



# Encyclopedia of AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS

edited by  
Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGIONS

*Religious Information Systems (Vol. 9)*

*Garland Reference Library of Social Science (Vol. 721)*

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Larry G. Murphy  
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*To my son*

*Ayinde Murphy,*

*the response to our praise*

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## Introduction

The *Encyclopedia of African American Religions* is the most comprehensive reference work to date covering African American religious leaders and groups, and the major issues raised by the development of African American religious life. It has grown out of a conversation between myself and Larry Murphy at an American Academy of Religion meeting several years ago. Out of my own work in compiling reference works, I suggested that there was a real need for such an encyclopedic volume and expressed some surprise that given the vitality of Black studies during the last two decades that no one had attempted doing it. Larry responded that he had been giving the same idea some thought over the years but had never acted upon it beyond some preliminary collection of materials. Given the convergence of our concern, we decided to give it a try. An initial list of some 800 entries was prepared and we divided the work load. We also recruited Gary L. Ward, who had joined the staff of the Institute for the Study of American Religion in 1988 and in whose work I had great confidence, to join us. Then we began to create a list of specialists whom we could ask to assist us by writing some of the key articles.

### Biographical Entries

Our first task was the definition of the volume. Our area of coverage would be the broad spectrum of African American religions both past and present. As such we needed to provide entries on the major African American religious leaders. Very early in the project we decided to include an entry on each of the bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the founders and major national leaders of the several African American Baptist conventions. We also wanted to include biographical entries on the founders of the larger African American churches and religious groups. Beyond those more obvious criteria, we would have to make some judgments about those outstanding religious leaders to be included.

We then turned to the issue of African American leaders in predominantly White churches and religious groups. We agreed to provide entries on all of the African American bishops of the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church (and its antecedent bodies). Again we would have to make some hard judgments about prominent leaders in non-episcopal churches such as the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and the Reformed Church in America.

Finally, as regards the biographical entries, we made a conscious decision to be diligent in searching out African American women who had made prominent contributions to the development of the religious community and document their accomplishments. We also sought out female scholars as contributors to the *Encyclopedia*.

### Organizational Entries

Above and beyond the biographical entries, we included an entry on each of the African American denominations and religious groups and on the more prominent religious organizations. This goal is obviously a heuristic one, but, drawing from the files of the Institute for the Study of American Religion, the major research facility monitoring African American religious groups over the past generation, we have been able to compile a list of several hundred Christian denominations and religious bodies which show the broad participation of African Americans across the spectrum of American religious life, from orthodox Christianity to Eastern religions to African-based religions. We also wanted to tell the story of the emergence of African constituencies in the larger predominantly White denominations.

## INTRODUCTION

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Among the most important of Black religious organizations are the Black institutions of higher learning. The great majority of these either are religiously sponsored or were founded as religious schools. Because of the demise of many of these schools, not to mention the development of many into secular state-supported institutions, there is the danger that their history will be lost or ignored. We quickly discovered that no comprehensive list of these schools had ever been compiled, and thus we set out to create such a list and include entries on each college, university, Bible school, or seminary. Even though we have discovered and generated entries on over 100 such schools, the list is not yet complete, and we continued to locate missing schools right up to the closing date for new additions to the text.

### Broad Coverage

Having sketched out our area of coverage, we had to set some boundaries to what was becoming an overwhelming task. We first decided to limit our coverage to the United States and not attempt covering the work of African American groups overseas. We have had to make a few exceptions, as missionary work in Africa and the Caribbean Islands has on occasion been crucial to the developing churches in the United States. For example, the first African American bishops in the predominantly White churches were assigned to serve outside the country in places such as Liberia and Haiti. It is our hope that the work of African American churches overseas and the development of affiliated religious groups can be treated fully in a later volume.

We also agreed to place strict limitations on our treatment of the efforts of White churches and church leaders to minister in the Black community, the development of social action programs on racial justice, and the White churches' response to the presence of African Americans in their midst. To keep faith with this criterion, we decided to exclude biographical entries on White church and religious leaders, even though some White people, from Methodist William Capers to Roman Catholic John R. Slattery, had greatly altered the direction of African American religion. Their contributions have been covered in the context of the story of the development of those black religious organizations they most affected.

In like measure, we decided to put aside a primary treatment of slavery except as it impinged upon the story of the creation of religious life within the African American community. Slavery and the various efforts at abolition is the single area of the African American experience which has been given the most comprehensive attention in the literature and a set of reference books already covers the slavery controversy.

Having agreed upon the area of concern to be targeted, we began to write and commission others to write the entries (topics, organizations, and people) for inclusion in the *Encyclopedia*. The initial list of 800 grew throughout the period we worked on the project to a final list of **some 1200 entries**. Initially, Ward assumed responsibility for the biographical entries and wrote the great majority of them. The *Encyclopedia* features biographical sketches of 773 people. Melton took primary responsibility of the many articles on the several hundred black religious organizations. This section includes 341 entries, the majority of which he authored, though most of the longer articles on the major African American groups were authored by specialists who had done particular research on them.

Murphy agreed to take charge of the 30 or so major topical entries from the Civil Rights Movement to the status and role of women. He also took charge of recruiting and/or writing the articles on the major African denominations (AME, AMEZ, National Baptist, etc.) and the White churches with a significant Black membership.

### Special Features

Two special features highlight this volume. During the process of compiling the *Encyclopedia*, we became aware of just how much new information we were generating as well as how much more well-known data we were assembling for the first time under one cover. It seemed that compiling a chronological list of the major events in black religious history would be a meaningful contribution. The resulting **Chronology** appears below in the introductory material.

Secondly, to allow direct contact with the currently existing religious organizations discussed in the text, a **Directory** of all the churches and groups for which an entry appears has been attached at the end of this text.

### Indexing/Cross-Indexing

In order to make this volume as user friendly as possible, a set of indices has been included. There is a complete subject/organization/personal name index. Secondly, there is a cross index of all of the biographical entries by the church or religious tradition with which the person is identified. Thus one can turn to the "Biographical Cross-

Index” and quickly locate all of the Presbyterians or Pentecostals profiled in the *Encyclopedia*. Finally, major entries mentioned throughout the text are in boldface type.

### **Bibliography/Sources**

Very early in the planning stages of this work, the editors proposed to compile a bibliography for inclusion in this work. However, as the work progressed, we saw that such a bibliography would not be as useful as attaching relevant references to each article. Such references will allow the user quickly to discover additional items which expand upon the topic under discussion. However, we have compiled a selective bibliography of the major texts on African American religion and the major religious traditions. The selective bibliography constitutes a basic working library of African American religious studies.

### **Acknowledgments**

The compiling of this *Encyclopedia* has proved a massive undertaking and could not have been done without the cooperation of many. Primary thanks must go to the many contributors of the articles included in the text. They have shared of their special expertise and have made this volume a far stronger work than it could have been if the writing had been left exclusively to the three editors.

Second only to the contributors, however, is the staff of the Library of the University of California—Santa Barbara under the leadership of University Librarian Joseph Boissé. This volume was largely compiled from the Black Studies Collection and the American Religions Collection (ARC) of UCSB. We offer special thanks to Black Studies Librarian Sylvia Curtis and Library Assistant M. Alyce Harris who made their materials available for our use and went above and beyond the call of duty in assisting our search for information.

The ARC at UCSB was established in 1985 when the Institute for the Study of American Religion turned over its collection of books and files to the care of the Library’s Special Collections Department. The ARC contains a significant set of materials on Black religious groups which had been gathered over the years and continues to grow.

The combined ARC and Black Studies Collection at UCSB, though relatively unheralded, constitute one of the better libraries in African American religion in the United States. Copies of the majority of the items cited in the text may be found at UCSB.

Finally, we offer our special thanks to Isotta Poggi of the Institute for the Study of American Religion staff who worked on the *Encyclopedia* at every stage, prepared the Directory and Index, and did much of the final checking and verification on the text.

J. Gordon Melton  
September 1992

### **A Final Note**

The editors completed their work on this volume with a sense of satisfaction that we had compiled the most comprehensive encyclopedic work on African American religion possible at this time. However, we were also aware that additional new entries to this volume were being suggested right up to our writing deadline. And then as editing of the articles proceeded other new entries were suggested. Thus we ended our writing phase with a decision to prepare a supplement in the near future. Not only would such a proposal allow us extra time to locate data on some important figures about whom biographical information had been elusive, track down the missing black schools, and discover additional denominations and religious groups, but it would allow the readership of this volume the opportunity to make suggestions for inclusion of people, organizations, and subjects we might have overlooked. We invite suggestions for additional entries or comments on improving the *Encyclopedia* in future editions. Address your comments to the editors:

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## Abbreviations

AAB	Burle, William Jeremiah. <i>American Authors and Books</i> . New York: Crown Publishers, 1962.
AAE	<i>Afro-American Encyclopedia</i> . 10 vols. North Miami, FL: Educational Book Publishers, 1974.
AAP	Penn, Irvine Garland. <i>The Afro-American Press and Its Editors</i> . Springfield, MA: Wiley & Co., 1891.
AARS	Williams, Ethel, and Clifton Brown, eds. <i>Afro-American Religious Studies: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Locations in American Libraries</i> . Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972.
ACAB	Wilson, James Grant, and John Fiske, eds. <i>Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography</i> . New York: Appleton, 1888.
ACC	Hart, James D. <i>A Companion to California</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
ALNA	Dreer, Herman. <i>American Literature by Negro Authors</i> . New York: Macmillan, 1950.
AMECMIM	Foster, J. Curtis, Jr. <i>The African Methodist Episcopal Church Makes Its Mark in America</i> . Nashville, TN: African Methodist Episcopal Church Publishing House, 1976.
AMEZC	Walls, William J. <i>The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church</i> . Charlotte, NC: A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 1974.
AMS	Gaines, Wesley J. <i>African Methodism in the South</i> . 1890. Rept.: Chicago: Afro-Am. Press, 1969.
AMSC	James, Frederick C. <i>African Methodism in South Carolina: A Bicentennial Focus</i> . Tappan, NY: Custombook, Inc., for the Seventh Episcopal District, A.M.E. Church, 1987.
ANT	Warfel, Harry R. <i>American Novelists of Today</i> . New York: American Book Co., 1951.
AWW	Faust, Langdon Lynne. <i>American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present</i> . New York: Ungar, 1983.
BA	Burkett, Randall, and Richard Newman, eds. <i>Black Apostles: Afro-American Clergy Confront the Twentieth Century</i> . Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1978.
BAA	Brignano, Russell C. <i>Black Americans in Autobiography</i> . Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984.
BAB	Blackett, R. J. M. <i>Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History</i> . Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986.
BAC	Christopher, Maurine. <i>Black Americans in Congress</i> . Revised ed. New York: T. Y. Crowell Co., 1976.
BAMEC	Wright, Richard, Jr. <i>The Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Church Sunday School Union, 1963.
BAW	Matthews, Geraldine O. <i>Black American Writers, 1773–1949</i> . Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1975.
BAWPP	Rush, Theresa Gunnells, Carol Myers, and Esther Arata. <i>Black American Writers Past and Present</i> . Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975.
BDA-AAM	Southern, Eileen. <i>Biographical Dictionary of African-American and African Musicians</i> . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982.
BDA-AHP	DuPree, Sherry Sherrod. <i>Biographical Dictionary of African-American, Holiness-Pentecostals, 1880–1990</i> . Washington, DC: Middle Atlantic Regional Press, 1989.
BDACSL	Melton, J. Gordon. <i>Biographical Dictionary of American Cult and Sect Leaders</i> . New York: Garland Publishing, 1986.
BDAE	Ohles, John F. <i>Biographical Dictionary of American Educators</i> . 3 vols. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978.
BDBPC	David, Jay. <i>Black Defiance: Black Profiles in Courage</i> . New York: William Morrow & Co., 1972.
BDCALC	Mickelson, Arnold R., ed. <i>A Biographical Directory of Clergymen of the American Lutheran Church</i> . Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972.
BDNM	Williams, Ethel. <i>Biographical Directory of Negro Ministers</i> . 1st ed.: 1965; 2nd ed.: 1970; 3rd ed.: Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1975.



## ABBREVIATIONS

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BDSA	Knight, Lucian Lamar. <i>Biographical Dictionary of Southern Authors</i> . Atlanta, GA: The Martin & Hoyt Co., 1929. Rpt. Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1978.
BDUMB	<i>Biographical Directory of United Methodist Bishops, Spouses, and Widows</i> . Office of the Secretary of the Council of Bishops, 1988.
BE	<i>The Brethren Encyclopedia</i> . 3 vols. Philadelphia, PA and Oak Brook, IL: The Brethren Encyclopedia, 1983.
BGM	Fauset, Arthur Huff. <i>Black Gods of the Metropolis</i> . Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944.
BGRC	Lapp, Rudolph M. <i>Blacks in Gold Rush California</i> . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977.
BGWC	Burgess, John M. <i>Black Gospel/White Church</i> . New York: Seabury Press, 1982.
BH	Jones, Charles Edwin. <i>Black Holiness</i> . Metuchen, NJ: The American Theological Library Association and Scarecrow Press, 1987.
BHAC	Thorpe, Earl E. <i>Black Historians: A Critique</i> . New York: Morrow, 1971.
BHBA	Toppin, Edgar Allen. <i>A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528</i> . New York: McKay, 1971.
BHONH	Drotning, Phillip T. <i>Black Heroes in Our Nation's History</i> . New York: Cowles Book Company, 1969.
BJH	Brotz, Howard. <i>The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership</i> . New York: Schocken Books, 1964.
BLA	White, John. <i>Black Leadership in America 1895–1968</i> . 2nd ed. London and New York: Longman, 1990.
BLC	Mezle, S. Okechukwu, and Ram Desai, eds. <i>Black Leaders of the Centuries</i> . Buffalo, NY: Black Academy Press, Inc., 1970.
BLTC	Franklin, John Hope. <i>Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century</i> . Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982.
BMC	Bechler, Le Roy. <i>The Black Mennonite Church in North America, 1886–1986</i> . Scottdale, PA and Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1986.
BMIC	Nichols, Charles H., ed. <i>Black Men in Chains: Narratives by Escaped Slaves</i> . New York and Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1972.
BN	Essien-Udom, E. U. <i>Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
BNA	Bracey, John H., Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick, eds. <i>Black Nationalism in America</i> . Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1970.
BP	Metcalf, George R. <i>Black Profiles</i> . New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.
BPAW	Golder, Morris E. <i>The Bishops of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc.</i> Indianapolis, Indiana: The Author, 1980, and an updated addendum, circa 1988.
BPEAR	Kaplan, Sidney and Emma N. Kaplan. <i>The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution</i> . Revised ed. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.
BPJ	Swift, David E. <i>Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War</i> . Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
BPL	Tucker, David M. <i>Black Pastors and Leaders: Memphis, 1819–1972</i> . Memphis, TN: Memphis State University Press, 1975.
BPMC	McClain, William B. <i>Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest?</i> Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1984.
BPUSA	Bennett, Lerone, Jr. <i>Black Power U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867–1877</i> . Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1967.
BR	Thornbrough, Emma Lou. <i>Black Reconstructionists</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972.
BRBR	Wilmore, Gayraud S. <i>Black Religion and Black Radicalism</i> . 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.
BSC	Washington, Joseph R., Jr. <i>Black Sects and Cults</i> . Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972.
BTFTMC	Griffin, Paul R. <i>Black Theology as the Foundation of Three Methodist Colleges: The Educational Views and Labors of Daniel Payne, Joseph Price, and Isaac Lane</i> . Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984.
BW	Katz, William Loren. <i>The Black West</i> . Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1971.
BWA	Barksdale, Richard, and Keneth Kinnamon, eds. <i>Black Writers of America</i> . New York: Macmillan Company, 1972.
BWASS	Metzger, Linda. <i>Black Writers: A Selection of Sketches from Contemporary Authors</i> . Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1989.
BWMH	Jackson, George F. <i>Black Women Makers of History: A Portrait</i> . Sacramento, CA: Dome Printing & Publishing, 1975.

BWNCAL	Loewenberg, Bert James. <i>Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life</i> . University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.
BWR	Richardson, Marilyn. <i>Black Women and Religion: A Bibliography</i> . Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980.
BWTC	Pease, Jane H. and William H. Pease. <i>Bound with Them in Chains: A Biographical History of the Antislavery Movement</i> . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972.
CA	<i>Contemporary Authors</i> . Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1962–.
CAA	Foy, Felician A., ed. <i>Catholic Almanac 1992</i> . Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1991.
CB	<i>Current Biography</i> . New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1940–.
CBL	Fax, Elton C. <i>Contemporary Black Leaders</i> . New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1970.
CCAN	Gillard, John T. <i>The Catholic Church and the American Negro</i> . Baltimore, MD: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929.
CEAMEC	Wright, Richard R., Jr. <i>Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . Philadelphia, PA: Book Concern of the A.M.E. Church, 1916.
CH	Bergman, Peter M. <i>The Chronological History of the Negro in America</i> . New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
CMECTY	Harris, Eula W., and Maxie H. Craig. <i>Christian Methodist Episcopal Church Through the Years</i> . Revised ed. Jackson, TN: Christian Methodist Episcopal Church Publishing House, 1965.
CR	Blackwell, Earl, ed. <i>Celebrity Register</i> . New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
CRACG	Adams, A. John and Joan Martin Burke, eds. <i>Civil Rights: A Current Guide to the People, Organizations, and Events</i> . New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1970.
CRS	D'Emilio, John. <i>The Civil Rights Struggle: Leaders in Profile</i> . New York: Facts on File, 1979.
DAA	Adams, Oscar Fay. <i>Dictionary of American Authors</i> . New York: Houghton, 1897.
DAB	Johnson, Allen, and Dumas Malone, eds. <i>Dictionary of American Biography</i> . 10 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931. 8 supplements, 1944–1988.
DANB	Logan, Rayford W., and Michael R. Winston, eds. <i>Dictionary of American Negro Biography</i> . New York: W. W. Norton, 1982.
DARB	Bowden, Henry Warner. <i>Dictionary of American Religious Biography</i> . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977.
DAS	Press, Jaques Cattell, ed. <i>Directory of American Scholars</i> . 8th ed. New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1982.
DCB	<i>Dictionary of Canadian Biography</i> . 12 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966–1990.
DNAADB	Wallace, William Stewart. <i>Dictionary of North American Authors Deceased Before 1950</i> . Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1968.
DPCM	Burgess, Stanley M., and Gary B. McGee, eds. <i>Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing Co., 1988.
EAB	Garraty, John A., ed. <i>Encyclopedia of American Biography</i> . New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
EAJ	Paneth, Donald. <i>Encyclopedia of American Journalism</i> . New York: Facts on File, 1983.
EAMEC	Wright, Richard R., Jr. <i>Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA: Book Concern of the A.M.E. Church, 1947.
EBA	Low, W. Augustus, and Virgil A. Clift, eds. <i>Encyclopedia of Black America</i> . New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.
EBAP	Robinson, William H., Jr. <i>Early Black American Poets</i> . Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Co., 1971.
ELC	Bodensieck, Julius, ed. <i>The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church</i> . 3 vols. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965.
ENB	Freeman, Edward A. <i>The Epoch of Negro Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.</i> 1953; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1980.
EPP	Hartshorn, William Newton. <i>An Era of Progress and Promise, 1863–1910</i> . Boston, MA: Priscilla Publishing Co., 1910.
ERS	Hill, Samuel S., ed. <i>Encyclopedia of Religion in the South</i> . Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984.
ESB	<i>Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists</i> . 3 vols. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958. Suppl. 1982.
ESH	Roller, David C., and Robert W. Twyman, eds. <i>Encyclopedia of Southern History</i> . Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979.
EWM	Harmon, Nolan, ed. <i>The Encyclopedia of World Methodism</i> . 2 vols. Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1974.
FAW	McHenry, Robert. <i>Famous American Women</i> . New York: Dover, 1983.
FFF	Garrett, Romeo B. <i>Famous First Facts About Negroes</i> . New York: Arno Press, 1972.
FNHA	Hughes, Langston. <i>Famous Negro Heroes of America</i> . New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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GBA	Richardson, Benjamin A., and William A. Fahey. <i>Great Black Americans</i> . 2nd ed. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1976.
GBB	Boddie, Charles Emerson. <i>God's "Bad Boys."</i> Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1972.
GMBS	Major, Gerri. <i>Gerri Major's Black Society</i> . Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1976.
GMC	Foley, Albert Sidney. <i>God's Men of Color: The Colored Catholic Priests of the United States, 1854–1954</i> . New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1955.
GNPP	Adams, Russell. <i>Great Negroes Past and Present</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: Afro-American Publishing Co., 1969.
GRM	Burkett, Randall K. <i>Garveyism as a Religious Movement</i> . Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978.
HAMEC	Gregg, Howard D. <i>History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1980.
HAMECH	Payne, Daniel A. <i>History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891.
HAMEZC	Bradley, David Henry, Sr. <i>A History of the A.M.E. Zion Church</i> . 2 vols. Nashville, TN: The Parthenon Press, 1956, 1970.
HAMEZCIA	Moore, John Jamison. <i>History of the A.M.E. Zion Church in America</i> . York, PA: Teachers' Journal Office, 1884.
HBB	Fitts, Leroy. <i>A History of Black Baptists</i> . Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1985.
HBBUS	Banks, William L. <i>A History of Black Baptists in the United States</i> . Philadelphia, PA: The Author, 1987.
HBCUS	Davis, Cyprian. <i>The History of Black Catholics in the United States</i> . New York: Crossroads, 1990.
HCGCH	Cobbins, Otho B. <i>History of the Church of God in Christ (Holiness), U.S.A., 1895–1965</i> . New York: The Author, 1966.
HCMEC	Lahey, Othel Hawthorne. <i>The History of the C.M.E. Church</i> . Memphis, TN: The C.M.E. Publishing House, 1985.
HCMECA	Phillips, Charles Henry. <i>The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America</i> . New York: Arno Press, 1972.
HH	Brown, Hallie Q., ed. <i>Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction</i> . Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.
HNB	Robinson, Wilhelmena S. <i>Historical Negro Biographies</i> . International Library of Negro Life and History. New York: Publishers Co., 1967.
HNC	Woodson, Carter G. <i>The History of the Negro Church</i> . Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1921.
HNRA	Williams, George Washington. <i>History of the Negro Race in America</i> . 2 vols. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968.
HPAW	Golder, Morris E. <i>History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World</i> . Indianapolis, IN: The Author, 1973.
HPM	Synan, Vinson. <i>The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971.
HUBA	Williams, Ethel, and Clifton Brown. <i>The Howard University Bibliography of African and Afro-American Religious Studies</i> . Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1977.
IAAH	Reid, Robert Henry, Jr. <i>Irony of Afro-American History</i> . Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Publishing House, 1984.
IB	Ward, Gary, Bertil Persson, and Alan Bain. <i>Independent Bishops: An International Directory</i> . Detroit, MI: Apogee Books, 1990.
IBAW	Spradling, Mary Mace, ed. <i>In Black and White: Afro-Americans in Print</i> . 3rd ed. Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1985.
IBAWCB	Campbell, Dorothy W. <i>Index to Black American Writers in Collective Biographies</i> . Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1983.
IBS	Rountree, Louise Marie. <i>An Index to Biographical Sketches and Publications of the Bishops of the AME Zion Church</i> . Salisbury, NC: Carnegie Library, Livingstone College, 1963.
IDAW	Lanker, Brian. <i>I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America</i> . New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989.
IP	Lee, George L. <i>Interesting People: Black American History Makers</i> . Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1976.
IPAA	Sherman, Joan R. <i>Invisible Poets: Afro-Americans of the Nineteenth Century</i> . 2nd ed. Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
IVR	Hammond, Lily Hardy. <i>In the Vanguard of a Race</i> . New York, 1922.
IWW	Ireland, Norma Olin. <i>Index to Women of the World From Ancient to Modern Times</i> . Westwood, MA: F. W. Faxon Co., 1970.
LBAS	Shockley, Ann Allen. <i>Living Black American Scholars</i> . New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1973.

LC	Lueker, Erwin L., ed. <i>Lutheran Cyclopedia</i> . Revised ed. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1975.
LCAN	Krebs, Ervin E. <i>The Lutheran Church and the American Negro</i> . Columbus, OH: Board of American Missions, American Lutheran Church, 1950.
LV	Franklin, Robert Michael. <i>Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African-American Thought</i> . Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990.
LW	McHenry, Robert. <i>Liberty's Women</i> . Springfield, MA: G & C Merriam Co., 1980.
MB	Leete, Frederick DeLand. <i>Methodist Bishops</i> . Nashville, TN: The Parthenon Press, 1948.
MBRL	Young, Henry J. <i>Major Black Religious Leaders</i> . 2 vols. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1977–79.
ME	<i>The Mennonite Encyclopedia</i> . 5 vols. Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, vols. 1–4, 1959; vol. 5, 1990.
MM	Simmons, William J. <i>Men of Mark</i> . Cleveland, OH: George M. Rewell & Co., 1887. Rpt. Arno Press and New York Times, 1968.
MSB	Wormley, Stanton L., and Lewis H. Fenderson, eds. <i>Many Shades of Black</i> . New York: William Morrow & Co., 1969.
NA	<i>Negro Almanac</i> . 5th ed. Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1989.
NAH	Cromwell, John W. <i>The Negro in American History</i> . Washington, DC: The American Negro Academy, 1914.
NAW	James, Edward T., ed. <i>Notable American Women</i> . 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.
NAWMP	Sicherman, Barbara, and Carol Hurd Green, eds. <i>Notable American Women: The Modern Period</i> . Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980.
NBAW	Smith, Jessie Carney, ed. <i>Notable Black American Women</i> . Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1991.
NBH	Brawley, Benjamin G. <i>Negro Builders and Heroes</i> . Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937.
NBHUSA	Jordan, Lewis Garnett. <i>Negro Baptist History, USA 1750–1930</i> . Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Publishing Board, 1930.
NBPH	Boone, Theodore S. <i>Negro Baptists in Pictures and History</i> . Detroit, MI: The Voice of Destiny, 1964.
NCAB	<i>National Cyclopedia of American Biography</i> . 63 vols. permanent series, 13 vols. current series. New York: James T. White & Co., 1896–.
NCW	Scally, Mary Anthony. <i>Negro Catholic Writers, 1900–1943</i> . Grosse Point, MI: Walter Romig, Publisher, 1945.
NEA	Loggins, Vernon. <i>Negro Author: His Development in America to 1900</i> . Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1931, 1964.
NG	Brawley, Benjamin. <i>The Negro Genius</i> . New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1937.
NHM	Shaw, J. Beverly F. <i>The Negro in the History of Methodism</i> . Nashville, TN: The Parthenon Press, 1954.
NIOY	Shofner, Jerrell H. <i>Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863–1877</i> . Gainesville, FL: The University Presses of Florida, 1974.
NM	Moonie, Louise, ed. <i>Newsmakers: The People Behind Today's Headlines</i> . Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1985–.
NNW	Majors, Monroe A. <i>Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities</i> . 1893; Rept.: Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.
NNY	Ottley, Roi, and William J. Weatherby, eds. <i>Negro in New York</i> . Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1967.
NPT	Broderick, Francis, and August Meier, eds. <i>Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century</i> . New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.
NSE	Wish, Harvey, ed. <i>The Negro Since Emancipation</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964.
NV	Bardolph, Richard. <i>The Negro Vanguard</i> . New York: Vintage Press, 1959.
NWAC	Ottley, Roi. <i>New World A-Coming</i> . New York: Arno Press, 1968.
NYB	<i>Negro Year Book</i> . Tuskegee Institute, AL: Negro Year Book Publishing Co., (variantly) 1912–1952.
NYTBS	<i>New York Times Biographical Service</i> . New York: New York Times, 1970–.
NYTO	<i>New York Times Obituary Index</i> . 2 vols. New York: New York Times, 1970, 1980.
OBMS	Pegues, Albert W. <i>Our Baptist Ministers and Schools</i> . Springfield, MA: Wiley & Co., 1892.
OBS	Hemesath, Caroline. <i>Our Black Shepherds</i> . Washington, DC: Josephite Pastoral Center, 1987.
OHYAMEZC	Hood, James Walker. <i>One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church</i> . New York: A.M.E. Zion Book Concern, 1895.
OHYNF	Bontemps, Arna. <i>100 Years of Negro Freedom</i> . New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1961.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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ONL	Boulware, Marcus H. <i>The Oratory of Negro Leaders: 1900–1968</i> . Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1969.
OS	Diamonstein, Barbaralee, ed. <i>Open Secrets: Ninety-Four Women in Touch with Our Time</i> . New York: The Viking Press, 1972.
OTSB	<i>One Thousand Successful Blacks</i> . Ebony Success Library. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1973.
PATN	Murray, Andrew E. <i>Presbyterians and the Negro—A History</i> . Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966.
PBGB	Wagner, Clarence M. <i>Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists</i> . Atlanta, GA: Bennett Brothers Printing Co., 1980.
PBP	Haskins, James. <i>Profiles in Black Power</i> . Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972.
PHCGC	Cornelius, Lucille J. <i>The Pioneer History of the Church of God in Christ</i> . N.p.: The Author, 1975.
PHNA	Hughes, Langston, and Milton Meltzer. <i>A Pictorial History of the Negro in America</i> . 3rd ed. Eds. Eric Lincoln, and Milton Meltzer. New York: Crown Publishers, 1968.
PIC	Ovington, Mary White. <i>Portraits in Color</i> . New York: The Viking Press, 1927.
PNW	Dannett, Sylvia G. L. <i>Profiles of Negro Womanhood, 1619–1900</i> . 2 vols. New York: Educational Heritage, 1964.
PP	Bennett, Lerone, Jr. <i>Pioneers in Protest</i> . Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1968.
RAM	Singleton, George A. <i>The Romance of African Methodism: A Study of the African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . New York: Exposition Press, 1952.
RCM	Lakey, Othal Hawthorne. <i>The Rise of “Colored Methodism;” a Study of the Background and the Beginnings of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church</i> . Dallas, TX: Crescendo Book Publications, 1972.
REAW	Lamar, Howard R., ed. <i>The Reader’s Encyclopedia of the American West</i> . New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1977.
RLA	Schwarz, J. C., ed. <i>Religious Leaders of America</i> . Vol. II. New York: The Author, 1942.
RLOA	Melton, J. Gordon. <i>Religious Leaders of America</i> . Chicago: Gale Research, 1991.
SBAA	Page, James Allen. <i>Selected Black American Authors</i> . Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1977.
SBIAA	Cook, Richard B. <i>The Story of the Baptists in All Ages</i> . Baltimore, MD: H. M. Wharton, 1884.
SCA	Jackson, Joseph H. <i>A Story of Christian Activism: The History of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.</i> Nashville, TN: Townsend Press, 1980.
SFAY	Lewis, Helen M., and Meharry H. Lewis, eds. <i>Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Yearbook of the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, Inc., 1903–1978</i> . Nashville, TN: General Headquarters, Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, 1978.
SNB	Pelt, Owen D., and Ralph Lee Smith. <i>The Story of the National Baptists</i> . New York: Vantage Press, 1960.
SOTT	Sterling, Dorothy, ed. <i>Speak Out in Thunder Tones: Letters and Other Writings by Black Northerners, 1787–1865</i> . Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1973.
SS	Andrews, William L., ed. <i>Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century</i> . Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.
TAO	Embree, Edwin R. <i>Thirteen Against the Odds</i> . New York: The Viking Press, 1944.
TCBD	Johnson, Rossiter, ed. <i>The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans</i> . Boston, MA: The Biographical Society, 1904.
TCNL	Culp, D. W., ed. <i>Twentieth Century Negro Literature</i> . 1902; Rept.: Miami, FL: Mnemosyne Publishing Co., 1969.
TCSAPR	Lippy, Charles H., ed. <i>Twentieth-Century Shapers of American Popular Religion</i> . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989.
TNA	Jenness, Mary. <i>Twelve Negro Americans</i> . Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1936.
TP	Hollenweger, Walter J. <i>The Pentecostals</i> . Trans. R. A. Wilson. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972.
TSW	Rollins, Charlene Hill. <i>They Showed the Way: Forty American Negro Leaders</i> . New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1964.
VBA	Foner, Philip S. <i>Voice of Black America</i> . New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972.
WB	Daniel, Sadie Iola. <i>Women Builders</i> . Revised by Charles H. Wesley and Thelma D. Perry. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1970.
WGMC	Rogers, J. A. <i>World’s Great Men of Color</i> . 2 vols. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
WITW	Bennett, Lerone, Jr. <i>Wade in the Water: Great Moments in Black History</i> . Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1979.

WRA	Ruether, Rosemary Radford, and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. <i>Women and Religion in America</i> . 3 vols. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981–1986.
WRF	Cain, Alfred E. <i>The Winding Road to Freedom</i> . New York: Educational Heritage, 1965.
WWA	<i>Who's Who in America</i> . 47 vols. Wilmette, IL: Marquis Who's Who, 1899–.
WWABA	<i>Who's Who Among Black Americans</i> . Through the 5th ed., Lake Forest, IL: Educational Communications, Inc. 6th ed. Chicago, IL: Gale Research Company, 1990–91.
WWAM	Price, Carl F., ed. <i>Who's Who in American Methodism</i> . New York: E. B. Treat & Co., 1916.
WWAW	<i>Who's Who of American Women</i> . 17 vols. Wilmette, IL: Marquis Who's Who, 1958–.
WWC	Schwarz, J. C., ed. <i>Who's Who in the Clergy</i> . Vol. I. New York: The Author, 1936.
WWCA	<i>Who's Who in Colored America</i> . New York: Who's Who in Colored America Corp., 1927, 1931, 1940.
WWCR	Mather, Frank Lincoln. <i>Who's Who of the Colored Race</i> . 1915; Rept.: Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1976.
WWE	<i>Who's Who in the East</i> . 23 vols. Chicago, IL: Marquis Who's Who, 1943–.
WWF	Reifert, Gail, and Eugene M. Dermody. <i>Women Who Fought: An American History</i> . Norwalk, CA: Dermody, 1978.
WWMC	<i>Who's Who in the Methodist Church</i> . Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1966.
WWR	<i>Who's Who in Religion</i> . Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1975–76; 2nd ed. 1977; 3rd ed.: 1985.
WWW	<i>Who's Who in the World</i> . Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1970–.
WWWA	<i>Who Was Who in America With World Notables</i> . Vols. 1–9 plus Historical Volume. Wilmette, IL: Marquis Who's Who, 1897–.
WWWANAA	<i>Who Was Who Among North American Authors 1921–1939</i> . 3 vols. Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1976.

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# Religion in the African American Community

by

Larry G. Murphy

The form of the present volume represents the first salient fact about the religious experience of Africans in the North American Diaspora—it has a sweep and diversity of expression which make it *encyclopedic*. No single religious tradition comprehends it; no facile interpretive principle explains it. Indeed, the extensive table of contents to this volume suggests rather than exhausts the scope of the subject.

African American religion as a subject of intellectual inquiry is relatively new to the academic arena. Well into the twentieth century there were still relatively few White scholars who considered Black people and their cultural life to qualify for serious study. This was a reflection both of the prevailing negative American assessment of the worth of African American life and the prevailing Euro/Anglo-centric character of American scholarship. On the other hand, the proscriptive laws and institutional policies of the nation inhibited Black access to academic training, academic positions, or, as importantly, the sense of freedom to be engaged in intellectual pursuits. There were notable exceptions on both sides. Melville Herskovits made the study of Black life, from the African continent to the Western Diaspora, his central work, establishing the perhaps unparalleled Africana Collection of research materials at Northwestern University. Black scholars Martin Delaney, Edward Blyden, George Washington Williams, W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, and E. Franklin Frazier, among others, laid early, significant foundations for exploring and understanding the unfolding tapestry of African American life. Woodson, in fact, sought to bring cooperative intentionality to this undertaking by initiating in 1915 the organization of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. This consortium of researchers and writers, still vitally active today, has been responsible for the publication for some 76 years of the respected quarterly *The Journal of Negro History*. And it was Woodson who initiated the observance of an annual Negro History Week, now celebrated as African American History Month. In this tradition have stood such distinguished scholars as Benjamin Mays, Joseph Nicholson, John Hope Franklin, and Charles S. Johnson. Their work was complemented by persons such as Arthur Schomburg and Jesse Moorland, who gathered large volumes of materials on African American life into what are now major research collections.

The social revolution in Black America in the 1950s and 1960s, with its emphasis on Black identity and Black pride of heritage, engendered a flowering in the study of African American history and culture. Black studies departments were organized at universities across the nation. Black students began opting term projects, then area concentrations, then whole degree programs that focused on African and African American subject matter. Not only was there a sense of freedom to be so engaged but the sense that liberation—existential, intellectual, and even social/political—would ultimately result.

This ferment in the Black community sparked, in some cases, and complemented in others, social movements in many sectors of the American populace, movements toward a broader ostensible social inclusivity and institutional recognition of the diverse elements in our national makeup. Thereby, African American subject matter began to achieve an academic “legitimacy” both for Black scholars and for an increasing number of Whites. A generation of scholars has emerged which, building on the work of their pioneering predecessors, has retrieved substantial amounts of research data and produced provocative volumes on African American life and history.



The study of African American religion has been a prime beneficiary of this process. Most students of Black life have recognized the centrality of religion historically in Black communities. Thus it has been the object of primary data collection and has been a component in narrative interpretations of Black social and institutional dynamics.

The developments here described have prepared the ground for professors Albert Raboteau and David Wills to collaborate with a cadre of colleagues today toward the production of a major, multi-volume documentary history of African American religion. Thus, also, is possible an *encyclopedia* with thousands of entries on individuals, movements, and organizations spanning the religious spectrum.

In conceptualizing the present volume it was clear to the editors that the organizing subject was *religious history* as opposed to what has traditionally been called *church history*. For church history suggests an examination of *Christian* denominations and formal institutions. African Americans do, indeed, have their own ecclesiastical institutions (e.g., the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., the Church of God in Christ) which could be chronicled over long periods—more than two centuries back, in some cases. But moving in this direction would exclude the religious life of the majority of Black people during most of this country's history, because Blacks were not affiliated *en masse* with official denominational structures until just after the Civil War. Furthermore, as this volume will demonstrate, African American religious life has never been confined solely to the Christian tradition. It has found expression in Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Vodun, New Thought, and many other religious modalities, some created *de novo*.<sup>1</sup> The scope is widened still more because even when African Americans adhere in name to existing religious traditions, the reality of the Diaspora is that, as William Watty points out,

Everywhere, creolization has taken place to a greater or lesser degree. Voodoo in Haiti is not the Voodoo in Dahomey. Shango in Trinidad is not the Shango of Yorubaland, the Black Muslims are a far cry from Mecca, the Black Jews are not recognized in Zion. Each has represented an accommodation on the part of Black People to historical situations in varying degrees in selection and rejection.

Watty goes on to include in this assessment the Black Christian churches in the US, which also evolved in distinction from their larger White Christian context. While acknowledging the reactive dimension of alienation and protest in this process of evolving, Watty focuses on what is for him the more determinative, pro-active dynamic, saying,

These [churches] are not some unfortunate aberrations of or deviations from some pre-supposed universal Christianity but, on the contrary, represent the essence of Christianity, which is only authenticated as it is accommodated, [as it] reckons with the scandal and the glory of particularity.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, a real dynamism of religion in the African American community has often come from individuals and groups of persons acting out of religious conviction but acting on their own, rather than at the behest of a religious institution or judiciary, even when they were so affiliated. *Religious history*, then, because it is broad and encompassing, takes in the variety of both institutional and noninstitutional religious developments which are essential parts of the story of African American life.

### Religion in African American Life

A characterization of African Americans commonly offered by Black and White commentators, alike, is that they are "a religious people." To what degree is such a designation accurate? Contemporary research is revealing increasing evidence of African religious beliefs and behaviors that survived enslavement and transportation to the Americas, in spite of the conscious attempt of the slavery system to obliterate all cultural memory and sense of group identity. Survival and reconstruction of African traditions has been much more obvious and complete in Latin America and the Caribbean than in the US. The descriptive reporting of Florestan Fernandes and Donald Pierson on Brazil, Zora Neale Hurston on Jamaica, Maya Deren on Haiti, and many others, shows just how much this is so [though one must bear in mind William Watty's observation concerning the creolization of these traditions].

In the U.S., the reassertion of African cultural systems was expressly not tolerated. Yet scholars are discovering the glitches in the enforcement of this intolerance. Clear Africanisms are to be found in the African Americans' diet, dress, language, musical instrumentation and composition, styles of labor, thought patterns, religio-philosophical ideas and values, and many other areas. These are identified and discussed in the writings of Herskovits, John

Blassingame, and Albert Raboteau, among others. A suggestive sampling is given in the present volume in the entry by Lillian Ashcraft-Eason, treating Blacks in the colonial period. One sees, then, the demonstration of Margaret Mead's point that cultures are resilient, having the power of continuity to survive invasive assault. And, suggests Mead, even in situations of extensive systemic disruption, cultural fragments may survive by adapting new forms as the vehicles for old meanings and infusing old forms with new meanings.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, some Africans transported to North America must have arrived with elements of traditional African religion intact, or at least as usable fragmentary resources. From the early days of slavery up to the present, one could find practitioners of traditional African religious ceremonies and quasi-religious conjuring arts. One could also find persons acting out of a remembered Muslim heritage.

Now there was a deep ambivalence among Anglo Christians concerning evangelization of African slaves due, to fear of its consequences for the security of the slavery system and for the continued subordination of Blacks. After all, by common custom in the West, Christians were not to hold other Christians in involuntary servitude. As these fears were allayed by civil and ecclesiastical decrees, evangelization increasingly occurred.

A number of factors, including the ongoing resistance of slave owners and the perennial shortage of clergy to service even the White population, prevented evangelization from ever becoming anything like universal. W. E. B. DuBois estimated the ratio of confessing slave Christians at approximately one in ten. Others have set the number somewhat higher, e.g., one in six.<sup>4</sup> In either case, the minority percentage perhaps represents both the limited extent of gospel contact and also the differential response of slaves to the presentation of the Christian message. Some were convicted by the preaching and became authentic converts; some preferred to continue in whatever mode of religious adaptation on which they had already settled; others rejected the Christian message, either because of the slavery-supporting form in which it typically was presented or because of the identification of the messenger with the slavery system itself.

And yet, Judeo-Christian language, symbols, and images were integrated into the larger cultural framework in which all US residents, slave or free, lived their lives, and all, ultimately, were influenced thereby. Looking back, then, to the matter of African Americans as "a religious people," one is led to say that this perception is owing not so much to any actual greater inherent religious sensibility or theistic orientation among Africans and their Diaspora descendants. Rather, it would seem that religion's function of addressing issues of identity, security, and purposiveness has had a much more engaging pertinence for African Americans than for some other groups, given the nature of their historical status and their treatment in the American context. Depersonalized by an external definition as chattel/property; marginalized in social intercourse; excluded by statute and common practice from participation in the privileges and institutional processes of the nation; their physical existence, itself, devalued and under continuous threat, even from the enforcers of the law—these challenges have been cast in the very serviceable categories of religion and addressed through the primary, sometimes sole agencies of advocacy at their disposal, namely, the churches and other religious institutions.

In the constraining, inhibiting context in which most of African America has lived for most of its history, religion has been an arena of freedom. Religion happens internally, beyond society's proscriptive reach. In its institutional expression, whether the "invisible institution" of the slaves or the more formal, overt structures of free persons, there has been afforded to Blacks a level of ownership and self-determination, indeed self-articulation, largely unavailable in any other sphere before the present time. Hence the centrality of religious institutions in African American community life. Further, such authors as Richard Wright and Howard Thurman, in their autobiographies, have spoken of the role of the Black Church in providing a sense of place and belonging, of personal meaningfulness and existential stability to its members.

Not all persons in Black communities have been subscribers to the confessions of the various religious institutions nor consistent participants in their associational life. At least one study has shown that in such overt expressions of religiosity as church attendance, Black people hardly, if at all, exceed other segments of the population.<sup>5</sup> Yet, by and large, Black Americans have inherited a religious vocabulary, primarily Judeo-Christian, which colors and adds grace notes to their articulation of their reality. They have inherited a religious conceptual framework, largely Judeo-Christian but informed by residual African categories and filtered through their American experience. Through this framework their reality is interpreted and understood and issues of present well-being and ultimate destiny are addressed.

Religion among African Americans has been more than a stratagem for survival and psych-emotional stability. It has been an appropriate, authentic response to what they have experienced as a benevolent, transcendent Being—a response of wonder and trust, of awe and gratitude. That response has been creatively particularized, as illustrated by

entries in this volume by James Evans on Black Theology; Henry Mitchell on Black preaching; Portia Maulsby on Black sacred music; the entry by the editors on Black Judaism; and the introductory essay by John Cartwright on the religiously rooted social activism of Martin Luther King, Jr. While particularizing from existing models, African Americans have shown religious innovation, also, in theological formulation, organizational design, and the application of religion to the challenges and promises of life. This will be seen many times in the pages of this volume.

### Beyond the Present Work

A religious history of African American people has yet to be written. Important works have been produced examining the development of a distinctive Afro-Christian tradition during the colonial and national periods among slaves and free Blacks. Notable examples are Carter G. Woodson's early *History of the Negro Church*; W. E. B. DuBois' Atlanta University Study on *The Negro Church*; Albert Raboteau's *Slave Religion*. Such works have tended to focus upon Blacks in evangelical Protestantism, with some lesser attention to other streams of tradition, mainly Christian. Helpful histories have been done on the rise and organizational development of independent Black denominational bodies, especially Methodist and Baptist, though not all groups have been the subjects of recent or updated works. Many Black sub-groups and caucuses in predominantly White denominations have been treated. For instance, Gayraud Wilmore has published on Black Presbyterians; Cyprian Davis on Black Catholics; William B. McClain on Blacks in United Methodism. Other specialized works have examined Black Muslims; Black Pentecostals; Blacks in Spiritualism, Eastern religions, the occult; Black religious nationalism; and more. Provocative thematic works have highlighted what their authors believed to be key trajectories in Black religion. In two examples, Leonard Barrett in a book of the same name spoke of a "soul force" in Black religion; Mechal Sobel sought to trace out an African American "sacred cosmos." Writers in a variety of disciplines have explored the development of aspects of Black religion such as theology, music, preaching, social philosophy, institutional management, and gender roles.

A few writers have attempted to encompass African American religious history in an interpretative paradigm. For instance, Gayraud Wilmore wrote of it as the successive ebb and flow of "radicalism," in terms of the activist, prophetic Judeo-Christian stream of social transformation. Vincent Harding's recent two volume work on the social history of African Americans sees religion as a core element of the story. He employs the image of a river to represent Black people as they move with variable but determined force toward freedom.

Sociologists have compiled and analyzed the data on Black religious beliefs and behaviors and on the social milieu in which these have been operative. E. Franklin Frazier set the terms for much of the early discussion about the nature of the Black religion in America. It was he who coined the phrase "invisible institution" to refer to church-type activities among the slaves. Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson undertook major sociological research in the 1930s to illuminate Black church life and Black understandings of God. Most recently, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya replicated the Mays/Nicholson study on an even grander scale. The resulting volume of history and sociological analysis entitled *The Black Church in the African American Experience* has been broadly acclaimed as a major extension of knowledge and understanding on the subject.

Yet, Lincoln and Mamiya treat only the seven historic Black Christian denominations. The persistent and intriguing fact of African American religious life is its wide-ranging diversity, well beyond mainline Protestant Christianity, and its depth of conviction across the range. A religious history of the African American people that is conscientiously inclusive must meet the challenge that its subject is *encyclopedic*. It is the hope of the present editors that this volume will illumine the task, serve as a useful resource on its own, and point directions for work yet to be done.

### References

1. The comprehensive chronicling of Black religious groups really began in the several issues of the *Religious Census* issued by the United States Department of Commerce. That project was dropped following the 1936 issue. It was revived in 1977 and 1979 by *The Directory of Religious Bodies in the United States* (New York: Garland, 2nd ed., 1992) and the *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Detroit: Gale Research, 4th ed., 1993) authored by J. Gordon Melton. These volumes, periodically updated, provide entries on all of the Black denominations and religious groups within the larger coverage of American religions. Melton has also recently completed a companion volume, *Religious Organizations of America* (Detroit: Gale Research) which also includes

comprehensive coverage of Black religious organizations. Melton's work has been joined by the valuable *Directory of African American Religious Bodies* edited by Wardell J. Payne (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1991) which provides a primary focus on those people and organizations functioning primarily within the Black community.

2. William Watty, "Black Religion in the Caribbean—Present and Future." Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Black Religion, Kingston, Jamaica, November 25, 1986.

3. Cf. Mead, *Culture and Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press/Doubleday & Co., 1970): Chap. 1.

4. Cf. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1944): 860; W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro Church* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903).

5. Cf. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990): 382.

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# Martin Luther King, Jr. and Modern African American Religion

by

John Henderson Cartwright

[*Editors note:* In compiling this *Encyclopedia*, the editors came to the conclusion that African American history (both secular and sacred) could be divided into three periods. The dividing line between the first and second era was provided by the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the new opportunities they initiated. The dividing line between the second and third period was the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. That movement was carried by the unique gestalt of ideas articulated by Martin Luther King, Jr. The vitality of African American life in the last generation, it could be argued, grows out of the continuance of King's life and work through those who consider themselves his students, and the reaction to him by those who considered his perspective and program limited or ultimately a failure. In either case, King stands as the dividing line of modern Black history. Hence, we asked John Cartwright, one of the major interpreters of King's life, to prepare this summary of his thought and its religious roots.]

Undoubtedly, Martin Luther King, Jr., was both one of the most influential and one of the most controversial figures of the twentieth century. All indications suggest that he will remain so for the foreseeable future. He was a young man of 39 years when an assassin's bullet took his life on Thursday, April 4, 1968. His entire ministry had been in the service of civil rights and equal justice for the poor and oppressed, regardless of race, creed, or color.

Choosing to enter the full-time pastoral ministry while completing his doctorate in systematic theology at Boston University, King accepted a call in 1954 to become pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Approximately one year later, when Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus and the Blacks of Montgomery rose up in protest, the youthful King was thrust into a leadership role which he would carry for the remainder of his life.

Though options to preach or teach in the North were open to them, both Martin and his spouse, **Coretta Scott King**, accepted the call from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in the spirit of sacrificial vocation. "We agreed," he said, "that, in spite of the disadvantages and inevitable sacrifices, our greatest service would be rendered in our native South. We came to the conclusion that we had something of a moral obligation to return—at least for a few years." Thus, the two of them shared the ministry, the cause, and the sacrifices fully together.

Of the variety of images that come to mind when one mentions the name of Martin Luther King, Jr.—champion of civil rights, head of the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference** (S.C.L.C.), orator, Nobel Peace laureate, disciple of Mahatma Gandhi—perhaps the only image that truly would do justice to the whole of his personhood is simply that of a committed Christian minister. Of course, there are those who maintain that he perverted the Christian message, and conversely, those who feel that he captured its very essence. Whatever the case, there can be no doubt but that he based his words and deeds on his Christian convictions. The numerous and all too frequent distortions and misrepresentations of King's life and message, by friend and foe alike, can be attributed in large measure to a failure to recognize this cardinal fact and its entailments.

Thus, it was neither King the humble humanitarian nor King the rootless radical who challenged the status quo of the 1950s and 60s. Rather, it was King the committed Christian who, firmly grounded in that tradition, reminded his Christian brothers and sisters that:

You have a dual citizenry. You live both in time and eternity. Your highest loyalty is to God, and not to the mores or the folkways, the state or the nation, or any man-made institution. If any earthly institution or custom conflicts with God's will, it is your Christian duty to oppose it. You must never allow the transitory, evanescent demands of man-made institutions to take precedence over the eternal demands of the Almighty God.

Likewise the point of departure of King's social philosophy and vision of the goal of human society was fundamentally religious, rooted in his personal faith in God and in the power of love to transform the hearts and minds of all God's children, regardless of race, creed, status, or nationality. Furthermore, despite the degree of influence on him by non-Christian sources—e.g., the classical philosophers, Karl Marx, and especially Mahatma Gandhi—the fact remains that his “intellectual” categories were drawn almost exclusively from Christian theology and morality.

### A Christian Social Ideal

King referred to his conception of the Christian social ideal as the “Beloved Community.” Although King does not specifically account for his use of the expression “Beloved Community,” the term was a part of the popular theological vocabulary of the Boston University School of Theology during the period when he was in attendance there as a doctoral student (1951–1955). As a technical term, however, the Beloved Community can be traced to the philosophical writings of Josiah Royce (1855–1916) who, along with his teacher, R. H. Lotze, played a major role in the development of the school of thought that is called “personal idealism” or “personalism.” King would have been well acquainted with Royce, for Boston University was a center for personalism and three of the leading personalists of that time—Edgar S. Brightman, Peter A. Bertocci, and L. Harold DeWolf—were King's primary instructors, with DeWolf also serving as his major professor. King tells of their influence:

It was mainly under these teachers that I studied personalistic philosophy—the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position.

The debt to Royce not only for the term, Beloved Community, but also for a great deal of its meaning for King is apparent from the following passage expressing Royce's idea of the universal community:

All morality, namely, is, from this point of view, to be judged by the standards of the BELOVED COMMUNITY, of the ideal Kingdom of Heaven. Concretely stated, this means that you are to test every course of action not by the question: What can we find in the parables or in the Sermon on the Mount which seems to us more or less directly to bear upon this special matter? The central doctrine of the Master was: ‘So act that the Kingdom of Heaven may come.’ This means: So act as to help, however you can, and whenever you can towards making mankind one loving brotherhood, whose love is not a mere affection for morally detached individuals, but a love of the unity of its own life upon its own divine level, and a love of individuals in so far as they can be raised to communion with this spiritual community itself.

Royce goes on to stress both loyalty and sacrifice. For him, loyalty is “the Will to Believe in something eternal, and to express that belief in the practical life of a human being.” But what would loyalty be without trial? To be loyal to the ideal of the Beloved Community one finds the universal meaning of sacrifice. “So the sacrifice of Christ is emulated by the death of each individual man—death to selfishness . . . the death thus died by membership in the ‘Beloved Community,’ means the sacrifice of individual desires in the interest of the ideal brotherhood of all.”

Although these themes were to become central ingredients in King's conception of the Beloved Community, he cites as the major influence Walter Rauschenbusch's interpretation of the Kingdom of God and its relationship to the idea of an inclusive human community. King stated that he indeed found the theological basis for his social concern in the thought of Rauschenbusch—in his emphasis on Christian social responsibility and his insistence that the gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but also his body; not only his spiritual well-being but his material well-being. This is no doubt true, but it is equally true that King was *not explicitly aware of the salient* influence of Royce on Rauschenbusch. Not only in general did Royce's philosophy influence him considerably. Rauschenbusch acknowledged his debt to Royce's *The Problem of Christianity* in aiding him to arrive at a

solidaristic view of society and an interpretation of many traditional Christian doctrines in social terms. In any case, the central and all-pervading theme for Rauschenbusch was the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the social ideal of Christendom; it was also the first and most essential dogma of the Christian faith. Thus the Kingdom was both a religious and a social doctrine: religious in that it is "divine in its origin, progress and consummation, and is the continuous revelation of the power, the righteousness, and the love of God;" social in that the Kingdom is "always both present and future . . . always coming, always pressing in on the present, always big with possibility, and always inviting immediate action" that promotes the progressive unity of mankind.

The organic centrality of the doctrine of the Kingdom led Rauschenbusch to conclude that the Christian religion, itself, is essentially corporate and communal in character. He stated, therefore, that the fundamental purpose of Christianity is "to transform human society into the Kingdom of God by regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God." Hence the Kingdom is synonymous with a transformed and regenerated society; for, in the words of his classic definition, it is "humanity organized according to the will of God" and "the organized fellowship of humanity acting under the impulse of love."

King was quite sympathetic with this outlook, although he was at odds with Rauschenbusch on two counts. First, he felt that Rauschenbusch had fallen victim to the nineteenth-century "cult-of-inevitable progress" which led him to a superficial optimism concerning man's nature. Secondly, he thought that Rauschenbusch came perilously close to identifying the Kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system. Nevertheless, King acknowledged his indebtedness to Christian liberalism in general and to Walter Rauschenbusch in particular for giving him a theological basis for the social concern which had already grown up in him as a result of his early experiences of racial and economic injustice. The overwhelming evidence supports the view that these sources, furthermore, were the basis both for King's "I have a dream" general theme and for his idea of the Beloved Community in particular.

This is not to say, however, that there were no other influences in the development of the idea of the Beloved Community. Indeed, King was an eclectic thinker with a greater genius for synthesizing extant ideas than creating them. He read all of the influential historical thinkers in dialectical fashion and attempted in his own mind to synthesize the partial truths and partial errors that he found there. Thus the idea of the Beloved Community is comprised of some primary elements taken from several sources. The Christian liberalism of the "Social Gospel" variety provided the theological foundations; the personal idealism of Brightman, DeWolf, et. al., contributed philosophical foundations; the philosophy of nonviolence of Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi provided the means; and the "Christian realism" of Reinhold Niebuhr, with its emphasis on the human capacity for evil and its pessimism about human effort in attaining social ideals qualified both King's optimism about its historical attainment and his attitude toward the kind of tactics needed for its fulfillment.

Following Rauschenbusch, however, King directly related all of his social and theological concerns to the central place he assigned to the Beloved Community. Underlying all of King's thought and activity was this vision of the Beloved Community and the hope that one day an inclusive human community would be actualized.

Despite the ubiquity of the idea of the Beloved Community in King's writings and speeches, nowhere did he attempt to delineate or systematize fully his vision. In general it can be said, however, that for King: 1) the Beloved Community would be the ideal corporate expression of the Christian faith; and, 2) it is a fully integrated and inclusive community of love and justice and brotherhood. Indeed, after the formation in 1957 of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King described the purpose of that organization as follows: "The ultimate aim of S.C.L.C. is to foster and create the 'beloved community' in America . . . S.C.L.C. works for integration. Our ultimate goal is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living—integration."

Although the concept of "integration" was conceived within the context of racial conflict in America, King saw in this idea the total interrelatedness of the whole human family. It included not only all races, but also all classes, all ethnic groups, all nations, and all religions; for "we are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality." Therefore, "no man is an island" and "do not ask for whom the bells toll," as King would so often summarize in quoting from the father of metaphysical poetry, Canon John Donne.

He was equally aware that there is a moral difference between integration and desegregation. For him, desegregation is at bottom negative because it only eliminates discrimination in those areas of social life that can be corrected by law. Integration, on the other hand, is much more inclusive and positive in that it implies the loving acceptance of individuals and groups into the total range of human activities. Thus desegregation cannot be the hallmark of the Beloved Community because at best it will only create "a society where men are physically desegregated and spiritually segregated, and where elbows are together and hearts apart. It gives us social



togetherness and spiritual apartness. It leaves us with a stagnant equality of sameness rather than a constructive equality of oneness.”

Finally, as with Rauschenbusch, King could not envision the Beloved Community apart from the question of economic justice. This must be a society that is not only free from the malformation of persons resulting from racial hatred but also free from the “malformation of persons resulting from economic injustice and exploitation.” And because he believed that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, economic and social liberation is basically a matter of justice and not of race. He was concerned that justice not be seen apart from the indivisibility of human existence. Thus to King, the Beloved Community would reflect the intention of God that all his children should have the physical as well as the spiritual necessities of life.

King never attached a label to his economic views, although he was certainly influenced by Karl Marx and other critics of capitalism. Obviously he needed not search further for a revolutionary economic posture since Protestant liberalism had already convinced him of the radical and revolutionary quality of a “properly conceived” Christian faith. However, his rather thoroughgoing egalitarian and somewhat socialist approach to questions of wealth and property could allow one to label him a “democratic socialist.” He said, for example, “life is sacred. Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being. It is part of the earth man walks on; it is not man.”

In any case, he rejected both doctrinaire capitalism and doctrinaire communism in terms of the goal of the Beloved Community. He stated, rather, in typical King fashion, that “the Kingdom of God is neither the thesis of individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truth of both.”

In singling out the matter of economic justice within the idea of the Beloved Community, King combined two traditional Biblical themes—the “holiness of the poor” and the “blessed community.” One might conclude in this regard that in King’s social thought, Blacks became the embodiment of “the poor” and integration represented the vision of “the holy community.” Furthermore, for King these two elements—the holy oppressed and the blessed community—are not merely interrelated; they are inseparable. Without the vision of restored community, the poor are relegated to perpetual alienation from political participation and made the objects of charity and social service programs.

In summary, King’s own description of his vision of the Beloved Community will suffice:

The dream is one of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few; a dream of a land where men do not argue that the color of a man’s skin determines the content of his character; a dream of a place where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity . . . where every man will respect the dignity and worth of all human personality, and men will dare to live together as brothers . . . Whenever it is fulfilled, we will emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man’s inhumanity to man into the bright and glowing daybreak of freedom and justice for all of God’s children.

### **The Beloved Community and the Kingdom of God**

It is noteworthy that one finds an absence of explicit reference to and explication of the doctrine of the Kingdom of God in the writings of King. However, references to the idea of the Beloved Community occur throughout his writings and occupy a central place in them. The explanation for this fact is undoubtedly that for King the Beloved Community and the Kingdom of God are synonymous.

It is additionally plausible that King intentionally substituted one for the other in order to avoid any identification of his idea of the Kingdom with the more traditional idea of an other-worldly realm quite removed from this earth. Credence for this point of view is enhanced by the tenor of a rare passage from King on the meaning of the Kingdom of God for him.

Jesus took over the phrase ‘the Kingdom of God,’ but he changed its meaning. He refused entirely to be the kind of a Messiah that his contemporaries expected. Jesus made love the mark of sovereignty. Here we are left with no doubt as to Jesus’ meaning. The Kingdom of God will be a society in which men and women live as children of God should live. It will be a kingdom controlled by the law of love . . . Many have attempted to say that the ideal of a better world will be worked out in the next world. But Jesus taught men to say, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Although the world seems to be in bad shape today, we must never lose faith in the power of God to achieve His purpose.

From this passage it is also clear that King and Rauschenbusch agreed completely that the Kingdom is “humanity organized according to the will of God.” The idea of the Kingdom, furthermore, was seen by both as corrective not only to the error of spiritualizing the Kingdom by projecting it into the world-to-come, but also the error of identifying the Kingdom with a particular social or political philosophy.

Moreover, for King it was especially important that the controlling concept of the Kingdom be that of “community.” Indeed, one could characterize his whole theology as a theology of community. Pivotal to that theology is a doctrine of creation which purports that persons were not only made in the image of God but also, and of equal importance, they were made for relationship. Just as the *Imago Dei* became the basis for the individual’s dignity and worth, created relatedness becomes the basis for community. Since we are all children of the same Father-Creator, we are all one family, one community, inseparably bound together. Segregation, therefore, is so profoundly wrong because it denies relationship, just as does anything else which perverts or destroys community. Therefore, to oppose inclusive community is to resist the very laws of God’s created order. King even interpreted the crucifixion-resurrection-pentecost events in terms of community:

The Cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God’s triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community-creating reality that moves through history.

From this central idea of community, King drew two further conclusions which became basic to both his idea of the Beloved Community and to his active ministry. The first was the conviction that there cannot be community without social justice. For him, the Hebrew prophets, in proclaiming that Yahweh is a just and righteous God who requires justice and righteousness from his children, were not merely voicing a demand for conformity of humanity of God. They were enunciating a prerequisite for the existence of community. Without the justice and righteousness of peace, freedom, equality, and harmony, community becomes sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. Thus community and justice are welded of necessity. Community without justice is hollow; justice without community is blind. The former begets colonialism; the latter, paternalism. Both are denials of the intention of the Creator.

The second conclusion emerging from the idea of community was framed around the New Testament concept of *agape* (love). Contrasting *agape* with the other two words for love in the Greek New Testament (*eros* and *philia*), King thought *agape* to be the essence of the Christian Gospel. It is characterized by “understanding, redeeming good will for all men. It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart.”

This concept of *agape* allowed King to make the critical distinction between that which underlies community and that which creates and sustains it. Justice undergirds community but cannot create it. Justice, King would say, may help to form an inclusive neighborhood, but only love can produce an inclusive neighborliness. It is the only force that can bring community into existence because its inherent unselfishness leads to cooperation instead of competition and conflict. In sum, *agape* is “love in action. *Agape* is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. *Agape* is willing to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community.” Thus it becomes clear why King was so insistent on going beyond the justice of desegregation to the love of integration, beyond association to community—the Beloved Community of the Kingdom of God.

### **The Realization of the Beloved Community**

The demands of the Gospel, as King saw them, propelled him into his pilgrimage toward nonviolence. This was no journey for a dilettante, but rather a sober and careful attempt at the formulation of comprehensive and coherent social philosophy grounded in the metaphysics of a personal God, a Christian systematic theology, and an ethics of the dignity and worth of all human personality. This fundamentally religious vision of the goal of human society was rooted also in King’s deep personal faith in God and in the power of love which he believed could transform the hearts and minds of all God’s children, regardless of race, creed, status, or nationality.

The main original theological contribution of King’s tragically shortened career was his remarkably consistent translating of his positive theological tenets into action. In this process he related his theological beliefs in an authentic and original way to various social theories and movements. At Boston University his theoretical position was being crystallized but not tested in action. One could say, therefore, that a fundamental aspect of Montgomery, of Selma, of Birmingham and all the rest was their being test-grounds—proving grounds, if you will—for the

adequacy of his theological position. On such battlefields one's ideals are either smashed or strengthened, abandoned or defended, compromised or held steadfast.

In the thinking through of so comprehensive a dream as that which King envisioned, and assuming as he did, intellectual categories and concepts derived almost exclusively from Christian theology and morality, three fundamental problems become the foci of this constructive activity.

The first was that of developing and articulating a social vision as the goal of our earthly striving. Thus, King asked: "From a Christian perspective, what kind of society must human society be when human society truly becomes?" The Beloved Community, which was discussed earlier, became the central focus in this regard.

The second problem involved methodology. Given his belief that means and ends must cohere, King asked: "By what 'legitimate' means can we transform our social existence in light of the present condition of humanity?"

The last problem centered in King's belief that the essence of the Christian Gospel is love, which is a translation of *agape*. Given both the commandment to love and a sin-sick world, King asked: "How can love become incarnate without becoming at the same time either some kind of sentimentality or, as with the Kantian categorical imperative, a sublime but unrealizable and frustrating 'ought'?"

These latter two problems put into focus the matter of achieving the goal of the Beloved Community. Once again, the starting point for King was the connectedness of all life. In the closing chapter of *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, King speaks eloquently of the moral solidarity of the human race.

From time immemorial human beings have lived by the principle that 'self-preservation is the first law of life.' But this is a false assumption. I would say that other-preservation is the first law of life precisely because we cannot preserve self without being concerned about preserving other selves.

This follows from the fact that deeply woven into the fiber of our religious tradition is the conviction that persons are made in the image of God, and that they are souls of infinite metaphysical value. If we accept this as a profound moral fact, we cannot be content to see our fellow human beings hungry, to see them victimized with ill-health, when we have the means to help them.

We must recognize, said King, that all persons are truly interdependent. "Every nation is an heir of a vast treasury of ideas and labor to which both the living and the dead of all nations have contributed. Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally 'in the red.' We are everlasting debtors to known and unknown men and women." All life, therefore, in a profound sense, is interrelated. In materialistic economic terms, mankind is the unit of cooperation. In spiritual and moral terms, humanity is the unit of uplift, betterment and respect.

In this call to transcend the petty boundaries of class, race, sex, nationality, etc., as a moral duty to the norm of universal community and humanity, King was essentially attempting to provide the moral foundations for the transition from a limited perspective and exclusiveness to the idea of universal community.

Universal community for King means several things. In the first place, it means a continued emphasis on both the personal and the social aspects of religion. The idea of the self-sufficient soul must never be allowed to subsume the meaning of the Gospel. As King stated,

We must come to see that the Christian gospel is a two-way road. On the one side, it seeks to change the souls of persons and thereby unite them with God; on the other side it seeks to change the environmental conditions of men so that the soul will have a chance after it is changed. Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of persons and yet is not concerned with the economic and social conditions that strangle them [is barbarous].

Secondly, inclusive community points to the vision of mankind becoming "one world" as a condition of peace, if not survival. King states,

We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must somehow live with each other in peace.

King believed that peace is heavily dependent on our loyalties becoming more ecumenical rather than sectional:

Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means that we must develop a world perspective. No individual can live alone, and as long as we try, the more we are going to have war in this world. Now the

judgment of God is upon us, and we must either learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we are all going to perish together as fools.

At King's funeral, Benjamin Mays pointed to King's motif of "one world community:" "He [King] was supra-race, supra-nation, supra-denomination, supra-class, supra-culture. . . He belonged to the world and to mankind. Now he belongs to posterity."

Finally, universal community entails the idea of Christian vocation and commitment. In a 1965 interview with Alex Haley, King was recounting mistakes that he had made in leading the civil rights movement. He sorrowfully reported that,

the most pervasive mistake . . . was in believing that because our cause was just, we could be sure that the white ministers of the South, once their Christian consciences were challenged, would rise to our aid. I felt that white ministers would take our cause to the white power structures. I ended up, of course, chastened and disillusioned. As our movement unfolded, and direct appeals were made to white ministers, most folded their hands—and some even had stands against us.

King was then asked if he disagreed with their stated reason for refusing help, which was that it is not the proper role of the church to "intervene in secular affairs." King responded most emphatically in the affirmative and went on to elaborate.

The essence of the Epistles of Paul is that Christians should rejoice at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believe. The projection of a social gospel, in my opinion, is the true witness of a Christian life. This is the meaning of the true ekklesia—the inner, spiritual church. The Church once changed society. It was then a thermostat of society. But today I feel that too much of the church is merely a thermometer, which measures rather than molds popular opinion.

The laxity of the white church and of white ministers was particularly painful to King, especially when one remembers that his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963) was addressed to a group of white clergymen who had publicly criticized King for "unwise and untimely" demonstrations. Later on, King reflects.

I will remain true to the church as long as I live. But the laxity of the white church collectively has caused me to weep tears of love. There cannot be deep disappointment without deep love. Time and time again in my travels, as I have seen the outward beauty of white churches, I have had to ask myself, "What kind of people worship there? Who is their God? Is their God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and is their Savior the Savior who hung on the cross at Golgotha? Where were their voices when a black race took upon itself the cross of protest against human injustice to their fellow humans? Where were their voices when defiance and hatred were called for by white persons who sat in these very churches?" My optimism about help from the white church was shattered; and on too many occasions since, my hopes for the white church have been dashed.

King died still nurturing an amazement at the sheer amount of hypocrisy within the Christian Church.

Finally, the idea of nonviolence was for King the key concept that linked not only the methodology of inclusive community with the commandment to love, but also reconciled the often polar norms of love, power, and justice. Put into a simple formula it can still be stated as follows: What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. There is nothing essentially wrong with power. The problem is that in most situations power is unequally distributed. This has led Black Americans, for example, in the past to seek their goals through love and moral suasion devoid of power and white Americans to seek their goals through power devoid of love and conscience. This is the often-seen occurrence of the confrontation of immoral power and powerless morality. Inclusive community must have as a prerequisite, therefore, some means of sharing power. And since authentic community can exist only on the strength of goodwill and mutuality, the means for attaining the end of community must be inherently benevolent. Nonviolence is the only such means. It is both loving and confrontational, respectful and principled, judging and redeeming.

In his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, King recounts his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence." Conspicuously absent from that account, however, is any mention of **Howard Thurman**, noted Black Baptist preacher and mystic

who was a contemporary and friend of Martin's parents and who was Dean of the Chapel at Boston University during King's matriculation as a doctoral student.

Interestingly, as early as 1935, Thurman was searching for a means by which he could operationalize the love-ethic in the struggle for wholeness and community. Thus began his pilgrimage to nonviolence. Luther Smith states that,

The development of a philosophy of non-violent protest for the Black struggle is a foremost achievement of his [Thurman's] social witness. Here Thurman makes a signal contribution to providing a method for change in American race relations. He has done more than any other person to articulate the ethical and spiritual necessity for Blacks' civil liberties struggle to be grounded in the principles of non-violence.

Indeed there is a profound affinity between Thurman and his younger contemporary, Martin Luther King, Jr., with regard to the explication of nonviolence. Five common points can be identified from their various writings:

1. That nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards, for it does resist evil.
2. That it does not seek to humiliate the opponent, but to win understanding and friendship.
3. That the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against the persons doing the evil.
4. That it willingly accepts suffering without retaliation, including violence.
5. That it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of the spirit.

Thurman saw, as did King, that those principles would tend to introduce new possibilities for reconciliation between the oppressed and the powerful. They would permit love to enter conflict creatively and thus to address the real problem—the spiritual ills of separation, fear, hate, and deception.

On the subject of King and Thurman, it is interesting to note that there is a good deal of speculation regarding the probable influence of Thurman on King. Such speculation stems in part from the report by historian/journalist Lerone Bennett, Jr., that while interviewing King during the 1956 Montgomery bus boycott, he noticed a copy of Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* in King's briefcase. This report makes even more curious the fact that King does not refer explicitly to Thurman in any of his speeches or writings.

Another writer suggests that Thurman might have been the first person to sow the seed of "nonviolent suffering" in the mind of Black Americans. S. P. Fullinwider goes so far as to credit Thurman with indirect responsibility for introducing King to the nonviolent ethic. That scenario goes something like this. Thurman, while Dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University, went to India and met with Gandhi, who strongly influenced his thinking. Upon his return to Howard University, Thurman urged President Mordecai Johnson of Howard to make the pilgrimage to India in order to hear first-hand Gandhi's views on nonviolence. When President Johnson returned from India, he lectured at Fellowship House in Philadelphia on the Gandhian ethic of love and nonviolence. Martin Luther King, Jr., was in the congregation on that occasion and wrote later in his account of his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" that he began to study seriously the usefulness of the nonviolent ethic after hearing Johnson's lecture on Gandhi. For his part, however, Thurman, in his autobiography *With Head and Heart*, never mentions any serious conversation with King about the nonviolent ethic, even though both were at Boston University in the mid 1950s.

Unquestionably both King and Thurman held quite similar views regarding nonviolence and the love ethic. Both dedicated their ministries to revealing the possibilities for community. Both tried to practice the love ethic within their respective arenas of ministry and both with the same designation of the same goal—the beloved community.

Whatever the case may be, King acknowledged that he was so motivated and electrified by Mordecai Johnson's portrayal of the life and teachings of Gandhi that he immediately embarked on a study of Gandhi's writings. He began to have a keen appreciation for the concept of "Satyagraha," which means truth-force or love-force, and its potential in the area of social reform. King went on to state that "it was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking," that nonviolence was "the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom," and that "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethics of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale."

This was to serve him well in the storm that gathered during his Montgomery ministry. In *Stride Toward Freedom*, he recalls:

When I went to Montgomery as a pastor, I had not the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable. I neither started the protest nor suggested it. I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman. When the protest began, my mind, consciously or unconsciously, was driven back to the Sermon on the Mount, with its sublime teachings on love, and to the Gandhian method of nonviolent resistance.

Now in speaking about Christian love, King was quick to acknowledge that it may never be completely fulfilled. He recognized that “men have a tragic inclination to yield to selfish impulses, but one always has the capacity to strive for love. It always remains the regulating ideal.” Fundamentalists tend to take everything in the Bible literally, King argued; yet when pressed, most of them write off the phrase “Love your enemies” as unrealistic. Although King himself wrote off a literal view of the virgin birth, he insisted that Jesus’ words, as reported in the New Testament, be interpreted literally.

In doing so, he has made what many clergypersons and others consider a singular contribution to modern religious thought. Using the words of Jesus and the example of Gandhi in India, King became one of the first and certainly the foremost in articulating the concept of nonviolent resistance for Christianity in America and, more importantly, in organizing and campaigning for social reform using nonviolent methods and discipline.

Generally speaking, King was a liberal-optimist on the question of the actualization of the “Beloved Community” within history. Whatever naive optimism in this regard he once harbored, the “Christian realism” of Niebuhr had purged. Nevertheless, he found in the social gospel and in personalism an optimism concerning the divine nature which balanced the Niebuhrian pessimistic emphasis on the potential for evil in human nature. This optimism bolstered his faith in the power of God to achieve His purpose among humanity and within history as well as the possibilities of human beings when they allow themselves to become co-workers with God. Thus, to whatever extent the “Kingdom will come,” it will be a product of human effort and God’s help.

It is difficult to see how King could have come to any other conclusion given his firm conviction that the universe is on the side of justice and righteousness and that as we struggle to defeat the forces of evil, the God of the universe struggles with us. He often said to his followers:

The believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future. This faith is another reason why the nonviolent resister can accept suffering without retaliation. For he knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship . . . Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole.

In the main, King placed less emphasis on the specific question of actualization than on the attributes and qualities which persons must acquire in order to hasten the coming of the Beloved Community and insure its survival. Cardinal among these is the adoption of nonviolence, not merely as a policy or tactic, but as a moral imperative. In the struggle for community, only nonviolence acts to reestablish the wholeness of community and reconciles oppressor with the oppressed. In this regard, there is the implication in King that the Beloved Community would gradually emerge as the by-product of the practice of nonviolence and the realization of wider and wider degrees of social cooperation.

He further stressed the need for loyalty and devotion in pursuit of community. He knew fully well that fulfillment may be nourished by hope but is attained through tenacious work. Each stride toward the goal requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle. One must be willing to suffer for the sake of others, express love (*agape*) to its fullest extent, and live with devotion, concern for justice, rightness, and harmony with God.

Thus out of King’s faith in the power of God, love, and nonviolence to reconcile persons to each other and to God emerged his dream of the Beloved Community—admittedly a “dream,” but for King, the committed servant of God, it was the only one that was worthy of the struggle.

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# **Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology**

by

Jacquelyn Grant

## **Introduction**

Black theology and other Third World theologies of liberation have shown through their challenge of the methodologies of classical theologies that experience of the dominant culture has been the invisible crucible for theologizing. They have demonstrated that theology is not unrelated to socio-political realities of existence, and that historically it has been used to maintain the social and political advantages of the status quo. The portrayal of the universal God was such that an affirmation of this meant a simultaneous negation of all others' cultural perceptions of the divinity, as well as a negation of those very cultures. Nowhere was this more clear than in the area of Christian foreign missions where conversion to Christianity implicitly meant deculturalization and acceptance of the western value system on the part of Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans. Upon conversion, one had to withdraw from indigenous ways of imaging the divine reality, and embrace foreign, western ways which often served to undergird oppressive religious, social and political structures.

This is true not only in the foreign missions field but also in the western world; it is reflected in the ways in which oppressors deal with oppressed people within their own territory. We see this with respect to Third World people in the first world context as well as with respect to women. The experiences of Black Women provided especially insightful sources for doing theology.

An illustration emerging out of Black theology and Feminist theology will make the point. Theologians in both these camps propose an alternative understanding, for example, of Christian love.

James Cone in an early work makes a distinction between a nonthreatening love of many Christians and the radical love of Jesus which demands justice.

There is no place in Christian theology for sentimental love—love without risk or cost. Love demands all, the whole of one's being. Thus, for the Black [person] to believe the Word of God about [God's] love revealed in Christ, he/she must be prepared to meet head-on the sentimental "Christian" love of whites, which would make him/her a nonperson.<sup>1</sup>

Cone insists that one cannot practice Christian love and at the same time practice racism. He argues:

It seems that whites forget about the necessary interrelatedness of love, justice, and power when they encounter Black people. Love becomes emotional and sentimental. This sentimental, condescending love accounts for their desire to "help" by relieving the physical pains of the suffering Blacks so they can satisfy their own religious piety and keep the poor powerless. But the new Blacks, redeemed in Christ, must refuse their "help" and demand that Blacks be confronted as persons. They must say to whites that authentic love is not "help," not giving Christmas baskets, but working for



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political, social, and economic justice, which always means a redistribution of power. It is a kind of power which enables the Blacks to fight their own battles and thus keep their dignity. "Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars."<sup>2</sup>

Black people do not need a love which functions contrary to the establishment of Black personhood. This understanding of love was just recently affirmed by Black theologians (lay and clergy, professional and non-professional) in Southern Africa in their challenge to the church through *The Kairos Document*. They cautioned, "we must also remember that the most loving thing we can do for both the oppressed and for our enemies who are oppressors is to eliminate the oppression, remove the tyrants from power and establish a just government for the common good of all the people."<sup>3</sup> Here, love is not defined in the interest of those who wish to maintain the present status quo. But it is defined from the point of view of those on the underside of history—the victims of the oppressors' power.

In a similar vein, feminists challenge traditional understandings of love. Valerie Saiving Goldstein expresses her suspicions of traditional theological works in the following way:

I am no longer certain as I once was that, when theologians speak of "man," they are using the word in its generic sense. It is, after all, a well-known fact that theology has been written almost exclusively by men. This alone should put us on guard, especially since contemporary theologians constantly remind us that one of man's strongest temptations is to identify his own limited perspective with universal truth.<sup>4</sup>

Lifting up the Christian notion of sin and love, Goldstein suggests that it would be equally unsatisfactory to impose universal understanding on those concepts. The identification of these notions with self-assertion and selflessness respectively, functions differently in masculine experience and feminine experience. She explains further:

Contemporary theological doctrines of love have been constructed primarily upon the basis of masculine experience and thus view the human condition from the male standpoint. Consequently, these doctrines do not provide an adequate interpretation of the situation of women—nor, for that matter, of men, especially in light of certain fundamental changes taking place in our own society.<sup>5</sup>

Because of their feminine character, for women love takes the form of nurturing, supporting and servicing their families. Consequently, if a woman believes

the theologians, she will try to strangle their impulses in herself. She will believe that, having chosen marriage and children and thus being face to face with the needs of her family for love, refreshment, and forgiveness, she has no right to ask anything for herself but must submit without qualification to the strictly feminine role.<sup>6</sup>

For women too, the issue is one of personhood—are women to deny who they are in order to be saved?

Goldstein then argues that when experience in theology is scrutinized, we will discover that because it has been synonymous with masculine experience, it is inadequate to deal with the situation of women.

In other words, Black theologians and feminist theologians have argued that the universalism which classical theologians attempt to uphold represents merely the particular experiences of the dominant culture. Blacks identify that experience as White experiences; and women identify it as a male experience. The question then is, if universalism is the criteria for valid theology, how is such universalism achieved?

What will be explored here is how Black women's experiences can provide some insights into this question. In doing so, Black women not only join Blacks and feminists in their challenge of theology but they also provide an internal critique for Black men as well as for White women. In this paper, I will focus primarily upon Black women's experience as related to the development of feminist theology. (In a rather limited way, I have addressed the issue of Black women's experiences and Black theology in an article entitled "Black Theology and The Black Woman."<sup>7</sup> That subject certainly has not been exhausted and shall be treated in more substantive ways in the future.)

But here I am interested in engaging feminist theology with reference to its constructive efficacy for Black women, given the peculiarities of their experiences. The results will be the beginnings of a theology from a Black Woman's perspective, with special reference to Christology.

In order to create a common starting point, let's begin with a synopsis of the basic tenets of feminist theology. First, feminist theology seeks to develop a *wholistic theology*. Feminist theology rejects the traditional forms of oppressive and one-sided, male-dominated theologies which arise out of patriarchal religion(s).<sup>8</sup> Women have begun

to see that their continuous oppression in the church and society has its basis in these patriarchal religion(s). Historically, the theologies of religions have emerged out of the experiences of men, making the theologies representative thereof. Because humanity is comprised of both men and women, feminist theologians seek to develop a more wholistic perspective in theology.

Second, in seeking to produce a wholistic perspective in theology, feminist theologians call for the *eradication of social/sexual dualisms* in human existence which are inherent in patriarchy. A patriarchy is characterized by male-domination and female submission and subordination. In such a society, men are considered strong, intelligent, rational and aggressive; women are considered weak, irrational, and docile.

A third function of feminist theology is to conceptualize *new and positive images of women*. Throughout history, including the history of theology, women have been portrayed in negative ways. They have been sources of evil (snakes), authors of trickery (witches), and stimulants (therefore causes) for the sexual perversions of men (temptresses and prostitutes). These negative images must be changed to reflect reality.

Finally, feminist theology must *evaluate male-articulated understandings of the Christian faith*. Doctrines developed in a system of patriarchy merely perpetuate patriarchal structures. As the patriarchal theological system is challenged, so are the doctrines, e.g., God, Jesus Christ, the Fall and the Church.

### Emerging Black Feminist Perspective

It has been argued by many Blacks that the women's liberation movement is a White middle-class movement. Therefore, it is believed to be totally irrelevant to the situation of Black women since the majority of them are not middle-class.

Brenda Eichelberger gives several reasons for Black women's non-involvement in feminist causes. Among them are such things as class differences, the lack of Black women's knowledge about the real issues involved and the suspicion that the middle-class White Women's movement is divisive to the Black community, which claims prior allegiance.<sup>9</sup> In spite of these and other negative responses to the White women's liberation movement, there has been a growing feminist consciousness among many Black women and Black men. This consciousness is coupled by the increased willingness of Black women to undertake an independent analysis of sexism, thereby creating an emerging Black perspective on feminism. Black feminism grows out of Black women's tri-dimensional reality of race/sex/class. It holds that full human liberation cannot be achieved simply by the elimination of any one form of oppression. Consequently, real liberation must be "broad in the concrete";<sup>10</sup> it must be based upon a multi-dimensional analysis.

Recent writings by secular Black feminists have challenged White feminist analysis and Black race analysis, particularly by introducing data from Black women's experience that has been historically ignored by White feminists and Black male liberationists.

In only a few of them do Black women employ only a gender analysis to treat Black women's reality. Whereas Ntozake Shange focuses chiefly upon sexism, Michelle Wallace, like Alice Walker, presumes that White racism has had an adverse effect upon the Black community in a way that confuses and reinforces the already existing sexism. Sharon Harley, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Paula Giddings and Gloria Wade-Gayles all recognize the inclusiveness of the oppressive reality of Black women as they endure racism, sexism and economic oppression. Barbara Smith, Gloria Hull, Bell Hooks and Angela Davis particularly explore the implications of this tri-dimensional oppression of Black women. In so doing, Black women have either articulated Black feminist perspectives or developed grounds for doing so.<sup>11</sup> These perspectives, however, have not led to the resolution of tensions between Black women and White women, and they even brought to the forefront some tensions between Black women and Black men.

On the contrary, the possibly irreparable nature of these tensions is implied in Walker's suggestion that the experience of being a Black woman or a White woman is so different that another word is required to describe the liberative efforts of Black women. Her suggestion that the word "womanist" is more appropriate for Black women is derived from the sense of the word as it is used in Black communities:

Womanist, from womanish (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interest in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another Black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.<sup>12</sup>

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Womanists were Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee, Amanda Berry Smith, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McCloud Bethune and countless others not remembered in any historical study. A womanist then is a strong Black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled a domineering castrating matriarch. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people. Walker's womanist notation suggests not "the feminist," but the active struggle of Black women that makes them who they are. For some Black women that may involve being feminine as traditionally defined, and for others it involves being masculine as stereotypically defined. In any case, womanist means being and acting out who you are and interpreting the reality for yourself. In other words, Black women speak out for themselves. As a Black feminist critic Barbara Christian explains, referring to Audre Lorde's poem about the deadly consequence of silence, Black women must speak up and answer in order to validate their own experience. This is important even if only to ourselves. It is to the womanist tradition that Black women must appeal for the doing of theology.

### **The Beginnings of a Womanist Theology, with Special Reference to Christology**

Womanist theology begins with the experiences of Black women as its point of departure. These experiences include not only Black women's activities in the larger society but also in the churches, and reveals that Black women have often rejected the oppressive structure in the church as well.

These experiences provide a context which is significant for doing theology. Those experiences had been and continue to be defined by racism, sexism and classism and therefore offer a unique opportunity and a new challenge for developing a relevant perspective in the theological enterprise. This perspective in theology which I am calling womanist theology draws upon the life and experiences of some Black women who have created meaningful interpretations of the Christian faith.

Black women must do theology out of their tri-dimensional experience of racism/sexism/classism. To ignore any aspect of this experience is to deny the holistic and integrated reality of Black womanhood. When Black women say that God is on the side of the oppressed, we mean that God is in solidarity with the struggles of those on the underside of humanity, those whose lives are bent and broken from the many levels of assault perpetrated against them.

In a chapter entitled "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," Hooks elaborates on the interrelationship of the threefold oppressive reality of Black women and shows some of the weaknesses of White feminist theory. Challenging the racist and classist assumptions of White feminism, Hooks writes:

Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries. Past feminist refusal to draw attention to and attack racial hierarchy suppressed the link between race and class. Yet class structure in American society has been shaped by the racial politics of white supremacy."<sup>13</sup>

This means that Black women, because of oppression determined by race and their subjugation as women, make up a disproportionately high percentage of the poor and working classes. However, the fact that Black women are a subjugated group even within the Black community and the White women's community does not mean that they are alone in their oppression within those communities. In the women's community poor White women are discriminated against, and in the Black community, poor Black men are marginalized. This suggests that classism, as well as racism and sexism, has a life of its own. Consequently, simply addressing racism and sexism is inadequate to bring about total liberation. Even though there are dimensions of class which are not directly related to race or sex, classism impacts Black women in a peculiar way which results in the fact that they are most often on the bottom of the social and economic ladder. For Black women doing theology, to ignore classism would mean that their theology is no different from any other bourgeois theology. It would be meaningless to the majority of Black women, who are themselves poor. This means that addressing only issues relevant to middle-class women or Blacks will simply not do. The daily struggles of poor Black women serve as the gauge for the verification of the claims of womanist theology. Anna Julia Cooper makes a relevant point.

Women's wrongs are thus indissolubly linked with all undefended woes, and the acquirement of her "rights" will mean the supremacy of triumph of all right over might, the supremacy of the moral forces of reason, and justice, and love in the government of the nations of earth.<sup>14</sup>

Black women's experience must be affirmed as the crucible for doing womanist theology. It is the context in which we must decide theological questions. More specifically, it is within the context of this experience that Black women read the Bible. A (brief) look at Black women's use of the Bible indicates how it is their experiences which determine relevant questions for them.

### **The Bible in the Womanist Tradition**

Theological investigation into the experiences of Christian Black women reveals that Black women considered the Bible to be a major source of religious validation in their lives. Though Black women's relationship with God preceded their introduction to the Bible, the Bible gave some content to their God-consciousness.<sup>15</sup> The source for Black women's understanding of God as creator, sustainer, comforter, and liberator took on life as they agonized over their pain, and celebrated the hope that as God delivered the Israelites, they would be delivered as well. The God of the Old and New Testament became real in the consciousness of oppressed Black women. Of the use of the Bible, Fannie Barrier Williams quite aptly said:

Though the Bible was not an open book to the Negro before emancipation, thousands of the enslaved men and women of the negro race learned more than was taught to them. Thousands of them realized the deeper meanings, the sweeter consolations and the spiritual awakenings that are part of the religious experiences of all Christians.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, though Black people in general and Black women in particular were politically impotent, religiously controlled, they were able to appropriate certain themes of the Bible which spoke to their reality. For example, Jarena Lee, a nineteenth century Black woman preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, constantly emphasized the theme "Life and Liberty" in her sermons which were always biblically based. This interplay of scripture and experience was exercised expressly by many Black women. An ex-slave woman revealed that when her experience negated certain oppressive interpretations of the Bible given by white preachers, she, through engaging the biblical message for herself, rejected them. Consequently she also dismissed white preachers who distorted the message in order to maintain slavery. Her grandson, Howard Thurman, speaks of her use of the Bible in this way:

"During the days of slavery," she said, "the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul, 'Slaves be obedient to them that are your masters . . . as unto Christ.' Then he would go on to show how, if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible."<sup>17</sup>

What we see here is perhaps more than a mere rejection of a White preacher's interpretation of the Bible: it is an exercise in internal critique of the Bible. The liberating message of the gospel is seen as over against the oppressive elements in the Bible. The truth which the Bible brought was undeniable, though perception of it was often distorted in order to support the monstrous system of oppression. Sarcastically responding to this tendency, Fannie Barrier Williams admonished, "do not open the Bible too wide." Biblical interpretation, realized Williams, a non-theologically trained person, had at its basis the prior agenda of White America. She therefore argued:

Religion, like every other force in America, was first used as an instrument and servant of slavery. All attempts to Christianize the negro were limited by the important fact that he was property of valuable and peculiar sort, and that the property value must not be disturbed, even if his soul were lost. If Christianity could make the negro docile, domestic and less an independent and fighting savage, let it be preached to that extent and no further.<sup>18</sup>

A false, pernicious, demoralizing gospel could only be preached if the Bible was not opened wide enough, lest one sees the liberating message of Jesus as summarized in Luke 4:18. The Bible must be read and interpreted in the light of Black women's own oppression and God's revelation within that context. The womanist must, like Sojourner, "compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness" in them.<sup>19</sup>

To do Womanist theology, then, we must read and hear the Bible and engage it within the context of our own experience. This is the only way that it can make sense to people who are oppressed. Black women of the past did not hesitate in doing this and we must do no less.

### Jesus in the Womanist Tradition

Having opened the Bible wider than many White people, Black people, in general, and Black women in particular, found a Jesus who they could claim, and whose claim for them was one of affirmation of dignity and self-respect.

In the experience of Black people, Jesus was “all things.”<sup>20</sup> Chief among these however was the belief in Jesus as the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations of oppression. For Christian Black women in the past, Jesus was their central frame of reference. They identified with Jesus because they believed that Jesus identified with them. As Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they. His suffering culminated in the crucifixion. Their crucifixion included rapes, and husbands being castrated (literally and metaphorically), babies being sold, and other cruel and often murderous treatments. But Jesus’ suffering was not the suffering of a mere human, for Jesus was understood to be God incarnate. As Harold Carter observed of Black prayers in general, there was no difference made between the persons of the Trinity, Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. All of these proper names for God were used interchangeably in prayer language. Thus, Jesus was the one who speaks the world into creation. He was the power behind the Church.<sup>21</sup> Black women’s affirmation of Jesus as God meant that White people were not God. One old slave woman clearly demonstrates this as she prayed:

Dear Massa Jesus, we all uns beg Ooner [you] come make us a call dis yere day. We is nutting but poor Ethiopian women and people ain’t tink much ‘bout we. We ain’t trust any of dem great high people for come to we church, but do’ you is de one great Massa, great too much dan Massa Linkum, you ain’t shame to care for we African people.<sup>22</sup>

Implicit in the description “nothing but poor Black women” and what follows is the awareness of the public devaluation of Black women. But in spite of that Jesus is presented as a confidant who could be trusted while White people could not be trusted. This woman affirmed the contribution of Abraham Lincoln to the emancipation of Blacks, but rejected Mr. Lincoln as her real or ultimate master. Quite a contrast to the master’s (slave owner’s) perception of him/herself.

This slave woman did not hesitate to identify her struggle and pain with those of Jesus. In fact, the common struggle made her know that Jesus would respond to her beck and call.

Come to we, dear Massa Jesus. De sun, he hot too much, de road am dat long and boggy (sandy) and we ain’t got no buggy for send and fetch Ooner. But Massa, you ‘member how you walked dat hard walk up Calvary and ain’t weary but tink about we all dat way. We know you ain’t weary for to come to we. We pick out de torns, de prickles, de brier, de backsliding’ and de quarrel and de sin out of you so dey shan’t hurt Ooner pierce feet no more.<sup>23</sup>

The reference to “no buggy” to send for Jesus brings to mind the limited material possessions of pre- and post-Civil War Blacks. In her speech, “Ain’t I a Woman?” Sojourner Truth emphasized that Black women were not helped into carriages as were White women.<sup>24</sup> In the prayer, this woman speaks of that reality wherein most Blacks didn’t even have carriages or buggies. For had she owned one, certainly she’d send it to fetch Jesus. Here we see the concern for the comfort and the suffering of Jesus. Jesus suffers when we sin—when we backslide or when we quarrel. But still Jesus is identified with her plight. Note that Jesus went to the cross with this Black woman on his mind. He was thinking about her and all others like her. So totally dedicated to the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, the outcast that in this Black woman’s faith, Jesus would never be too tired to come. As she is truly among the people at the bottom of humanity, she can make things comfortable for Jesus even though she may have nothing to give him—no water, no food—but she can give tears and love. She continues:

Come to we, dear Massa Jesus. We all uns ain’t got no good cool water for give you when you thirsty. You know, Massa, de drought so long, and the well so low, ain’t nutting but mud to drink. But we gwine to take de ‘munion cup and fill it wid de tear of repentance, and love clean out of we heart. Dat all we hab to gib you, good Massa.<sup>25</sup>

The material or physical deprivation experienced by this woman did not reduce her desire to give Jesus the best. Being a Black woman in the American society meant essentially being poor, with no buggy, and no good cool water. Life for Black women was indeed bad, hot and at best muddy. Note that there is no hint that their condition results from some divine intention. Now, whereas I am not prepared to say that this same woman or any others in that church the next day would have been engaged in political praxis by joining such movements as Nat Turner’s

rebellion or Denmark Vesey's revolt, it is clear that her perspective was such that the social, political and economic orders were believed to be sinful and against the will of the real master, Jesus.

For Black women, the role of Jesus was revealed as they encountered him in their experience as one who empowers the weak. In this vein, Jesus was such a central part of Sojourner Truth's life that all of her sermons made him the starting point. When asked by a preacher if the source of her preaching was the Bible, she responded "No honey, can't preach from de Bible—can't read a letter."<sup>26</sup> Then she explained: "When I preaches, I has jest one text to preach from, an I always preaches from this one. My text is, 'When I found Jesus!'"<sup>27</sup> In this sermon Sojourner Truth recounts the events and struggles of life from the time her parents were brought from Africa and sold "up an' down, an' hither an' yon. . . ."<sup>28</sup> to the time that she met Jesus within the context of her struggles for dignity of Black people and women. Her encounter with Jesus brought such joy that she became overwhelmed with love and praise:

Praise, praise, praise to the Lord! An' I begun to feel such a love in my soul as I never felt before—love to all creatures. An' then, all of a sudden, it stopped, an' I said, Dar's de white folks that have abused you, an' beat you, and an' abused your people—think o' them! But then there came another rush of love through my soul, an' I cried out loud—"Lord, I can love even white folks!"<sup>29</sup>

This love was not a sentimental, passive love. It was a tough, active love that empowered her to fight more fiercely for the freedom of her people. For the rest of her life she continued speaking at abolition and women's rights gatherings, where she condemned the horrors of oppression.

### **The Womanist Traditions and Christological Reflections**

More than anyone, Black theologians have captured the essence of the significance of Jesus in the lives of Black people which to an extent includes Black women. They all hold that the Jesus of history is important for understanding who he was and his significance for us today. By and large they have affirmed that this Jesus is the Christ, that is, God incarnate. They have argued that in the light of our experience, Jesus meant freedom.<sup>30</sup> They have maintained that Jesus means freedom from the sociopsychological, psychocultural, economic and political oppression of Black people. In other words, Jesus is a political messiah.<sup>31</sup> "To free [humans] from bondage was Jesus' own definition of his ministry."<sup>32</sup> This meant that as Jesus identified with the lowly of his day, he now identifies with the lowly of this day, who in the American context are Black people. The identification is so real that Jesus Christ in fact becomes Black. It is important to note that Jesus' blackness is not a result of ideological distortion of a few Black thinkers, but a result of careful Christological investigation. Cone examines the sources of Christology and concludes that Jesus is Black because "Jesus was a Jew." He explains:

It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the christological significance of Jesus' present blackness. He is black because he was a Jew. The affirmation of the Black Christ can be understood when the significance of his past Jewishness is related dialectically to the significance of his present blackness. On the other hand, the Jewishness of Jesus located him in the context of the Exodus, thereby connecting his appearance in Palestine with God's liberation of oppressed Israelites from Egypt. Unless Jesus were truly from Jewish ancestry, it would make little theological sense to say that he is the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel. But on the other hand, the blackness of Jesus brings out the soteriological meaning of his Jewishness for our contemporary situation when Jesus' person is understood in the context of the Cross and resurrection. Without negating the divine election of Israel, the Cross and resurrection are Yahweh's fulfillment of his original intention for Israel. . . .<sup>33</sup>

The condition of Black people today reflects the cross of Jesus. Yet the resurrection brings the hope that liberation from oppression is immanent. The resurrected Black Christ signifies this hope.

Cone further argues that this christological title, "The Black Christ," is not validated by its universality, but, in fact, by its particularity. Its significance lies in whether or not the christological title "points to God's universal will to liberate particular oppressed people from inhumanity."<sup>34</sup> These particular oppressed peoples to which Cone refers are characterized in Jesus' parable on the last Judgment as "the least." "The least in America are literally present in Black people."<sup>35</sup> This notion of "the least" is attractive because it descriptively locates the condition of Black women. "The least" are those people who have no water to give, but offer what they have, as the old slave woman cited above says in her prayer. Black women's experience in general is such a reality. Their tri-dimensional reality renders their particular situation a complex one. One could say that not only are they the oppressed of the oppressed, but their situation represents "the particular within the particular."

## **WOMANIST THEOLOGY: BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE**

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But is this just another situation that takes us deeper into the abyss of theological relativity? I would argue that it is not, because it is in the context of Black women's experience where the particular connects up with the universal. By this I mean that in each of the three dynamics of oppression, Black women share in the reality of a broader community. They share race suffering with Black men; with White women and other Third World women they are victims of sexism; and with poor Blacks and Whites, and other Third World peoples, especially women, they are disproportionately poor. To speak of Black women's tri-dimensional reality, therefore, is not to speak to Black women exclusively, for there is an implied universality which connects them with others.

Likewise, with Jesus Christ, there was an implied universality which made him identify with others—the poor, the woman, the stranger. To affirm Jesus' solidarity with the "least of the people" is not an exercise in romanticized contentment with one's oppressed status in life. For as the resurrection signified that there is more to life than the cross of Jesus Christ, for Black women it signifies that their tri-dimensional oppressive existence is not the end, but it merely represents the context in which a particular people struggle to experience hope and liberation. Jesus Christ thus represents a three-fold significance; first he identifies with the "little people," Black women, where they are; secondly, he affirms the basic humanity of these, "the least;" and thirdly, he inspires active hope in the struggle for resurrected, liberated existence.

To locate the Christ in Black people is a radical and necessary step, but understanding of a Black women's reality challenges us to go further. Christ among the least must also mean Christ in the community of Black women. William Eichelberger was able to recognize this as he further particularized the significance of the Blackness of Jesus by locating Christ in Black women's community. He was able to see Christ not only as Black male but also as Black female.

God, in revealing Himself and His attributes from time to time in His creaturely existence, has exercised His freedom to formalize His appearance in a variety of ways. . . . God revealed Himself at a point in the past as Jesus the Christ a Black male. My reasons for affirming the Blackness of Jesus of Nazareth are much different from that of the white apologist. . . . God wanted to identify with that segment of mankind which had suffered most, and is still suffering. . . . I am constrained to believe that God in our times has updated His form of revelation to western society. It is my feeling that God is now manifesting Himself, and has been for over 450 years, in the form of the Black American Woman as mother, as wife, as nourisher, sustainer and preserver of life, the Suffering Servant who is despised and rejected by men, a personality of sorrow who is acquainted with grief. The Black Woman has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. She has been wounded because of American White society's transgressions and bruised by white iniquities. It appears that she may be the instrumentality through whom God will make us whole.<sup>36</sup>

Granted, Eichelberger's categories for God and woman are very traditional. Nevertheless, the significance of his thought is that he is able to conceive of the Divine reality as other than a Black male messianic figure.

Even though Black women have been able to transcend some of the oppressive tendencies of White male (and Black male) articulated theologies, careful study reveals that some traditional symbols are inadequate for us today. The Christ understood as the stranger, the outcast, the hungry, the weak, the poor, makes the traditional male Christ (Black and White) less significant. Even our sisters of the past had some suspicions about the effects of a male image of the divine, for they did challenge the oppressive use of it in the church's theology. In so doing, they were able to move from a traditional oppressive Christology, with respect to women, to an egalitarian Christology. This kind of egalitarian Christology was operative in Jarena Lee's argument for the right of women to preach. She argued ". . . the Saviour died for the woman as well as for the man."<sup>37</sup> The crucifixion was for universal salvation, not just for male salvation or, as we may extend the argument to include, not just for White salvation. Because of this, Christ came and died, no less for the woman as for the man, no less for Blacks as for Whites. For Lee, this was not an academic issue, but one with practical ramification.

If the man may preach, because the Savior died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.<sup>38</sup>

Lee correctly perceives that there is an ontological issue at stake. If Jesus Christ were a Saviour of men then it is true the maleness of Christ would be paramount.<sup>39</sup> But if Christ is the Savior of all, then it is the humanity—the wholeness—of Christ which is significant.

Sojourner was aware of the same tendency of some scholars and church leaders to link the maleness of Jesus and the sin of Eve with the status of women and she challenged this notion in her famed speech "Ain't I A Woman?"

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.<sup>40</sup>

I would argue, as suggested by both Lee and Sojourner, that the significance of Christ is not his maleness, but his humanity. The most significant events of Jesus Christ were the life and ministry, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. The significance of these events, in one sense, is that in them the absolute becomes concrete. God becomes concrete not only in the man Jesus, for he was crucified, but in the lives of those who will accept the challenge of the risen Saviour—the Christ. For Lee, this meant that women could preach; for Sojourner, it meant that women could possibly save the world; for me, it means today this Christ, found in the experience of Black women, is a Black woman.

### Conclusion

I have argued that Black women's tri-dimensional reality provides a fertile context for articulating a theological perspective which is wholistic in scope and liberating in nature. The theology is potentially wholistic because the experience out of which it emerges is totally interconnected with other experiences. It is potentially liberating because it rests not on one single issue which could be considered only a middle-class issue relevant to one group of people, but it is multi-faceted. Thus, the possibility for wholistic theology is more likely. Feminist theology as presently developed is limited by virtue of the experience base for feminist theology. That is, when feminists say that experience is the crucible for doing [feminist] theology, they usually mean White women's experience. With few exceptions, feminist thinkers do their analysis primarily, and in some circles exclusively, based on the notion that because sexism is the longest and most universal form of oppression, it should claim priority.<sup>41</sup>

Black women, by and large, have not held this assumption. Many have claimed that because of the pervasiveness of racism, and because of its defining character for black life in general, racism is most important. Though Sojourner Truth never did develop a sophisticated social analysis, she was aware of the fact that she (and her poor people) were poor because she was Black, and perhaps poorer because she was a woman. I say "perhaps" simply because in the slave economy one could argue that there was relatively little distinction between the property status of slaves by virtue of gender; women were no less property than men. As property, they were a part of the material distributed, rather than participants in the inevitable (system of) material distribution. Thus as indicated above in the black woman's prayer, material possessions of blacks were limited. In a sense one could say that by virtue of one's race, one was slave and by virtue of that status one was poor.

Still as we see the issues today, class distinctions which have emerged even in the Black community, and sex differences, which have taken on new forms of institutionalization, must be addressed. For liberation to become a reality, race, sex, and class must be deliberately confronted. Interconnected as they are, they all impinge greatly on the lives of Black women. Overwhelming as are these realities, Black women do not feel defeated. For Jarena Lee observed the hope of the struggle is based on the faith that Jesus died (and was raised) for the woman as well as the man. This realization gave inspiration for the struggle. Black women today inside and outside of the church still bring an optimistic spirit as reflected in the conclusion of Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise":

Out of the hut of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a Black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and Swelling, I bear in the tide  
leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave



I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise.  
I rise.  
I rise.<sup>42</sup>

### Endnotes:

1. James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969): 53–54.
2. Ibid., 53–54.
3. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church*, 2nd ed. (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Publishers, 1985; Repr.: Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986): 24–25.
4. Valerie Saiving Goldstein, “The Human Situation of a Feminist,” *The Journal of Religion* 40 (April 1960): 100.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Theology and The Black Woman,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966–1979*, eds. Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone (New York: Orbis Books, 1979): 418–433.
8. See Sheila D. Collins, *A Different Heaven and Earth: A Feminist Perspective on Religion* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974); Mary Daley, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973); Mary Daley, *The Church and the Second Sex: With a New Feminist Post Christian Introduction by the Author* (New York: Harper Bros., 1975).
9. Brenda Eichelberger, “Voice of Black Feminism,” *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* III (Spring, 1977): 16–23.
10. This phrase is used by Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South* (Xenia, Ohio: Abdine Publishing House, 1852; Repr.: Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1969), cited by Bell Hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981): 193–194. I use it here to characterize Black women's experience. To be concerned about Black women's issues is to be *concrete*. Yet because of their interconnectedness with Black men (racism), White women (sexism) and the poor (classism), it is also to be, at the same time, concerned with broad issues.
11. See Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1975); Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Dial Press, 1978); Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich Publishers, 1982); and *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich Publishers, 1983); Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds. *Afro-American Women* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1978); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984); Gloria Wade-Grayles, *No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984); Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Barbara Smith, Gloria Hull, and Patricia Scott, *All the Women Are White, and All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Book, 1981).
12. Walker, in *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi.
13. Hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 3.
14. Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 19.

15. Cecil Wayne Cone, *Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville, TN: African Methodist Episcopal Church Press, 1975), passim, especially chapter III.
16. Bert James Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976): 267.
17. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1949): 30–31.
18. Lowenberg and Bogin, *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life*, 265.
19. Olive Gilbert, *Sojourner Truth: Narrative and Book of Life* (1850 and 1875; Rept.: Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970), p. 83.
20. Harold A. Carter, *The Prayer Tradition of Black People* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1976), 50. Carter, in referring to traditional Black prayer in general, states that Jesus was revealed as one who “was all one needs!”
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 49
23. Ibid.
24. Sojourner Truth. “Ain’t I A Woman?” in Mariam Schneir, ed., *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).
25. Carter, *The Prayer Tradition*, 49.
26. Gilbert, *Sojourner Truth*, 118.
27. Ibid., 119.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. James Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1974): 138. See especially chapter 5. See also Noel Leo Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980): 125.
31. Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, p. 133.
32. Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969): 92.
33. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975): 134.
34. Ibid., 135.
35. Ibid., 136.
36. William Eichelberger, “Reflections on the Person and Personality of the Black Messiah,” *The Black Church II* (n.d.): 54.
37. Jerena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jerena Lee: A Colored Lady Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach* (Philadelphia, PA: n.p., 1836): 15–16.
38. Ibid., 16.

39. There is no evidence to suggest that Black women debated the significance of the maleness of Jesus. The fact is that Jesus Christ was a real, crucial figure in their lives. However, recent feminist scholarship has been important in showing the relation between the maleness of Christ and the oppression of women.

40. Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?," in Schneir, op. cit., 94.

41. This question is explored further in Jacquelyn Grant, *The Development and Limitation of Feminist Theology: Toward an Engagement of Black Women's Religious Experience and White Women's Religious Experience* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, Ph.D. dissertation, 1985).

42. Maya Angelou, *And Still I Rise* (New York: Random House, 1978): 42.

# **A Chronology of African American Religion**

## **The 1600s**

- 1618 — Angela, an African, arrives at Point Comfort, Virginia, on the ship *Treasurer*. European name suggests baptism prior to arrival.
- 1619 — 20 Black people arrive in Virginia at Jamestown as indentured servants. The term of service for indentured servants, Black or White, was usually seven years, after which they became free and able to participate in the economic, social, and political life.
- 1623 — The first colonial baptism of a Black person, a child, takes place in the Anglican church in Jamestown. He is given the name Anthony.
- 1639 — Dutch Reformed Church in New Amsterdam (New York City) begins baptizing Black people.
- 1641 — An African woman, unnamed, is accepted into full membership of the Congregational Church in Dorchester, Massachusetts.
- 1667 — Through a series of actions beginning in 1667, the status of Black people converted to Christianity is clarified. Conversion to Christianity does not grant freedom.
- 1669 — Emmanuel, a 50-year-old African American, is baptized in the Lutheran Church in New York on Palm Sunday.
- 1670 — By Virginia legislative action, Black people lose their voting rights and in the future “. . . all servants, not being Christians,” brought into Virginia by sea were declared slaves for life.
- 1672 — The Black population in the colonies now numbers in the thousands. The changing conditions of life have led to the founding of isolated “Maroon” communities of former slaves in the interior of Virginia. Virginia offers a bounty for captured Maroons, who have been raiding White communities for supplies.
- 1688 — The Friends (Quakers) of Germantown, Pennsylvania, a group of former Mennonites, issue the first protest of slavery in the Western Hemisphere, in a letter to the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends.

## A CHRONOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION

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### The 1700s

- 1700 — There are an estimated 28,000 Black people in the British American Colonies.
- 1704 — Elias Neau, a Frenchman in New York City, opens a catechism school for Black slaves.
- 1738 — October 16, Peter Böhler lands in Savannah to begin Moravian mission to the slave population in South Carolina.
- 1743 — Quassey, a member of the Baptist congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, is the first African American Baptist.
- Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (Church of England) opens a school for African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina.
- 1747 — Presbyterians begin mission to slaves in Hanover, Virginia.
- 1750 — Quaker Anthony Benezet opens school for African Americans in Philadelphia.
- 1757 — Rev. Samuel Davies, a White Presbyterian minister, baptizes 150 African Americans (slaves), the first received into the Presbyterian Church.
- 1758 — The first documented African American Baptist congregation is founded in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, on the plantation of William Byrd.
- 1760 — Poet Jupiter Hammon publishes *Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries*.
- 1764 — The first Methodist society in America, organized by Robert Strawbridge (White) in Frederick County, Maryland, has Black charter members, including a slave named Anne Switzer. Two years later, a woman known only as Betty joined four others in a class meeting that grew to become John Street Methodist Church, the first Methodist congregation in New York City. This congregation vies with one in Virginia as the first Methodist church in the United States.
- 1771 — Upon his arrival in New York, Joseph Pilmoor, the first Methodist preacher sent to America, discovers Black members of St. John's Methodist Church.
- 1772 — Methodist preacher Francis Asbury begins traveling to various Methodist centers through the Southern and Middle colonies and finds numerous Black people worshipping with the societies.
- Black people are admitted to membership in the Baptist congregations in Providence, Rhode Island, and Boston, Massachusetts.
- Phillis Wheatley publishes *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, the first book of poetry by an African American.
- 1773 — An itinerant Black Baptist preacher named Palmer baptizes a group of slaves at Silver Bluff, Aiken County, South Carolina, and forms them into a church, the second regularly formed Black Baptist church in North America. Included in the group is David George who becomes the church's preacher. George Liele, another itinerant Black Baptist preacher, who was ordained on May 20, occasionally speaks at Silver Bluff and for other groups along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina.
- 1776 — The third oldest Baptist church in the Colonies is established at Williamsburg, Virginia.

- 1778 — At some point in 1778 or 1779, George Liele takes advantage of the loose social controls during the Revolutionary War and forms a Black Baptist church in Savannah, Georgia.
- 1782 — British evacuate Savannah. Liele ordains Andrew Bryan before leaving.
- Lemuel Hayes is ordained in the Congregational Church and becomes the first African American to pastor a predominantly White congregation.
- 1783 — January, George Liele arrives in Jamaica, where he becomes an indentured servant of the governor.
- Baptists Moses Baker and George Givens travel as missionaries to the West Indies.
- 1784 — George Liele completes his period of indenture and begins preaching in Kingston.
- 1786 — African Americans are members of the first Sunday school organized in America. It was formed by Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury in Maryland in the home of David Crenshaw.
- 1787 — Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others withdraw from St. George Methodist Church, Philadelphia. They organize the first independent Black society in America, the Free Black Society.
- 1790 — Census reveals 59,557 free Black people and 697,624 slaves, of whom 292,627 reside in Virginia.
- Henry Evans organizes a Methodist church, named Evans Chapel in his honor, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He is regarded as the father of Methodism in the Fayetteville area.
- Two Baptists, Hector Peters and Sampson Colbert, undertake a missionary journey to West Africa.
- 1791 — Williamsburg Church is admitted to predominantly White Dover Baptist Association.
- 1792 — David George travels to Sierra Leone with 1,196 other Black people and founds church in Freetown.
- 1793 — Jesse Peter becomes the first pastor of the First African Church, Augusta, Georgia.
- Richard Allen publishes his autobiography, the first by an African American.
- Catherine Ferguson, an African American, founds the first Sunday School in New York City in her home. It later moves to a church on Murray Street and is known as the Murray Street Sunday School for the next forty years. The student body was interracial.
- 1794 — The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas is formed in Philadelphia under the leadership of Absalom Jones. It is the first African American Anglican congregation.
- July 29, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is dedicated in Philadelphia by Bishop Francis Asbury.
- 1795 — Absalom Jones is ordained as a deacon in the Protestant Episcopal Church.
- Andrew Bryan builds Baptist church in Savannah, Georgia.
- 1796 — Black Methodist leaders in New York City petition to organize a church for African Methodists.
- 1799 — Richard Allen becomes the first African American ordained (as a deacon) by the Methodists.

## **A CHRONOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION**

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- Harry Hosier is ordained a deacon in the Methodist Church by Bishop Francis Asbury.

### **1800–1859**

- 1800 — Census counts 895,602 slaves.
  - An estimated 25 percent of all Methodists and Baptists in the United States are African Americans.
  - Methodist Episcopal Church officially authorizes ordination of Black ministers as deacons.
- 1801 — New York African Methodists incorporate with a Black board of trustees, a step in the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.
  - John Chavis becomes a missionary to the slaves, the first African American home missionary commissioned by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.
- 1804 — Thomas Paul converts and organizes Joy Street Baptist Church in Boston, Massachusetts.
  - Absalom Jones is ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church.
- 1805 — Peter Spencer leads a withdrawal of Black members from Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, Wilmington, Delaware. They form Ezion MEC.
- 1806 — Stone Street, or African Church, Mobile, Alabama, is formed by this year.
- 1807 — The First African Presbyterian Church is founded in Philadelphia under the pastoral leadership of John Gloucester, a former slave.
- 1808 — The U.S. Congress moves to stop the slave trade.
- 1809 — Thomas Paul forms the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City.
  - African Baptist Church is organized in Philadelphia.
  - John Gloucester is appointed as a missionary by the Presbyterian Church. He is ordained in Tennessee in 1811 and then called to Philadelphia to organize a congregation.
- 1813 — African Union Church is formed under Peter Spencer by former members of the Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church in Wilmington, Delaware.
- 1815 — Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society is organized by Lott Carey and Collin Teague.
- 1816 — Bethel Church in Philadelphia separates completely from the Methodist Episcopal Church. African Methodists in Baltimore also separate from the White Methodists under the leadership of Daniel Coker. At a gathering in Philadelphia, the African Methodist Episcopal Church is formed. It is the oldest African American organization currently in existence.
  - April 11, Richard Allen is consecrated as bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church by Bishop Francis Asbury.
  - American Colonization Society is founded by Robert Finley. Black leaders protest its announced program.

- St. Philip's Episcopal Church organized in New York City.
- John Stewart, Methodism's first home missionary, begins his ministry to the Wyandot Indians in Ohio.
- 1819 — Richard Allen endorses the call to the ministry of Jarena Lee, who begins a career as a traveling missionary.
- 1820 — Legislation against slave trade is strengthened.
- Daniel Coker sails for Africa as an unofficial missionary for the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
- Simeon Jocelyn, a White man, organizes a group of African Americans for religious instruction. The group eventually becomes the Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church, the first African American Congregational Church.
- 1821 — A second group of free Blacks arrives in Sierra Leone.
- Zilpha Elaw begins preaching as an unordained evangelist for the Methodist Episcopal Church.
- Lott Carey sails for Africa as a missionary for the Baptists.
- First Conference of African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in New York City elects James Varick as its bishop.
- Samuel Cornish founds First Colored Presbyterian Church of New York.
- 1822 — Plot for an insurrection led by Denmark Vasey is discovered in Charleston, South Carolina. Black religious activity in the city is severely repressed. African Methodist Episcopal Church members migrate to Philadelphia.
- Lane Seminary (Ohio) students debate abolition and colonization.
- Liberia founded.
- St. James First African Church organizes in Baltimore, Maryland, the first Episcopal Church for African Americans in a slave state.
- 1826 — The first congregation of Black Baptists in New Orleans, Louisiana, is organized.
- 1827 — African Methodist Episcopal Church societies are formed in Canada.
- *Freedom's Journal*, the first African American periodical, is established by Rev. Samuel Cornish and John P. Russworm.
- Scipio Beaneo begins AME church mission work in Haiti. Several minor stations are established.
- 1828 — Morris Brown is elected as the second African Methodist Episcopal Church bishop.
- Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first African American religious order, is founded in Baltimore, Maryland.
- Theodore S. Wright graduates from Princeton Theological Seminary, the first African American seminary graduate.



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- 1829 — William Capers, a White Methodist minister, is appointed as a missionary to plantation-bound slaves.
- Temple Street African Congregational Church is formed as the first Congregational Church for African Americans.
- 1830 — Census reports 2,009,043 slaves in the United States.
- September 20–24, Richard Allen presides at the first National Negro Convention which convenes in Philadelphia. Among the attendees are the Revs. Samuel Cornish, Peter Williams, and J. W. C. Pennington.
- 1831 — Slave preacher Nat Turner leads rebellion in which 60 White people are killed.
- 1832 — In reaction to Nat Turner insurrection, repressive slave codes, including provisions against the operation of churches among slaves, are enacted across the South.
- Presbyterian minister Charles Colcock Jones is appointed missionary for the Association for the Religious Instruction of Negroes.
  - New York annual conference of the AME Church votes to send a missionary to Canada.
- 1833 — Oberlin College founded.
- 1834 — The Providence Baptist Association, the first African American Baptist association, is formed in Ohio.
- 1837 — Meeting resistance to her call to preach, Rebecca Jackson leaves the AME Church.
- 1838 — The Union Baptist Association is formed in Ohio.
- 1839 — The Colored Baptist Association and Friends to Humanity (later renamed the Wood River Baptist Association) is formed in Illinois.
- Daniel Payne is ordained by the Frankean Synod (Lutheran).
- 1840s — President John Tyler invites Bishop Daniel Payne to the White House to preach the funeral sermon for his recently deceased servant.
- 1840 — Morris Brown organizes the Upper Canada Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church among fugitive slaves in Canada.
- The American Baptist Missionary Convention is organized at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City.
  - The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society is organized.
  - The AME Church General Conference establishes the Canadian annual conference.
- 1841 — November, First Colored Presbyterian Church of Washington, D.C., established by J. F. Cook, Sr.
- The African Methodist Episcopal Church launches the first African American magazine, the *Review*.
- 1842 — November 21, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, a religious order of African American nuns, Harriette Delille, Juliet Gaudin, Josephine Charles, and a Miss Abbot, is founded in New Orleans.

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- 1845 — Southern churchmen gather in Charleston, South Carolina, to prioritize a Christian mission to the slaves.
- Wood River Baptist Church is organized in Illinois.
- 1846 — Congregationalists form the American Missionary Association to labor among the slaves.
- 1850 — September 18, fugitive slave laws are passed.
- 1853 — The first Y.M.C.A. for African American residents of Washington, D.C., is opened.
- The Western Colored Baptist Convention is organized by African American Baptists west of the Mississippi River.
- 1854 — James Augustus Healy is ordained in Paris at Notre Dame Cathedral, the first African American Roman Catholic priest.
- The Presbyterian Church establishes Ashmun Institute (now Lincoln University) in Lincoln, Pennsylvania, the first institution for higher learning for African Americans.
- 1856 — African Methodist work in Canada is set apart as British Methodist Episcopal Church.
- 1857 — March 6, the Dred Scott decision is handed down.
- 1858 — Francis Burns, the first Black bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, is elected to serve over the Liberia Conference.
- Thomas Frye (Tennessee) and Michael Coble (North Carolina) are licensed to preach by the Lutheran Church.
- 1859 — Rebecca Jackson organizes an African American Shaker group in Philadelphia.
- October 16, John Brown leads raid on Harper's Ferry.

### **1860–1899**

- 1860 — Census reports 3,953,760 slaves in the United States.
- 1861 — April 12, Civil War begins with the firing on Fort Sumter.
- 1863 — January 1, Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation.
- March 11, Wilberforce University is founded as first African American-controlled college in the United States. Daniel Payne becomes the first African American college president.
- In May the African Methodist Episcopal Church reenters South Carolina on the heels of Northern troops.
- African Methodist Bishop Henry McNeal Turner becomes the first African American chaplain in the United States Army.
- Bishop Daniel Payne travels to Tennessee and in December accepts two congregations into the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

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- 1864 — February 21, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church is dedicated as the first parish for African Americans of the Roman Catholic Church.
- The African Methodist Episcopal Church enters Eastern North Carolina, and later in the year organizes the North Carolina Conference.
  - The Western Colored Baptist Convention reorganizes as the Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention.
- 1865 — February 12, Henry Highland Garnet becomes the first African American to enter the chambers of the House of Representatives and the first to deliver a sermon to that body. His sermon commemorated the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
- March 3, Abraham Lincoln signs the bill creating the Freedman's Bureau.
  - April 9, General Robert E. Lee surrenders, thus ending the Civil War.
  - The Union Church of Africans merges with the First Colored Methodist Protestant Church.
  - African Methodist Episcopal Church organizes South Carolina Conference.
  - Louisiana African American Baptists organize first Baptist association in the South.
  - December 18, the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery in the United States, is ratified.
- 1866 — April 9, Civil Rights Act bestows full citizenship on African Americans. It is reinforced by the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified June 16.
- Three Baptist associations in the Northern and Western states form Consolidated Baptist Association.
  - Alabama and North Carolina Baptists form state conventions.
  - Methodist Episcopal Church, South, moves to organize remaining Black members in what will become the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.
  - In July Octavius Brooks Frothingham, speaking for the Unitarians, attacks sectarian religious teachers in the South working with the Freedman's Union Commission.
  - Reacting in part to Frothingham, in August, Methodists gather for organizing convention of the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.
- 1867 — Black leaders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) organize the American Evangelizing and Education Association. That same year the Disciples organize the Freedman's Missionary Society.
- February 2, Patrick Francis Healy becomes the first African American Jesuit priest.
  - March 2, Reconstruction Act passed over presidential veto.
- 1869 — Rev. Henry McNeal Turner becomes the first African American postmaster. He was appointed by President Grant to a post in Macon, Georgia.
- Colored (now Second) Cumberland Presbyterian Church organized by African American members of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

- 1870 — Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church is organized December 15 at Jackson, Tennessee. William H. Miles and Richard A. Vanderhorst are elected bishops.
- The Commission on Home Missions to Colored People supersedes the Freedman's Commission of the Episcopal Church.
  - African Methodist minister Rev. Hiram Rhoades Revels becomes the first African American elected to the U.S. Senate.
- 1871 — Women's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society of the West is organized at Chicago. It commissions Louise C. Fleming as its first missionary to Africa.
- The Jubilee Singers from Fisk University introduce African American sacred music to the general public.
- 1874 — August, New England Baptist Missionary Convention organized.
- Patrick Healy becomes president of Georgetown University, the first Black president of a Catholic university.
  - Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society formed by the women of the Northern conferences of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
  - November 8, James T. Holly is consecrated bishop for the Eglise Orthodoxe Apostolique Haitienne by bishops of the Episcopal Church.
- 1875 — James A. Healy is appointed bishop of Portland, the first African American Roman Catholic bishop.
- 1876 — About this year, the Christian Faith Bands, the first of the independent African American Holiness groups, is founded. The Bands would later accept Pentecostalism and become the Church of God (Apostolic).
- 1877 — Radical Reconstruction ends with the withdrawal of the last Federal troops from the South.
- Synodical Conference (Lutheran) begins mission to the Freemen. John F. Doesher (White) is appointed as a missionary.
- 1878 — National Convention of Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ) is organized by African American members.
- Mathilda Beasley founds the Third Order of St. Francis, a Roman Catholic order for the African American nuns and opens orphanage in Savannah, Georgia.
  - July 3, St. Paul's Colored Lutheran Church is organized in Little Rock, Arkansas. Its building is dedicated on August 18, at which time 23 are baptized. A month later its school opens. This is the first Lutheran Church organized by African Americans.
- 1880 — Baptist Foreign Mission Convention is organized at Montgomery, Alabama, on November 24. William H. McAlpine is elected its first president.
- Ladies Home and Foreign Missionary Society formed by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church's General Conference.
- 1882 — Episcopal priest George F. Bragg begins publications of the *Lancet*.

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- Reformed Zion Apostolic Church is organized.
- 1883 — Episcopal priest Alexander Crummell founds the Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People.
  - Baptist Women's Educational Convention of the State of Kentucky founded in Louisville.
- 1884 — Commission on Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians is instituted by the Third Plenary Council of the American hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.
  - Rev. Samuel David Ferguson becomes the first African American bishop of the Episcopal Church. He was assigned to Liberia.
- 1885 — African Methodist minister Benjamin W. Arnett is elected to the legislature of Ohio, the first Black person elected from a predominantly White district.
  - Jane Williams is the first African American woman ordained in the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana).
- 1886 — August 25, American National Baptist Convention is founded at St. Louis, Missouri.
  - April 24, Augustus Tolton is ordained in Rome as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1888 — St. Joseph's Seminary, a major seminary, is founded in Baltimore, Maryland, by the Society of St. Joseph to train priests for the Roman Catholic priesthood.
- 1889 — Charles M. Kinney is the first African American ordained by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
  - Epiphany Apostolic College, a minor seminary, is founded in Baltimore, Maryland, by the Society of St. Joseph for the training of African American priests for the Roman Catholic Church.
  - January 1–4, First Catholic Afro-American Congress convenes in Washington, D.C.
  - William Christian founds the Church of the Living God (Christian Workers for Fellowship), one of the first churches to teach that Jesus was a Black man.
  - Rabbi Leon Richelieu organizes the Moorish Zionist Temple in New York City, the first Black Jewish congregation.
- 1890 — Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) places its African American work under a new Board of Negro Education and Evangelism.
  - Mother Katherine Drexel (White) founds the Blessed Sacrament Sisters for Indians and Colored People.
- 1893 — Formation of National Baptist Educational Convention at Washington, D.C.
- 1894 — The AMEZ Church ordains Julia A. J. Foote as a deacon, the first African American woman so acknowledged.
  - Repeal of a section of the Emancipation Act dealing with voting rights launches a new wave of legal measures aimed at segregating Blacks and Whites.
  - C. P. Jones and Charles H. Mason found the Church of God in Christ.
- 1895 — May 19, Mary Jane Small becomes the second female deacon in the AMEZ Church.

- September 24, three Baptist conventions merge to form the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A.
- 1896 — Supreme court rules in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and establishes the “separate but equal” principle which undergirds segregation of the races in schools and other social structures across the South.
- William S. Crowdy organizes the Church of God and Saints of Christ in Lawrence, Kansas.
- Southern women of the AME Church, excluded from the leadership of the Women’s Mite Society, organize the Women’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society.
- 1897 — Lott Carey Baptist Home and Foreign Missionary Convention is formed December 16.
- March, Episcopal priest Alexander Crummell founds the American Negro Academy, the first African American association dedicated to scholarship and the arts.
- National Baptist Publishing Board incorporated.
- 1898 — AMEZ Church ordains Mary Jane Small, the wife of missionary bishop John B. Small, as an elder, the first female elder in the Church.

### 1900–1955

- 1900 — Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) disbands the Board of Negro Education and Evangelism and transfers responsibility for African American ministry to Christian Woman’s Board of Missions.
- The first African American branch of the Y.M.C.A. in New York City is formed by Charles Thomas Walker.
- Reverdy C. Ransom creates the first institutional church in the Black community, in Chicago’s Southside.
- August 31, Women’s Auxiliary to Lott Carey Baptist Home and Foreign Missionary Convention founded.
- September 15, Women’s Convention of the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. is established.
- Christ’s Sanctified Holy Church founded in 1904 in Louisiana.
- AMEZ Church ordains Julia A. J. Foote as an elder, the first to serve in the United States.
- 1903 — Eliza Healy becomes the first African American assigned as the superior of a convent of a Roman Catholic religious order.
- 1906 — Episcopal Church creates the American Church Institute for Negroes to raise financial support for its African American educational enterprises.
- April 9, the Azusa Street Revival is launched when the “Spirit” falls on Jennie Evans Moore and Edward S. Lee. From this revival over the next three years, Pentecostalism is spread around the world.
- Apostolic Faith Mission Church of God, possibly the first organized Pentecostal denomination, is founded in Alabama by F. W. Williams.

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- Pentecostal Assemblies of the World is organized in Los Angeles.
- The Roman Catholic Church extends its efforts in the African American community by establishing the Catholic Board for Mission Work among Colored People.
- 1907 — At a gathering of Primitive Baptists in Huntsville, Alabama, the National Primitive Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. is organized.
- Charles H. Mason breaks with former Holiness colleague C. P. Jones and reorganizes the Church of God in Christ as a Pentecostal denomination.
- 1908 — Healing of Mary Lewis Tate leads to formation of Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, an early Pentecostal body in Alabama.
- William J. Seymour and Charles H. Mason hold revival services in Washington which lead to the formation of the Apostolic Faith Church of God.
- W. E. Fuller of Atlanta, Georgia, organized the African American membership of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church as the Colored Fire-Baptized Holiness Church (now the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas).
- 1909 — Knights of Peter Claver, a Roman Catholic fraternity, is formed in Mobile, Alabama, to assist African American Catholics.
- The Young Woman's Society of the AMEZ Church begins in the home of Victoria Richardson in Salisbury, North Carolina.
- 1911 — Martha Cunningham Dolby is ordained as possibly the first woman and among the very few African American ministers in the Church of the Brethren.
- Mother Lizzie Roberson is appointed Overseer of Woman's Work in the four-year-old Church of God in Christ.
- 1913 — Noble Drew Ali launches the Moorish Science Temple of America with a center in Newark, New Jersey.
- 1915 — September 9, National Baptist Convention (Unincorporated) is formed.
- September, Xavier University is opened by the Blessed Sacrament Sisters for Indiana and Colored People in New Orleans, Louisiana, the only Roman Catholic Church college in the United States for African Americans.
- 1917 — African American members of the Disciples of Christ organize at the National Convention of the Church of Christ (changed in 1942 to National Christian Missionary Convention).
- William Thomas Phillips founds the Ethiopian (now Apostolic) Overcoming Holy Church of God in Mobile, Alabama.
- Woman's Connectional Missionary Society (now the Woman's Missionary Council) is authorized by the general conference of the Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church. Mattie Elizabeth Coleman is elected its first president.
- 1918 — Rev. Edward T. Demby becomes the first African American bishop elected by the Episcopal Church and assigned service in the United States. He is named suffragan bishop of Arkansas and the Southwest.

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- Women's Missionary Council is given official recognition by the general conference of the CME Church.
- 1919 — Robert C. Lawson leaves the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, moves to New York City, and founds the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith. Among the issues raised by Lawson is the acceptance of women into the ministry of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World.
- Wentworth Arthur Matthew formed the Commandment Keepers Congregation of the Living God, a Black Jewish group in Manhattan.
- 1920 — Matthew W. Clair, Sr., and Robert E. Burns become the first African American bishops elected by the Methodist Episcopal Church for service in the United States.
- November, St. Augustine's Seminary, Greenville, Mississippi, is opened by the Society of the Divine Word as the only seminary of the Roman Catholic Church dedicated to the training of African Americans for the priesthood.
- 1921 — September 2, George Alexander McGuire organizes the African Orthodox Church. He is consecrated archbishop on September 28 in Chicago.
- George Edmund Haynes founds the Department of Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches.
- 1922 — Endich Theological Seminary opened by the African Orthodox Church.
- 1923 — September 16, St. Augustine's Seminary opens in its new permanent home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, by the Society of the Divine Word as the major seminary for the training of African American priests by the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1924 — Pentecostal minister Samuel M. Crouch, Sr., of Dallas, Texas, becomes the first African American radio preacher.
- Beth B'nai Abraham founded in New York City by Rabbi Arnold Josiah Ford.
- 1925 — A college (now Xavier University) opens in New Orleans, Louisiana, the first college for African Americans founded by the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1926 — Mordecai Johnson becomes the first African American president of Howard University.
- 1931 — Xavier University is the first (and only) Roman Catholic university for African Americans.
- 1932 — Samuel Gimes begins his 35-year leadership of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World.
- June 7, Judge Lewis J. Smith dies unexpectedly a week after sentencing Father Divine to a jail term. From his cell, Father Divine, when questioned about the occurrence replies, "I hated to have to do it."
- Louis Gregory becomes member of National Spiritual Assembly, the governing body for the Baha'i Faith in the United States.
- 1935 — Mary McLeod Bethune leads in the consolidation of several women's organizations into the National Council of Negro Women.
- 1936 — Alexander Preston Shaw elected bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church.



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- 1939 — Three predominantly White branches of Methodism unite. As part of the plan of union, the church is divided into five regional jurisdictions, while African American members are set apart in a nongeographical Central Jurisdiction.
- Carnella Jamison (Barnes) is ordained by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the only African American Female minister in the denomination.
- 1941 — Bethune-Cookman College becomes a four-year senior college, and Mary McLeod Bethune the first African American female college president.
- Joseph Oliver Bowers is consecrated as first twentieth-century African American bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. He is assigned to duty in Africa.
- 1944 — June 28, James Russell Brown becomes the first African American commissioned officer in the chaplaincy in the U.S. Navy.
- The two women's societies of the AME Church merge to form the Women's Missionary Society.
- Baptist minister Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., becomes the first African American elected to Congress from the state of New York. He continues as pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem during his lengthy political career.
- 1946 — February 18, James H. Lark is ordained as the first African American minister in the Mennonite Church.
- 1954 — Supreme Court rules in *Brown vs. Board of Education* and reverses "separate but equal" principle. Ruling becomes the starting point for a generation of civil rights activity.
- Dr. James Joshua Thomas becomes pastor of Mott Haven Reformed Church in the Bronx, New York, the first Black minister to become pastor of a Reformed Church congregation.
- September 26, James H. Lark is consecrated as the first African American bishop of the Mennonite Church.

### 1955–1969

- 1955 — December 1, Rosa Parks refuses to move to the "colored" section of a Montgomery bus. On December 5, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., leads a boycott of the buses by the city's African American community. The event launches the Civil Rights Movement.
- 1956 — General conference of the Methodist Church passes legislation to begin the process of eliminating the Central Jurisdiction.
- Career of Prophet Jones, founder of the Church of Universal Triumph/The Dominion of God, begins decline following arrest and trial for gross indecency.
- 1957 — March, Southern Christian Leadership Conference formed.
- Rev. Archibald J. Carey, Jr., becomes the first Black to head a White House committee, the President's Committee on Government Employment Policy.
- President Eisenhower enforces integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

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- Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ World Wide founded by former leaders of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith.
- 1958 — Johnnie Colemon is the first African American ordained by the Unity School of Christianity, a New Thought metaphysical denomination founded in 1889.
- Sallie A. Crenshaw becomes the first African American in the United Methodist tradition ordained as an elder (in the Central Tennessee Conference of what was then the Methodist Church [1939–1968]).
- 1960 — Era of nonviolent sit-in demonstrations begins in Greensboro, North Carolina.
- May 16, S. Dorme Lartey becomes the first native African to be elected as a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
- 1961 — First of the Freedom Rides.
- James Meredith enters University of Mississippi.
- Baptist followers of Martin Luther King, Jr., leave the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Timothy Moses Chambers is elected as its first president.
- 1962 — John Melville Burgess consecrated as suffragan bishop of Massachusetts, the first African American to be assigned to a predominantly White diocese in the Episcopal Church.
- Afro-Peruvian monk Martin de Porres is canonized by the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1963 — 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is bombed and four children are killed.
- Martin Luther King, Jr., and S.C.L.C. target Birmingham for demonstrations.
- National Black Evangelical Association founded.
- 1964 — December 10, Martin Luther King, Jr., is awarded Nobel Peace prize.
- Edler G. Hawkins is the first African American selected as moderator of the United Presbyterian Church (now a part of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]).
- Civil Rights Bill passed by Congress.
- Malcolm X resigns from Nation of Islam.
- As part of the process of dissolving the all Black Central Jurisdiction, the Methodist Church assigns African American Bishops James S. Thomas and Prince Taylor, Jr., to predominantly White episcopal areas in the North Central and North Eastern Jurisdictions.
- 1965 — February 21, Malcolm X is assassinated.
- March 21, Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, begins.
- July 24–26, S.C.L.C. targets Chicago for demonstrations.
- African Americans in the Watts section of Los Angeles riot.

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- Harold Perry becomes the first twentieth-century African American named as a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church for service in this century. He is assigned as auxiliary of New Orleans.
- Trudy Trimm becomes the first female pastor accepted in the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.
- 1966 — January, Harold S. Perry is consecrated as the Roman Catholic auxiliary bishop of New Orleans, the first African American bishop assigned to a position in the United States since Bishop Healy in the 1870s.
- Martin Luther King, Jr., returns to Chicago for further demonstrations in the summer.
- June 26, James Meredith leads march in Jackson, Mississippi. Stokely Carmichael articulates concept of “Black Power,” a term coined by author Richard Wright in 1954 as book title.
- National Committee of Negro Churchmen release statement on “Black Power.” Responding to that statement, and later spurred by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., (1968), African American leaders in several predominantly White denominations begin to organize caucuses. Over the next four years the American Baptist Black Caucus, Black Affairs Council (Unitarian Universalist Association), Black Council (Reformed Church in America), Black Leadership Conference (Presbyterian Church in the U.S.), Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Black Presbyterians United (United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), Ministers for Racial and Social Justice (United Church of Christ), Union of Black Episcopalians, and United Black Christians (United Church of Christ) are organized by African Americans in the major White Protestant denominations. Roman Catholics organize the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Black Sisters’ Conference, the National Black Lay Catholic Conference, and the National Office for Black Catholics.
- 1967 — Mrs. Robert Clayton is elected as the first African American president of the National Young Women’s Christian Association.
- Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman (Albert Cleage, Jr.) launches the Black Christian Nationalist Movement at the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit on Easter Sunday.
- 1968 — April 4, Martin Luther King, Jr., assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.
- Ralph Abernathy, King’s successor as head of SCLC, leads Poor People’s March on Washington.
- On July 6, Washington Square United Methodist Church in New York City becomes the first major organization to respond to James Forman’s demand for Black reparations by donating \$15,000 to the National Black Economic Development Conference.
- Episcopal Church votes to give James Forman \$200,000.
- 1969 — May 17, Thomas Kilgore, Jr., is elected the first African American president of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- B. Barton McIntyre is named a Lt. Colonel in the Salvation Army, the highest rank ever attained by an African American.
- Rev. Johnnie Colemon is elected president of the Association of Unity Churches.
- Rev. Ike founds the United Church and Science of Living Institute in Boston.
- Clarence 13X, founder of the Nation of the Five Percent, a Nation of Islam splinter, is shot and killed.

## **A CHRONOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION**

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- John Melville Burgess becomes the Episcopal Church's bishop of Massachusetts in 1969.

### **1970–Present**

- 1970 — Donald M. Payne becomes the first African American head of the national council of the Young Men's Christian Association.
  - Society for the Study of Black Religion is founded; Charles Shelby Rooks is named as the first president.
- 1971 — May, Clarie Collins Harvey becomes the first African American president of Church Women United.
  - Supreme Court overturns conviction of Muhammad Ali on draft evasion charges.
  - June 19, ground is broken for the monument to Mary McLeod Bethune in Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Square, the first monument to an African American person on public land in the nation's capital.
- 1972 — Association for the Study of Black History votes to change its name to the Association of African American History.
  - Shirley Caesar wins Grammy Award for her song "Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man from Galilee."
  - December 7, W. Sterling Cary becomes the first African American president of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
- 1973 — Dorothy Morris becomes the first female presiding elder in the AME Church (Guyana Conference).
- 1974 — Charles Shelby Rooks becomes the president of Chicago Theological Seminary, the first African American named president of a White seminary.
  - Alice M. Henderson is the first female (either Black or White) to receive assignment as a chaplain in the U. S. Army.
  - Katie G. Cannon becomes the first African American female ordained in the Presbyterian Church.
  - Lawrence W. Bottoms becomes the first African American named as moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., now part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- 1975 — February 25, Elijah Muhammad dies and is succeeded as head of the Nation of Islam by his son, W. D. Muhammad.
  - July 1, W. D. Muhammad opens membership in the Nation of Islam to all races.
  - Martin Luther King, Sr., is the first African American to address a joint session of the Alabama state legislature.
- 1976 — Thelma Cornelia Adair is the first African American woman elected as moderator of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., now a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- 1977 — Joseph L. Howze is the first African American Roman Catholic in this century to serve as a diocesan bishop.

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- January 8, Pauli Murray becomes the first African American woman ordained to the priesthood by the Episcopal Church.
- 1978 — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints opens church membership and priesthood to Black people.
  - December 10, Fr. Emerson J. Moore is named a Prelate of Honor to Pope Paul VI, the first African American so honored.
  - Sandra Wilson is ordained to the Episcopal ministry and becomes the first African American female minister appointed to pastor a congregation.
- 1979 — Walter D. Dennis elected suffragan bishop of New York in the Episcopal Church.
- 1983 — January 27, Moses Anderson consecrated as a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church.
  - Cornelia Wright becomes the first female appointed as a presiding elder to serve in the United States by the AME Church.
- 1984 — Bishop Philip R. Cousin begins his term as the first African American president of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
  - Leontine T. C. Kelly is the first African American woman elected as a bishop of a major denomination (United Methodist Church).
- 1987 — May 21, the National Black Catholic Congress convenes in Washington, D.C.
- 1988 — March 15, Eugene A. Marino is named archbishop of Atlanta, the first African American Roman Catholic archbishop.
  - National Missionary Baptist Convention of America founded by former members of the National Baptist Convention of America.
- 1989 — Barbara C. Harris is consecrated as the first African American female bishop in the Episcopal Church and the first female bishop in the Worldwide Anglican Communion.
  - Joan Salmon Campbell becomes the first African American female selected as moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
  - James A. Forbes is named pastor of Riverside Church, New York City.
- 1991 — February 20, AME Bishop Vinton R. Anderson becomes the first African American elected as a president of the World Council of Churches.

*“Is Christ free? Did he come to preach liberty to the captives? Is his gospel the jubilee trumpet that proclaims the liberty of the world? Did Jesus pray, preach, travel, weep, agonize and die, and rise again, that liberty, in body and soul, should be enjoyed by every child of Adam, of every clime, country, and colour; then to be like Jesus in heart and life, in principle and practice, in desire and object, we must be free, and others must be free, and all must be free. O how delightful to strive to make human and immortal souls like Jesus Christ!”*

Paul Quinn, Bishop  
African Methodist Episcopal Church  
1834

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## A

**ABEL, ELIJAH** (July 25, 1810–December, 1884), early elder of the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**, was born in Maryland. Little is known of Abel's early life, even his exact birth place being disputed in the several records. However, in 1832, just two years after the church was founded, he converted, moved to the church's headquarters in Kirkland, Ohio, and was baptized by Ezekiel Roberts. He was one of the few African American members of the church. In 1836 he was admitted to the Melchizedek priesthood, a step through which all Mormon males are expected to pass, and was licensed as a minister of the gospel. Then in December of that year, he was promoted to the rank of a seventy (administrator) and given a patriarchal blessing. The blessing was unusual. In most such blessings, members were named as a descendant of one of the Old Testament patriarchs. The non-White Abel was declared an orphan and was told, "Thou shalt be made equal to thy brethren, and thy soul be white in eternity and thy robes glittering."

During the late 1830s Abel became a missionary for the church in New York and Canada. He ran into trouble in St. Lawrence County, New York, when he was accused of murdering a woman and five children. He was able to prove himself innocent and nothing came of the charges. In 1839 he moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, where the church headquarters had been relocated. At this time there were only about a dozen African Americans in the church membership. Latter-day Saints were basically opposed to slavery and did not own slaves. Abel was a carpenter and also was appointed as the town's undertaker. For a time he lived in the home of church founder Joseph Smith, Jr.

In 1842 Abel moved to Cincinnati. He married Mary Ann Adams, with whom he had three children, and followed his carpentry trade. Then in 1843 he became the object of the attention of a regional conference of the Cincinnati branch. The visiting elders who conducted the meeting expressed concern about his

visibility and the possibility that he might present himself as the equal of White members. A resolution was adopted limiting his activities to work among other African Americans. This resolution is cited as the first instance in which race was used as a criterion for limiting the activities of a church member. Meanwhile, in 1849, Brigham Young, who had led the church to Utah following the murder of the church's founder, declared Black people ineligible for the priesthood. The Utah legislature adopted a set of "black laws" designed to assign a defined lesser status to Black residents.

Abel moved to Utah in 1853, and his skills as a carpenter were put to use in the construction of the temple. He also found his position in the church challenged. Though a priest and minister, he was not allowed to have his marriage sealed in the temple, an important step which married Mormons believe sets their marriage in eternity. In spite of the problems with the church, he settled in Salt Lake City as a member of the Mill Creek Ward. An additional five children were born. He supplemented his income for a brief period by managing a hotel. His wife died in 1877.

In 1880 Abel applied to John Taylor, who had succeeded Brigham Young as the church's president, to go through the temple endowments ceremony. The Council of the Twelve (who rule the church along with the president), refused his request. Though turned back, he remained a member in good standing and in 1883 was appointed to go on a mission in Ohio and Canada. While on the mission, his health failed and he returned to Utah at the beginning of December 1884. He died two weeks later. It has been hypothesized that his going on the mission was to show his loyalty to the church and to demonstrate his worthiness to go through the long-sought temple ceremony.

Abel is remembered as representative of the church's early acceptance of African Americans, and his career coincides with the church's slide into those racial practices which were to dominate it until the 1960s.



Bringhurst, Newell G. "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks within Mormonism." *Dialogue* 12 (Summer 1979). Reprinted in Lester E. Bush, Jr., and Armand L. Mauss, eds. *Neither White nor Black*. Medvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984. 249 pp.

———. *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981. 254 pp.

**ABERNATHY, RALPH DAVID** (March 11, 1926–April 17, 1990), civil rights leader and close colleague of Martin Luther King, Jr., was born in Linden, Alabama, the tenth of twelve children in the family of farmers William L. and Louivery (Bell) Abernathy. After serving overseas in the Army, Abernathy was ordained a Baptist minister in 1948, in 1950 received a B.S. degree from Alabama College in Montgomery, and an M.A. degree in sociology at Atlanta University in 1951. That same year he accepted the position of pastor of the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He married Juanita Odessa Jones, a teacher, on August 31, 1952. In 1954 **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, whom Abernathy had already come to know through the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, arrived in Montgomery as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

Abernathy gained a high public profile when he called for a citywide boycott of the segregated bus system in response to the arrest on December 1, 1955, of Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat to a White person. Abernathy also suggested the organization of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) as a permanent body for coordinating the protest. King, although relatively new to Montgomery, was elected to head the MIA, and Abernathy accepted a secondary position on the executive board and program committee. This seemed to set the pattern for their future working relationship, in which King was always in the limelight. Abernathy, however, claimed not to have felt a rivalry with King. They remained very close, and King rarely made a major decision without Abernathy at his side.

The bus boycott lasted 381 days, until the Supreme Court decision of November 13, 1956, against bus segregation was delivered by federal marshals to city officials on December 20. Abernathy's home and church were subsequently bombed on January 10, 1957. Abernathy was away at the time, and his wife and baby daughter were unharmed, though the house was damaged and the church had to be completely rebuilt. That same month the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference** (S.C.L.C.) was founded, King being elected president and Abernathy financial secretary-treasurer.

The S.C.L.C. was the means by which nonviolent resistance to segregation practices was carried beyond Montgomery to other cities in the South. In 1961 Abernathy, in order to be closer to the Atlanta headquarters of the S.C.L.C., resigned his pastorate in Montgomery and became pastor of the West Hunter Street Baptist Church in Atlanta (affiliated with the **American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.**), where he remained for the rest of his career.

As a leader of voter registration drives, and various forms of civil disobedience, Abernathy was often subject to abuse and arrest; he was in jail together with King a total of seventeen times. He was one of seven Black leaders who met with President Kennedy on September 19, 1963, to discuss the aftermath of the bomb which killed four Black girls at a Birmingham church on September 15. He was a key leader in all the major civil rights actions of the 1960s, including the famous march from Selma to Montgomery in March, 1965. That same year, at King's request, Abernathy was made vice-president-at-large of the S.C.L.C.

On April 4, 1968, King was assassinated, and Abernathy was soon installed as the new president of the S.C.L.C. The major immediate task was to continue the planning for the Poor People's Campaign, which involved bringing poor people in caravans from many parts of the country to an encampment called Resurrection City in Potomac Park, Washington, D.C. In the next several years of his leadership, there were other major S.C.L.C. actions, including a second Poor People's Campaign in 1969, a successful voter registration drive in Greene County, Alabama in 1969, the organization of Operation Breadbasket in Atlanta, and a 100-mile march in Georgia in 1970 to protest police brutality. Nevertheless, the S.C.L.C. grew weaker and weaker. In December 1971, **Jesse Jackson** left the organization to promote his own group, **Operation PUSH**, and took most of the S.C.L.C. Chicago chapter with him. By 1973 S.C.L.C.'s income had dropped from over \$2,000,000 per year to about \$500,000, and many employees had to be dropped. Abernathy tried to resign on July 9, 1973, but the board of directors would not accept it, and he remained president until February 1977. He ran unsuccessfully in that year for the Georgia congressional seat vacated when Andrew Young was appointed as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

After leaving the S.C.L.C., Abernathy slowly grew estranged from many of the other civil rights leaders, particularly King's widow, Coretta Scott King, voicing objections to a 1978 television depiction of King's life on the grounds that it did not give proper credit to other conference leaders, and in 1980 supporting Ronald Reagan's campaign for President, based on assurances

that Blacks would be given high government posts. In the following two campaigns, however, he supported Jesse Jackson's candidacy. Nevertheless, he was not invited to participate in the 1986 ceremonies to mark the first national Martin Luther King, Jr., national holiday. Finally, in 1989 Abernathy published his autobiography, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*, which told of King's adulterous behavior. He defended the inclusion of this information by noting that others had already discussed the matter publicly. Despite the disagreements with others in the civil rights community in his later years, at his death he was remembered as a faithful and courageous leader.

Abernathy, Ralph. *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989. 640 pp.

———. "The Nonviolent Movement: The Past, the Present, and the Future." In Rhoda L. Goldstein, ed. *Black Life and Culture in the United States*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1971, 180–209.

"King Aide Abernathy Dies at 64," *Houston Chronicle* (April 18, 1990).

"Ralph Abernathy, Aid to Dr. King, Dies," *Los Angeles Times* (April 18, 1990).

WWABA (80–81), EBA, CB (68), NYTO, CRS, WWR (75, 77), NA, RLOA, IP.

**ADAIR, THELMA CORNELIA** (b. 1922), first African American female elected Moderator of the United Presbyterian Church, was born in Lincoln County, North Carolina, one of five children in the family of Robert James and Violet (Wilson) Davidson. Her father was a Baptist minister and educator and her mother was a school teacher, mortician, and community organizer. Adair's first years were on the campus of Western Union Baptist Academy in Spindale, North Carolina, where her father was principal and superintendent and her mother was a teacher. At about her fifth birthday, her father became principal of Davidson High School in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, and pastor of several Baptist churches on a circuit. The children in the family regularly crossed denominational boundaries, participating in the activities of all the churches in town, including Baptist, CME, AME, AMEZ, Presbyterian, and Sanctified. Adair's elementary education was at the school where her father was principal, and her secondary education was at Lincoln Academy, a boarding school three miles away, run by the American Mission Society of the Congregational Church.

A few days before her thirteenth birthday, she entered Barber-Scotia Junior College for women in

Concord, North Carolina, related to the Presbyterian Church. She then went to Bennett College for Women, related to the Methodist Episcopal Church. During the summer months she taught in public schools. Upon graduation, her first full-time job was at Mt. Carmel Junior High School near Lancaster, South Carolina, teaching math, science, and history to poor, rural children of very limited experience. She was paid \$50 per month, and was required to visit every family and attend church in the community.

Soon she married Eugene Adair, a Presbyterian minister and Sunday School missionary, left her job, and began traveling with him throughout North and South Carolina, organizing Sunday Schools, building chapels, conducting Vacation Church Schools, etc. Together they had three children. In 1942 they sold their car and used the money to go to New York. He entered Union Theological Seminary and she entered Teachers' College at Columbia University. While she worked on her Ph.D. in Education, the then-president of Union Theological Seminary, Henry Sloan Coffin, asked the couple to open the Mt. Morris Presbyterian Church in Harlem that had closed after the White congregation left. From that point on she had one foot in the social ministry of that church and the other in education, becoming a professor of education at Queens College, University of the City of New York.

She specialized in early childhood education and wrote books such as *A Lap to Sit On, School and Community, Parents and the Day Care Center*, and *When We Teach Fours and Fives*. She organized and directed Day Care Centers for the children of migrant farm workers and in New York City for the children of working parents. She organized and directed Head Start programs, and formulated programs for the Queens College Child Parents Center in Jamaica, Long Island. She has been a teacher and consultant internationally, with the Peace Corps, Operation Crossroads Africa, UNESCO, and numerous universities.

In the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, since 1983 a constituent part of the **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**, she was a ruling elder in the Mt. Morris Presbyterian Church and a leader in **Black Presbyterians United**, but did not gain wide fame until May 1976, when she became the first Black woman Moderator of the church's General Assembly (the 188th). There had been two previous Black moderators, Edler Hawkins in 1964 and Clinton Marsh in 1973, but not even any Black women candidates until Adair.

Widgeon, Pam. "Dr. Thelma Adair Elected Presbyterian Moderator." *Afro-American* (May 25, 1976): 1, 5.

Wilson, Frank T., ed. "Living Witnesses: Black Presbyterians

in Ministry, Part III." *Journal of Presbyterian History* 55 (Summer 1977): 180–238.

IBAW.

**ADAMS, C. C.** (b. 1895), was for years corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the **National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A., Inc.** He also pastored a church in Philadelphia, and for a number of years was president of the Pennsylvania Baptist State Convention. He was chair of the Foreign Mission Board before being elected corresponding secretary in 1941. In 1944 he published a small book entitled *Negro Baptists and Foreign Missions*, and he made three extended trips to the Convention's mission stations in Africa between 1945 and 1950. In 1948 Adams was knighted by the Liberian government for his service in that country, and especially for the role of the Foreign Mission Board in the work of the Carrie V. Dyer Memorial Hospital. He continued as secretary of the Foreign Mission Board into the 1960s, supervising over sixty mission stations in Africa.

Adams, C. C., and Marshall A. Talley. *Negro Baptists and Foreign Missions*. Philadelphia, PA: The Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., 1944. 84 pp.

"The Baptists." *Ebony* 4 (October 1949): 28–33.

AARS, HUBA, SNB, SCA.

**ADAMS, CHARLES G.** (b. December 13, 1936), internationally known Baptist minister, was born in Detroit, Michigan, the son of Charles Nathaniel and Clifton Verdelle (Gilchrist) Adams. He attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1954 to 1956, and received his B.A. from the University of Michigan in 1958. On August 4, 1963, he married Florence Layne, with whom he has had two children. He received his S.T.B. in 1964 from Harvard Divinity School in Boston, Massachusetts, as a Rockefeller Fellow.

Adams was ordained in 1961 as a member of the **National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.**, but soon affiliated with the **Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.**, founded that year. It broke away from the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A., Inc., over issues of length of tenure for officers and support for the civil rights movement. From 1962 to 1969 he pastored the Concord Baptist Church in Boston. In 1967 he founded and then presided over a community housing project, Concord Baptist Homes. From 1969 to the present he has pastored Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan.

He has led his church into involvement in a wide variety of social action ministries, including a credit union, tutorial services for high school and college students, and the Agape House. The Agape House provides a free medical clinic, a food co-op, free legal counseling, a print shop and school, an auto shop and school, and other services. Beginning in 1971 Adams headed the Michigan chapter of the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference**, and in 1973 he became chair of the Detroit Satellite of **Operation PUSH** (People United to Save Humanity) founded by Rev. **Jesse Jackson**. He is a life member of the N.A.A.C.P. and has served on the boards of numerous community service organizations, including the Mayor's Health Care Advocacy Commission; Greater Detroit Opportunities Industrialization Centers; and Detroit Commission on Community Relations.

In addition to his other responsibilities, Adams has maintained a steady stream of published writings. Since 1970 he has been a columnist for the *Michigan Chronicle*, and since 1970 he has also been editor of *Baptist Progress*. He has published articles in several journals, and in 1976 published a book, *Equality Under the Law*. Since 1972 he has been chair of the board of trustees of Shaw College in Detroit, and has been active in the Michigan Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1969 he was a lecturer at Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts, and since then has lectured in many schools across the country. He is also in high demand as a preacher, and has been a pulpit guest in major churches in the United States and South Africa. In 1984 *Ebony* magazine named him one of America's fifteen top Black preachers. He holds honorary doctorates from Morris Brown College, the University of Michigan, and several other schools.

Adams, Charles G. "The Burden of the Black Religion." *Tempo* 2 (December 15–January 1, 1970): 15.

———. *Equality Under the Law*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976.

———. "Some Aspects of Black Worship." *Andover Newton Quarterly* 11 (January 1971): 124–138.

"America's Fifteen Greatest Black Preachers." *Ebony* (September 1984): 27–33.

HUBA, AARS, WWR (75–76).

**ADAMS, JOHN HURST** (b. November 27, 1929), 87th bishop of the **African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)**, was born in Columbia, South Carolina, the son of Eugene Avery and Charity A. (Nash) Adams. His father (d.1969) was an AME minister, and Adams was named after Bishop **John Hurst** (1863–1930). He

received his B.A. from Johnson C. Smith College in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1948, was ordained deacon in 1949 and elder in 1952. He went on to Boston University School of Theology, where he received his S.T.B. in 1951 and S.T.M. in 1953. He later did advanced studies at Harvard University and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In 1949, while still in seminary, he was assistant pastor of the Charles Street AME Church in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1950 he was assigned as pastor of the Bethel AME Church in Lynn, Massachusetts. In 1952 he became a professor at Wilberforce University and its related Payne Theological Seminary in Ohio.

On August 25, 1956, he married Dolly Jacqueline Desselle, with whom he had three children. That year Wilberforce gave him an honorary D.D. degree as he left to be president of Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas. While in Texas, he served as State Education Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.). In 1956 Gayraud Stephen Wilmore led in the founding of the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (now the **National Conference of Black Churchmen**), and Adams was a charter member who wrote many of the position papers for the organization.

In 1962 he left Texas to be pastor of the First AME Church in Seattle, Washington. During his six years there he became widely known as a champion of civil rights, leading a movement to equalize all the facilities in Seattle. He was honored in 1964 as Man of the Year by B'nai B'rith Northwest, and in 1965 was named Man of the Year by the Seattle and Northwest Area Urban League. In 1965 he organized and chaired the Freedom Patrol Movement. In 1968 he went to Grant Memorial AME Church in the Watts community of Los Angeles, California. There he once again was active in a wide variety of community activities. He was presiding officer of the Los Angeles Black Political Convention, which empowered citizens in the choice of civil office candidates. He was president of the Ujima Development Corporation, which underwrote a new black-owned community in Los Angeles, with a 500-unit housing complex, medical center, small businesses, and education program. He lectured in theology and preaching at the School of Theology in Claremont, California.

At the 1972 General Conference in Dallas, Texas, Adams was elected on the first ballot, and eventually seven other bishops were elected at that historic General Conference. He was first assigned to the Tenth Episcopal District in Texas, shifting to the Second District (Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, North

Carolina) in 1980. He has served on the National Conference of Black Churchmen, the national board of Black United Funds, the National Council of Churches, and **Operation PUSH** (People United to Save Humanity). In 1984, *Ebony* magazine named him one of the top fifteen Black preachers in America.

"America's Fifteen Greatest Black Preachers." *Ebony* 39 (September 1984): 27-33.

WWABA (88), AMECMIM, BDNM (75), WWR (85), EBA, AMSC, HAMEC, FEDHR.

**AENON BIBLE SCHOOL. A Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) school.** Like most Pentecostal churches during the first half of the twentieth century, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World did not place a high priority on education for ministers, their emphasis being upon the movement and leading of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It was thought by many that the work of the Holy Spirit could be stifled, and often was, by education. Within the PAW the cause of ministerial education was led by Bishop **Karl F. Smith** (1892-1972), for many years pastor of the Church of the Apostolic Faith in Columbus, Ohio.

As World War II approached, Smith argued for the founding of an educational institution at the annual conventions of the PAW. In 1940, Smith and LeBaugh H. Stansbury were given permission to establish a school. A school was opened in Columbus, Ohio, at the beginning of 1941, and classes were held in Smith's church. Smith chose the name Aenon, meaning "waters of refreshing." The course lasted only eight weeks. Property was purchased in 1944 which allowed the school not only expanded classroom facilities but provided dormitory space for resident students.

Disaster struck in 1947 when fire destroyed the upper stories of the building and water inflicted severe damage on the first floor. Classes were moved back to the church while the school was repaired. However, expansion continued and with the growth of the faculty, a new two-year curriculum was initiated in 1948. Two years later a full four-year course was introduced. Smith served as president during this time.

The school has had a tenuous existence at times, but has survived through the years. In 1981 it was moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, into the Assemblies' new headquarters complex. In 1978 a branch of the school was opened in Philadelphia.

Golder, Morris E. *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*. Indianapolis, IN: The Author, 1973. 195 pp.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC CONGREGATION

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**AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC CONGREGATION.** A church in the Roman Catholic tradition. The African American Catholic Congregation grew out of the tension of a rising visible Black presence in the **Roman Catholic Church** in America in the last half of the twentieth century and the problems of the church in accommodating to that presence. The subject of that tension, in this case, was **George A. Stallings** (b. 1948). Stallings had been raised as a Roman Catholic and as a teenager decided to go into the priesthood. After completing his education in Rome, he was ordained in 1974. His first appointment was St. Teresa of Avila Roman Catholic Church, an African American parish in the archdiocese of Washington (D.C.). At the same time he became a lecturer at St. Mary's Seminary in nearby Emmitsburg, Maryland, and at the Washington Theological Union.

Stallings appeared to be launched on a successful career as both a parish priest and teacher. His early years coincided with the gradual emergence of African American Catholic organizations, many of which, such as the **National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus**, were headquartered in Washington. However, as years passed he became increasingly and openly critical of both his archbishop, James Hickey, and of the Roman Catholic Church in general. He saw each as possessed of an intense racism.

In 1988, to respond to Stallings and to quiet some of the criticism, Hickey moved him from the parish to a new assignment as a special evangelist for the archdiocese for work within the Black community. However, the move only served to heighten the rhetoric and the relationship between the archbishop and his priest worsened. Soon afterward Stallings quit the church and founded a rival congregation, the Imani Temple (so called after the Swahili word for "faith"). With his every move of media interest, he soon was able to found additional congregations in nearby states.

Unable to reconcile his differences with Hickey, on May 12, 1990, he was consecrated by Archbishop Richard W. Bridges of the independent American National Catholic Church. He now possessed apostolic orders through the lineage of the Old Catholic movement (which had broken with Rome in the nineteenth century following the changes made by Vatican I). The Old Catholic Church allows its priests to marry, and has in more recent years been very lenient in accepting divorced and remarried people into full communion and allowing artificial birth control. The African American Catholic Congregation fully accepted this distinction.

The Congregation inherited the social activism so evident during the early years of Stallings ministry and has moved to establish a variety of social service and

social justice ministries in the predominantly Black community of Washington, D.C.

Grogan, David. "A Black Catholic Priest's Renegade Church Stirs an Unholy Furor." *People* 32, 5 (July 31, 1989): 26–28.

*Historical and Doctrinal Digest of the African American Catholic Congregation.* Washington, DC: African American Catholic Congregation, 1990. 16 pp.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST MINISTRY.** A Unitarian Universalist Association organization. The African American Unitarian Universalist Ministry was originally conceived by the Affirmative Action Task Force created by the African American ministers of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Department of Ministry. It was founded in 1988 by Mark D. Morrison-Reed and William E. Jones. Morrison-Reed had earlier authored an attack upon the racism in the Unitarian Universalist Association in his *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination* (1984).

As presently constituted the relatively new agency is charged with producing African American-oriented materials for use in Unitarian Universalist churches. They are preparing worship materials, theological reflections on liberation theology, and historical and descriptive brochures. The ministry has 20 members drawn from among Black ministers, education directors, and denominational staff. Headquarters is in Boston, Massachusetts.

**AFRICAN ISLAMIC MISSION.** A Muslim group. The African Islamic Mission is an African American orthodox Muslim organization which emerged in the 1970s in Brooklyn, New York. It is headquartered in the Al Masjid Al Jaaami'a under the leadership of Imam Alhaji Obaba Muhammadu. The mission is most noted for its development of a black history publication series which includes reprints of many rare and hard to find books on the origins of African people.

*Introduction to Islam: The First and Final Religion.* Brooklyn, NY: African Islamic Mission, n.d. 16 pp.

**AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.** A Methodist organization. The movement of African American Methodism to institutionalized form dates from at least as early as 1786, scarcely two years after the founding of U.S. Methodism, itself. In that year,

Black Christians in Baltimore voluntarily had begun meeting for prayer and devotions separate from the Whites in the Methodist church with which they were affiliated. In that same year, **Richard Allen**, a former slave from Delaware, now a licensed Methodist preacher, organized some forty-two Black Philadelphians into prayer meetings and a Methodist society. With the support of three other Blacks—**Absalom Jones**, William White, and Dorus Ginnings—Allen initiated the building of a house of worship. However, in the face of strong opposition from the White Methodist clergy stationed in Philadelphia, both the building effort and the separate devotional meetings were discontinued.

Tension between Black and White Methodists in Philadelphia surfaced once again the following year. In November of 1787, Allen, Jones, and other Blacks arrived at the city's St. George Methodist Church for Sunday worship and were directed to a newly built gallery for seating. Mistakenly moving to the "White" area of the gallery, they were pulled from their knees during prayer by ushers insisting they move to the proper section. Instead, at prayer's end, several Blacks left the sanctuary as a group and, says Allen, "... they were no more plagued with us in the church." Over the next few years, the group met under the name of the Free African Society, inaugurating among African Americans nationwide the formation of mutual aid societies for support in material crises and for social and religious interaction. They also began, under Allen and Jones, an effort to raise funds through public subscription for the erection of a house of worship. In spite of strong opposition from St. George's clergy and the threat to read them out of church membership, the effort proceeded and a building was constructed.

Allen and Jones felt that it was desirable to align the group with the Methodist Church, even in the face of hostility, for, as Allen phrased it, "No religious sect or denomination would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodists; for the plain and simple gospel suits best for any people." The decision of a majority of the new society, though, was to affiliate with the Church of England [Episcopal]. Thus, in 1794 the congregation and the building which housed it became the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. Absalom Jones was ordained as the first Black Protestant priest in the U.S. and became pastor to St. Thomas'.

Richard Allen purchased, with his own funds, a blacksmith shop and fitted it up for a church. It was dedicated, also in 1794, by Methodist bishop Frances Asbury as the Bethel Church. There, Allen and others like him who "could not be anything else but a Methodist" found their devotional home. Allen provided

informal leadership to the congregation, and in 1799 he was ordained a deacon in the Methodist Church by Bishop Asbury—the first Black person to be granted that rank. Nonetheless, Bethel was officially served by White clergy appointed by the Methodist conference.

In Baltimore, Blacks at the two White churches formed an independent Colored Methodist Society after they had been put in galleries and not allowed to receive communion until after the Whites had been served. In several other cities in the region Blacks had experienced disaffection from Methodist congregations with whom they had affiliated and had withdrawn into separated worship groupings. Conflicts continued between the Philadelphia group and the conference over the quality and sensitivity of clergy assigned to them and also over the ownership of church property. The recognition of widespread, common concerns among Black Methodists led to a call in April, 1816, for all such separated bodies to convene to consider legal independence. Sixteen representatives from five congregations met at Bethel, Philadelphia. They voted to organize themselves under the name the African Methodist Episcopal Church. They sued for independence before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and were granted their plea. **Daniel Coker** was elected bishop of the new body but declined, and Richard Allen became the first bishop to serve the denomination.

The new church affirmed its Methodist heritage by adopting a system of church government patterned closely after that of the mother church. A quadrennial General Conference, comprised of clergy and lay delegates from every region the church serves establishes church policy, enacts legislation, and approves a budget for the coming quadrennial period. The General Board of the General Conference serves as trustee/custodian of all church properties. The Judicial Council is the supreme court of appeals for all disputes arising within the operation of the church. The bishops are the top-level administrative officers of the church. They preside over geographic districts approximately balanced for parity among the bishops in terms of numbers of constituents and churches. Today there are nineteen such episcopal districts worldwide.

The work of the denomination is managed through annual conferences, which are geographic/administrative subdivisions of episcopal districts. Bishops preside over the meetings of the annual conferences in their districts. Here, clergy and laity report on their labors in ministry for the year past, plan and set the budget for the work of the ensuing year. Also at the annual conferences bishops appoint clergy to the churches they will serve for the year. Theoretically, all clergy are subject to relocation each year; that is the essence of the Methodist

term *itinerant* (“traveling”) clergy. But the pattern of annual reassignment which, indeed, once pertained has lengthened, so that clergy may now serve several years in one station before “promotion” or the matching of a pastor’s gifts with the needs of a particular congregation elsewhere suggest a move is in order. Annual conferences are further divided into *presiding elder districts*, supervised by clergy of the same title, appointed by the bishops as their assistants.

The laws and operating procedures by which the AME Church is governed, as well as its doctrinal affirmations, are contained in the *Book of Discipline*. Like church structure, it closely parallels that of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now **United Methodist Church**). In matters of faith it adheres to Methodism’s Twenty-Five Articles.

The AME Church historically has seen a particular responsibility for ministering to African Americans. But, like the other Black Methodist bodies, it understands its larger mission to be universal. The ranks of its lay and clergy membership have always been open to all persons.

In its *Book of Discipline*, the AME Church sets forth its understanding of its “Mission and Purpose,” as follows:

... to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional needs of all people by spreading Christ’s liberating gospel by word and deed. Each local church of the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society out of which the A.M.E. Church evolved.

In keeping with this statement, it is common to find local congregations sponsoring, in addition to worship and Bible study, programs for health care, counseling, hunger relief, youth guidance and recreation, cultural enrichment, and economic development. Many AME congregations establish school facilities and sponsor housing for the elderly and other persons of limited income.

Evangelism was an early emphasis of the denomination. In 1827, Scipio Bean was sent as a missionary to Haiti. In the post Civil-War years AME clergy evangelized Native Americans in the Southwestern states and established churches in Mexico. The Rev. (later Bishop) **Henry McNeal Turner** planted African Methodism in South Africa just before the turn of the century. Today the church is represented in over twenty African countries, in England, Canada, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Virgin Islands, the Windward Island, Guyana, and Surinam. The church

holds membership in the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and, through its Caribbean congregations, in the Caribbean Conference of Churches.

Another early, strong emphasis was education. Over the years and widely across the nation the denomination has sponsored numerous schools, colleges, seminaries, and training institutes. Prominent among those at the collegiate level are Wilberforce and Allen Universities, Paul Quinn, Shorter, Bonner-Campbell, Edward Waters, Kittrel, Payne, and Morris Brown colleges. Seminaries include Payne, in Xenia, OH, and Turner, in Atlanta, GA. At least three Job Corps vocational training centers are hosted on AME properties. And several schools, from the primary grades through the collegiate level, are also sponsored by the church in Africa and the Caribbean. Among these are the Monrovia College and Industrial Training School in Monrovia, Liberia, and the School of Religion in Johannesburg, South Africa.

As of 1991 there were some 3,000,000 members in the worldwide African Methodist Episcopal Church, served by 6500 clergy in over 6200 congregations. Communication across this broad religious network occurs through several publications, including the *Christian Recorder* and the *Quarterly Review*, respectively the oldest newspaper and magazine continuously published by black people in the world; the *Voice of Missions*; the *Women’s Missionary Magazine*; the *Journal of Christian Education*; and the *Secret Chamber*.

Aptheker, Herbert. *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. 2 vols. New York: The Citadel Press, 1968.

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**AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH.** A Methodist organization. The desire for

non-discriminatory access to the Communion table and to itinerant ministry in the Methodist Episcopal Church led Black New Yorkers in the John Street Methodist Church to seek a separate arena of church life. Led by **James Varick**, in 1796 they requested and were granted permission by Bishop Frances Asbury to conduct services of worship among themselves. A hall was rented and a Methodist congregation was formed; it became chartered in 1801 as the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of New York, known also as Zion Church. The congregation was served by a White pastor, William Stillwell, who was appointed to this charge, along with John Street Church, by the Methodist Conference. Stillwell later served concurrently the Asbury Church, a Black congregation which emerged out of an 1813 split in Zion Church.

A legal action by White Methodist clergy in New York in 1820 seeking greater clergy control over church properties caused considerable anxiety among Zion members regarding the security of their church property. As a result, a series of meetings on the subject led to the decision in July of that year to “decline receiving any further services from [the Methodist Conference clergy] as respects our church government.” William Stillwell, who had, himself, led a schism in the conference over the same issue, was retained as Zion’s pastor.

Then, in June of 1821, representatives from Zion, Asbury, and other churches in New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania met in New York, under the leadership of James Varick, to form an independent Black Methodist body. In 1822 Varick was elected the first “bishop” (the term used at the time being “superintendent”).

The 1848 General Conference of this body voted to add “Zion” to its name in honor of the first congregation and in order to distinguish the denomination clearly from **Richard Allen’s African Methodist Episcopal Church** based in Philadelphia.

From its start in New York, the AMEZ Church came to achieve a concentration of strength in North Carolina (where its publication department, archives, and General Secretary are now located.) Growth during the 19th century prior to the Civil War was only modest. Yet the church counted some noteworthy African Americans among its membership, including **Sojourner Truth**, Frederick Douglass, **Harriet Tubman**, and Jermain Loguen. The Rev. (later bishop) **John J. Moore** pioneered the church’s work on the West Coast, beginning in the 1850s. He firmly planted Zion in the Far West and also distinguished himself as an educator, journalist/publisher, and leading advocate for Black social and political advancement. He was succeeded on

the Coast by other strong clergy who further advanced the work, persons such as **Alexander Walters** and **C. Calvin Pettey** (both later to become bishops.) Pettey organized an emigration movement of Zion members from North Carolina to a colony he established in Northern California.

Following the war, Zionites contended with AMEs for the recruitment into membership of the millions of ex-slaves and for the acquisition of the many church properties abandoned by Southerners or confiscated by the Union Army. In 1868 Bishop **J. J. Clinton** organized the Tennessee Annual Conference. The Texas Conference was organized by Bishop **Thomas H. Lomax** in 1883, and the Oklahoma Conference by Bishop C. C. Pettey in 1897. At century’s end, Zion claimed some 350,000 members in the U.S., Africa, South America, and the West Indies.

Because of their affinity to Methodism, Zion’s founders adopted, with only minor modifications, the *Book of Discipline*, Twenty-Five Articles of Religion, and the ecclesiastical structure of the mother church. The latter includes the system of quadrennial General Conferences, geographical episcopal districts (presently 13), Annual Conferences, and Presiding Elders as supervisory staff serving under the bishops. The work of the church is distributed among several boards, agencies and departments: Publications; Christian Education; Church Extension; Home Missions; Overseas Missions; Women’s Home and Overseas Missionary Society; Bureau of Evangelism; Historical Society; Public Relations and Social Service; Council of Laity. A longstanding commitment to education has produced numerous schools and seminaries, including Livingstone College, Salisbury, North Carolina; Clinton Junior College, Rock Hill, South Carolina; Lomax-Hannon Junior College, Greenville, Alabama; and Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, North Carolina. The weekly *Star of Zion* newspaper, well over a century old, is the principal journal of the denomination, which also publishes through its Publishing House and Book Concern the *Quarterly Review*, the *Missionary Seer* (monthly), the *Church School Herald*, and a complete line of church school literature.

The evangelical commitment of the AMEZ Church is pursued under the auspices of its Bureau of Evangelism, established in 1920. Mission efforts have planted Zion congregations in Haiti, the Bahamas, Jamaica, South America, Liberia, and England. Other aspects of the church’s sense of mission and ministry are expressed through the AMEZ Health Center, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and through the Laymen’s Council.

The role of women in the life of the church is one place where Zion Methodism took the lead. With the



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ordination of **Julia Foote** and **Mary Small** to deacon and then full elder status between 1894 and 1900, the AME Zion church was the second among all Methodist bodies (after the Primitive Methodists) to recognize women's ordained religious vocation.

Today the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church claims some 1.3 million members in 6057 churches served by over 6200 clergy. It holds membership in both the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

The AMEZ Church has entered serious merger negotiations with another branch of Black Methodism, the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church**. The General Conferences of the two bodies have approved the merger; it awaits final approval by the annual conferences. At this writing, however, there does not appear to be active movement in this direction.

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**AFRICAN MISSIONS AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.** At the beginning of the nineteenth century, American Protestant missionary societies began to focus on foreign mission work. White Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians all had organized foreign mission societies by 1840. The first foreign mission society in the United States was the interdenominational American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), formed in 1810. However, with the rise of denominationalism, all the non-Congregationalists withdrew from the ABCFM and founded their own separate mission societies.

A number of American mission societies began to support mission work in Africa in the early nineteenth century. By that date, Africa was seen as a legitimate

area for proselytizing, and American-based churches established mission stations there. American boards regarded Africans as "uncivilized and un-Christian" and they sought financial support from congregations at home by evoking a picture of the ignorant, unclothed, diseased, and generally benighted African.

The idea that "civilization" meant Westernization enjoyed a special vogue in mid-nineteenth century missiology. Christianity and "civilization" were inseparable. Racially inferior Africans could never attain the heights of Western "civilization"; they might receive all the spiritual blessings of Christianity but still remain within their own inferior culture. Therefore, any study of Christianity in Africa since 1800 must involve an analysis of these perceptions.

During the American Protestant missionary movement in Africa, Black Americans assumed a role in the evangelization of Africa. Many African Americans accepted the contemporary theory of "providential design," the idea that Blacks had been brought to America for slavery so that they might be Christianized and "civilized" to return to Africa with the light of "civilization." Basically, African Americans endorsed the Western image of Africa as a "Dark Continent."

In the latter half of the nineteenth century European governments shifted their interest in Africa from the slave trade to colonization. Hence, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the partitioning of Africa with the subsequent establishment of European colonial rule. During this period, a small segment of the African American community addressed themselves to the issue of the impact of European colonialism in Africa. Generally, they concluded that as long as the interests and welfare of Africans were being considered, European activities on the continent could be beneficial to Africa and Africans.

Black Americans also supported mission work in Africa, believing that this religious and cultural exposure would help make the continent more acceptable to the world. Neither the Black masses nor their leaders have ever forgotten their ancestral homeland and during the height of the missionary movement, Black churches expressed their interest in the continent by sending missionaries there, just as White churches were doing. After 1870 African Americans could not resist the call to serve, and Black churches became involved in African mission work. Although African Americans were assigned to fields other than Africa by both White and Black church boards, the majority saw their destiny in Africa and volunteered to work there.

The earliest plan contemplated for the use of Black American missionaries in Africa was the one proposed

by Samuel Hopkins of Newport, Rhode Island. Soon after his installation in 1770, Hopkins, a prominent clergy of the First Congregational Church of Newport, formulated a plan that contained both missionary and emigration features. Actually, the missionary tradition had its roots in the emigration movement. Hopkins' plan called for the selection and education of American free Blacks as Christian ministers who would then emigrate to Africa and teach Africans the doctrines and duties of Christianity.

Two candidates, both members of the First Congregational Church, were selected to be trained for this purpose and went to Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey) to study theology in order to prepare themselves as missionaries. With the British occupation of Newport during the American Revolutionary War, Hopkins' pastoral work was interrupted. He was unable to put his plan into effect. After 1791 Hopkins sought to renew his plan, but his death in 1803 ended his emigration-missionary dreams. At that time none of his emigrant-missionaries had completed their education. However, it is believed that at least two of his candidates later went to Liberia under a similar plan of the American Colonization Society (ACS).

On December 28, 1816 the constitution of the ACS was adopted. The ACS was dedicated to repatriating Blacks to Africa but it also was committed to African mission work. The philosophy of the ACS carried a strong missionizing theme. As such, a free Black minister of the **African Methodist Episcopal Church** (AME) emigrating to Liberia became the first African American missionary in Africa.

On February 6, 1820 **Daniel Coker**, from Baltimore, Maryland, along with ninety others, left New York harbor, on the ship the *Elizabeth*, as the first party of emigrants sent to what would become Liberia by the ACS. Coker was sent to Africa, a year before **Lott Carey**, as a missionary with a subsidy from the Maryland Colonization Society. Daniel Coker was the first African American to leave for Africa with a clear missionary purpose, although he had not been appointed by any particular missionary board. Ten days after the ship left New York, Coker organized the first foreign branch of the AME Church on board the ship. Coker first settled in Liberia but later transferred to Sierra Leone.

In 1815 Lott Carey helped to establish the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society and was elected recording secretary. Carey, born a slave, purchased his freedom and eventually became a leader in the First Baptist Church of Richmond. On May 1, 1819 Carey was appointed as a missionary by the

General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions. It had been formed in 1814, but soon was known as the Triennial Convention because it met every three years. The Triennial Convention was later renamed the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and is today the **American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.** This appointment set the stage for the beginning of Baptist mission work in Africa. Carey, then, was also both an emigrant and a missionary.

The First Baptist Church of Monrovia was organized in Richmond on January 11, 1821 by ACS emigrants who twelve days later sailed to Africa on the *Nautilus*. The group first settled in Sierra Leone because ACS agents had not yet purchased land in Liberia. However, in 1822 they moved to Cape Mesurado, the first settlement in Liberia and the present-day site of Monrovia. Carey established the first Baptist church in Monrovia, Providence Baptist Church.

*The Methodists:* Independent Black-led churches began mission activity in Africa in the nineteenth century and began to appoint Blacks as missionaries in their ancestral homeland. The largest number of African American missionaries sent to Africa by Black boards went during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The AME Church was organized as a separate branch of Methodism in 1816. Its foreign mission outreach began in 1820 when Daniel Coker organized the first AME Church in Sierra Leone. That church, however, was abandoned after Coker's death. In 1822 Charles Butler was appointed the first official AME missionary but he never left the United States for his assignment. John Boggs became the earliest commissioned AME missionary to reach Africa in 1824, serving in Liberia. However, there is no available information on the extent of the work that he established.

In 1844 the General Conference of the AME Church authorized the organization of the Parent Home and Foreign Missionary Society as the central agency for the operation of missions, but the society did not begin to function actively until 1864, when a Board of Missions was established and a Secretary of Missions elected. Ultimately, two women's auxiliaries were formed. In 1874 the Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society was organized in Philadelphia. The Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society was established in South Bend, Indiana in 1898 as a result of Bishop **Henry McNeal Turner's** visit to South Africa where he saw the need for Black missionaries, and because of southern AME women's dissatisfaction with northern leadership in the Mite Missionary Society. The Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society supported the

work of the church in Haiti, Santo Domingo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Barbados, Demarara, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Trinidad, and Jamaica. The Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society supervised AME missions in southern Africa.

Africa was set apart as a foreign mission field by the General Conference of the AME Church in 1856 and John R. V. Morgan was appointed missionary pastor to Liberia. Little is known of his activities except that he returned to the United States because his work was not supported by the church.

The first permanent AME mission in Africa was established in 1878. On April 21 of that year Samuel E. Flegler sailed from Charleston to Liberia on the *Azor* with over 206 other South Carolinian emigrants. Flegler led this AME congregation to Liberia where they settled at Brewerville, sixty miles in the interior of Liberia. Their settlement marked the formal beginning of AME churches in Africa. Initially sponsored by the Morris Brown AME Church in Charleston, the Liberian AME Church eventually was recognized by the national church conference. Flegler returned to South Carolina in 1881.

The permanent work of the AME Church in Sierra Leone began in 1886 when John Richard Frederick was appointed as the first officially sponsored AME missionary to that country. Frederick was sent to Africa by the New England Conference of the AME Church but most of his financial support was contributed by the Ohio Conference. He sailed on November 20, 1886.

Frederick was quite successful during his first few years in Sierra Leone and he soon spread his work into the interior. He was the first AME missionary to work extensively with indigenous Africans rather than with emigrants. After his arrival in Sierra Leone in 1887 he worked with educational and social welfare projects.

Frederick became friends with the West Indian emigrant **Edward Blyden**, who was living in Sierra Leone at the time. With Blyden and James "Holy" Johnson, Frederick helped found the Dress Reform Society, which had the goal of encouraging westernized Africans to reject European dress in favor of traditional African attire. Frederick remained one of Blyden's closest friends and was chosen to preach the sermon at Blyden's funeral in 1912.

Frederick got along well with Africans, so much so that some interior ethnic groups pleaded for him to open a mission station in their towns. He began training Africans as missionaries and also as ministers. He founded Bethel AME Church and Allen AME Church in Sierra Leone. In 1890 Frederick started AME missions at Mange and Magbele. He adjusted well to Sierra Leone and remained there for the rest of his life.

By 1897 Frederick had become disillusioned over AME commitment to support the mission in Sierra Leone. He felt that he was faced with a lack of moral and financial support from the AME Church and withdrew from the church. He joined the British Wesleyan Methodist Church.

The year after Frederick's arrival in Sierra Leone in 1887, Sarah Gorham, fifty-six years of age, became the first woman missionary of the AME Church appointed to a foreign field. In 1880 Gorham visited relatives who had emigrated to Liberia and she spent a year traveling throughout the country preaching and comforting the needy. It was on this trip that she became interested in African mission work. She returned to the United States in 1881 and settled in Boston, Massachusetts where she joined Charles Street AME Church.

In 1888 Gorham offered her services to the AME Church as a missionary. Although sponsored by the AME Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society, most of Gorham's financial support, like John Frederick's, came from the Ohio Conference.

Soon after her arrival in Freetown, Sierra Leone in September of 1888 Gorham traveled to Magbele, where she was active in the Allen AME Church. She worked at Magbele, one hundred miles from Freetown, among Temne women and girls. It was at Magbele that she established the Sarah Gorham Mission School, which gave both religious and industrial training. In 1891 she traveled to the United States to recuperate and regain her health. She later returned to Sierra Leone.

In July of 1894 Gorham was bedridden with malaria and died on August 10 in Freetown. On her tombstone was the following inscription: "She was early impressed that she should go to Africa as a missionary and that her life[s] work should be there. She crossed the ocean five times, and ended her mission on the soil and among the people she so desired to benefit."

In November of 1891 Bishop Turner reached Freetown and organized the Sierra Leone Annual Conference in the Zion AME Church. This was the first annual conference of the church established in Africa. Two weeks later he initiated the Liberia Annual Conference in Muhlenberg.

The years between 1892 and 1900 also witnessed the rise and growth of the AME Church in South Africa. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of the independent church movement, or Ethiopianism, in South Africa. European missionaries in South Africa unwittingly sowed the seeds of discontent among African religious leaders by refusing to promote an indigenous clergy to positions of responsibility and by not heeding the African cries for

self-determination in church government. During the early 1880s African evangelists began to secede from established churches in South Africa. The seeds of Ethiopianism had been sown. On November 5, 1893, Mangena Maahe Mokone formed his own church, the Ethiopian Church.

In 1895 the Ethiopian Church of South Africa began negotiations for affiliation with the American-based AME Church. The Ethiopian Church believed that union with the AME Church would help the Ethiopian Church evangelize the continent of Africa. On June 19, 1896, the Ethiopian Church of South Africa became the Fourteenth Episcopal District of the AME Church, with James Mata Dwane as general superintendent of that district. Bishop Turner visited the recently constituted Fourteenth District in 1898 and ordained more than fifty AME ministers.

However, the failure of the AME Church to fund a proposed training school in the Cape Colony for educating South African AME church members, and the belief that the Ethiopian Church's absorption into the AME Church undercut the Ethiopian spirit of self-reliance led Dwane to secede from the AME Church on October 6, 1899. In 1900, Dwane's group, the Order of Ethiopia, was accepted into the Anglican Church.

In 1900 **Levi Jenkins Coppin** was elected the first bishop of South Africa and was assigned to the Fourteenth Episcopal District (Cape Colony and the Transvaal). Coppin was born free in Frederick Town, Maryland on December 24, 1848. His mother was a very religious woman who gave him religious training and taught him to read and write. He was graduated from Protestant Episcopal Divinity School (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) in 1887. The son of AME parents, Coppin joined the church in 1865, was licensed to preach in 1876, ordained deacon in 1879 and elder in 1880, and elected the thirtieth bishop in 1900. In 1881 he married his second wife, Fanny Jackson.

**Fanny M. Jackson Coppin**, one of America's first Black women to be graduated from college, was born a slave in Washington, D.C. in 1837. After her Aunt Sarah Clark bought her freedom, she was educated in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, then earned an A.B. degree in 1865 and an A.M. degree in 1890 from Oberlin College (Oberlin, Ohio). Between 1865 and 1902 she taught at and eventually became principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. From 1883 to 1892 she served as president of the AME's Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society.

Levi Coppin first arrived in Cape Town alone on February 19, 1901, and departed for the United States on December 26. In November 1902 he returned with

his wife, Fanny Coppin. Missionary headquarters were located in Cape Town, although the Coppins frequently traveled into the interior.

Levi Coppin was prohibited by the South African government from visiting the Orange Free State and Transvaal Republics, but he traveled throughout Cape Colony and into Basutoland (today Botswana) and Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) to establish missions and spread the Gospel. He married almost one hundred couples and baptized over a hundred adults and children. During their stay in South Africa, Fanny Coppin directed most of her attention in Cape Town and the rural areas to organizing Black South African women into Women's Christian Temperance Union societies and into women's Mite Missionary Societies.

One of the permanent results of the Coppins' missionary stay in South Africa was the establishment of Bethel Institute at Cape Town. An old building was converted into a school and mission house. They left South Africa in the Spring of 1904. A Fanny Jackson Coppin Girls' Hall was named in Fanny Coppin's honor at Wilberforce Institute in Evaton, South Africa.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the AME church was definitely mission-minded. The church was united in an effort to support the cause of missions in Africa and elsewhere.

The second largest independent Black Methodist denomination in the United States in the nineteenth century was the **African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church** (AMEZ). A conference in October 1820 officially organized the AMEZ denomination. In 1876 the AMEZ Church began its foreign missionary activities in Liberia. In that year Andrew Cartwright of North Carolina arrived at Brewerville. On January 7, 1876 Cartwright, his mother, Mary Cartwright, his first wife, Rosanna Cartwright (full name unknown) of Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and their two daughters, Anne Marie and Lucy Cartwright, emigrated to Liberia.

Andrew Cartwright combined the positions of emigrant and missionary even though the AMEZ Church did not officially sponsor his mission. He organized the first AMEZ churches on the African continent in Brewerville on February 7, 1878, and in Clay Ashland in November 1878. He also established a mission at Cape Palmas in 1879. By 1880 he reported another church at Anthonerton.

Andrew Cartwright sent a formal report to the AMEZ General Conference assembled in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1880. It was at this meeting that concrete plans for AMEZ work in Africa were made with the formation of the General Home and Foreign Mission Board and the Ladies' Mission Society. The church-

sponsored Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, was encouraged to train missionaries for Africa.

Andrew Cartwright returned to America in order to arouse the mission interest of the members of his denomination. At the AMEZ General Conference of 1884 he officially was confirmed as the church's first missionary to Liberia. Cartwright's first wife had died in Liberia in 1880, and before he left the United States he married Carrie Annie S. (full name unknown) of Plymouth, North Carolina in 1885/1886. The two returned to Liberia.

In 1886, Andrew Cartwright organized a church at Cape Palmas, but shortage of funds caused it to close. Two years later he started the first foreign mission school of the AMEZ Church, with both male and female students. Carrie Cartwright worked as a missionary teacher in the school.

Andrew Cartwright felt that he should have been acknowledged by the AMEZ Church as superintendent of African missions, but the church's response was that there was no need for the election of a missionary bishop at that time. The church viewed him as a poor administrator who had not expanded the mission. Andrew Cartwright served in Liberia until his death in Liberia on January 14, 1903, but his mission never grew much beyond an individual effort.

However, in 1896 **John Bryan Small** was elected AMEZ bishop to Africa, the West Indies, and three home conferences. Small was born and educated in Barbados. He joined the British army as a clerk and was stationed in the West African country of the Gold Coast (today Ghana) for three years, but he also traveled along the western coast from Sierra Leone to Nigeria. He resigned from the army because of British policies toward the Asante kingdom. On a number of occasions in the nineteenth century the British had battled with the Asante, who wanted to prevent foreign domination of the coastal trade.

In 1871 Small came to the United States, joined the AMEZ Church, and pursued his original career as a preacher. In 1896 the church decided to appoint a bishop to Africa, the West Indies, and three home conferences, and because of Small's experience in Africa, he was elected. He chose as his ecclesiastical motto, "For bleeding Africa."

On June 22, 1896 Bishop Small and his wife, **Mary Julia Blair Small**, left the United States. As bishop, John Small visited Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gold Coast but he centered his work in the Gold Coast. His most outstanding contribution to AMEZ mission work in Africa was his efforts to train indigenous African church leadership. He discouraged the church from

sending more Black American missionaries to Africa and concentrated upon sending young Africans to be trained as missionaries at the AMEZ Church's Livingstone College. Between 1897 and 1900 Small had enrolled at least four students from the Gold Coast at Livingstone College. The most notable was James E. K. Aggrey who was destined to become famous in the twentieth century as an educator and African nationalist.

Under Bishop Small's administration, AMEZ work in Africa took on new life. Steady and substantial progress was made in the formation of new organizations and the establishment of schools. By 1900 the mission could claim one school with forty-five students, and two churches with seventy-one full members. In 1901 Small founded the *Zion Missionary Seer* in the Gold Coast to stimulate work in foreign fields. Bishop Small returned to the United States in 1904. He died on January 15, 1915, with these words from his deathbed: "Don't let my African work fail."

By the beginning of the twentieth century the AMEZ Church had established itself in the Gold Coast. There had developed in the church a widespread interest in missionary expansion in Africa. Like the AME Church, the AMEZ Church concentrated on adding African members from already converted English-speaking areas such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, or South Africa.

This was not the case with the smaller Black Methodist church. In the early twentieth century the Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church would join with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) to open a mission station in French-speaking Belgian Congo (today Zaire).

The Methodist Episcopal Church (today a constituent part of the United Methodist Church) was one of the earliest missionary societies in Africa. The church sent its first missionary, Melville Beveridge Cox, to Liberia in 1833. But Cox died four months after his arrival, with his dying words forming the backbone of future American Methodist missionary work in Africa: "Though a thousand fall, let not Africa be given up." With the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, the Liberian field fell to the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. Thereafter, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) did not initiate African mission work until 1910.

The CME Church (today the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church**), was organized in Jackson, Tennessee on December 15, 1870. At its inception the church was made up of ex-slaves who had been members of the MECS. The CME Church sought cooperation and assistance from southern Whites and continued close association with the MECS. The CME

Women's Missionary Society was founded in May 1894 at Fort Valley, Georgia, by **Lucius Holsey** and it became an organized missionary department in July of 1898.

For two decades before 1910, leaders of the Southern Presbyterian Church repeatedly had asked the MECS to enter the Congo and cooperate with them in the evangelization of Central Africa. The Southern Presbyterian Church's African adventure had begun in 1890 when two pioneer missionaries—a White, Samuel N. Lapsley, and a Black, William Henry Sheppard—established the American Presbyterian Congo Mission at Luebo. Four years before the beginning of World War I, the MECS decided to investigate the possibility of sending missionaries to Africa and asked the CME Church to join in the effort. Neither the MECS nor the CME Church had missions in Africa at this time.

Certainly, one of the considerations of the MECS was the desirability of securing the cooperation of the CME Church prior to entering African mission work. The MECS would furnish a large share of the financial support and a portion of the leadership while the CME Church would furnish the principal number of workers. As one CME minister explained, "the purpose of the great Methodist Episcopal Church, South is to do its bit for African missions through the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church! If we furnish the men and women, the parent Church will furnish the means." Basically, this statement summarized the proposed relationship that the MECS and the CME Church were to have in Africa, and the nature of the union.

At the sixtieth meeting of the Board of Missions of the MECS, held in Nashville, Tennessee in May 1906, a resolution was adopted affirming that the members of the board supported the opening of a mission in Africa, and the matter was referred to committee. From 1906 to 1910, the church discussed and studied the issue, resulting in a number of young men and women of the MECS volunteering for missionary service. At the same time, interest was stimulated among the students and faculty of the CME's Paine College in Augusta, Georgia, which led to a discussion of the role of the CME Church in the evangelization of Africa, and the possibility of cooperation between the MECS and the CME Church in the opening of a mission in Africa. These events were followed by an offer for service by Reverend John W. Gilbert, professor of Greek at Paine College and assistant secretary of the Board of Education for work among Blacks of the MECS.

During the 1910 General Conference of the CME Church, which convened at Augusta, Georgia, Dr. W. R. Lambuth, Fraternal Messenger to the CME Church from the MECS, delivered an address which suggested that the CME Church should cooperate with the MECS in

establishing a mission in Africa. At the end of Lambuth's speech, resolutions were adopted requesting the College of Bishops of the CME Church to appoint a committee to investigate the plan. Lambuth felt that professor Gilbert's offer, along with two other Paine College graduates, to serve in Africa immensely strengthened the appeal to both churches.

When the Board of Missions of the MECS met in 1910, the secretary presented the report of the committee to which had been referred the question of opening a mission in Africa. The committee resolved that the Board of Missions should take immediate and definite steps toward the establishment of a mission in Africa and confer with the CME Church concerning an alliance in this missionary effort. Gilbert, Fraternal Delegate to this conference from the CME Church, was invited to address the board on this subject. The committee's report was adopted unanimously.

The resolution of the committee was endorsed by the 1910 General Conference of the MECS. Still, by the 1911 annual meeting, no further action had been taken to inaugurate these recommendations. The College of Bishops, however, appointed Lambuth to lead an expedition to Africa. A Board of African Missions was set up to raise funds and secure qualified candidates for the proposed mission. Lambuth arranged to visit Central Africa in 1911.

For the two Methodist churches, Lambuth of the MECS and Gilbert of the CME Church were the logical persons to make the trip to Africa. Accordingly, the MECS in 1911 commissioned the pair to proceed to the Congo to investigate the possibility of establishing a mission in the country. This action represented the first biracial attempt to cooperate in the formation of an American mission in Africa, although there were many examples of interracial collaboration through the use of Black and White missionaries, such as the Southern Presbyterian Church in the Congo or the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Congregationalist) in Angola and Southern Rhodesia.

Walter Russell Lambuth was born on November 10, 1854, in Shanghai, China, the son of missionary parents, James William and Mary Isabella McClellan Lambuth. He earned a B.D. degree and an M.D. degree in the United States, and served intermittently from 1877 to 1891 as a medical missionary of the MECS in China and Japan. On May 16, 1910, at the sixteenth General Conference of the church, Lambuth was elected bishop. Three days later he was ordained. Bishop Lambuth died at Yokohama, Japan, on September 26, 1921.

John Wesley Gilbert was born on January 9, 1865, in Hephzibah, Georgia, to Gabriel and Sarah (full name unknown) Gilbert, farm hands. Early in his teens Gilbert

went to Augusta, Georgia where he entered the public schools and later was the first student at and a graduate of Paine Institute. He also studied at the Atlanta Baptist Seminary (now Morehouse College; Atlanta, Georgia) and Brown University (Providence, Rhode Island), and at the American School of Classics in Athens, Greece. Gilbert, in 1888, became the first Black teacher at Paine Institute and College, where he taught Greek. In 1895 he entered the ministry of the CME Church. From 1913 to 1914, he served as the third president of Miles College (Birmingham, Alabama). Reverend Gilbert died in Augusta, Georgia on November 18, 1923.

The relationship between the MECS, the CME Church, and Paine College was noteworthy. Paine Institute was established in 1882 at Augusta, Georgia, and chartered in 1883, adopting its present name in 1903. Its original mission was to train African American ministers and teachers. It represented a unique experiment in southern interracial cooperation. It was assisted financially and was operated by both the CME and the MECS. Almost from its beginning, Paine's faculty was interracial and international. The trustees were chosen equally from both churches. It was understandable, then, that out of this environment would come an attempt at Methodist missionary union in Africa.

For Lambuth and Gilbert, the years 1911–1912 were spent in travel and study. Gilbert, the CME Church's first commissioned missionary to Africa, met Lambuth in London and they sailed for the Congo from Antwerp, Belgium, on October 14, 1911. They arrived at Matadi, on the Lower Congo River, twenty-one days later, on November 5. The following morning they began a two day railroad journey to Stanley Pool where they remained for ten days. From this point they traveled nearly nine hundred miles by boat on the Upper Congo, Kasai, and Lulua Rivers, reaching the American Presbyterian Congo Mission at Luebo on December 7. They were welcomed at Luebo and observed the results of twenty-one years of missionary work.

After spending two weeks at Luebo, and with the advice of the Presbyterian missionaries, Lambuth and Gilbert, with sixty carriers, started inland to find a location for their new mission. On February 1, 1912, after a forty-one day march by foot, they reached the village of Wembo Nياما (or Wembo Nyama) in the Atetela region. The village of Chief Wembo Nياما was located about four degrees south of the equator between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth degrees longitude and bounded by the Lubefu, Lomami, and Lukanye Rivers. Lambuth and Gilbert were invited to the house of the chief where they remained for four days. Because of the

urgings of the chief, and the belief that the hand of God had shaped their course, the two church leaders determined to plant the mission station at this place. Lambuth and Gilbert, after seven months in the Congo, returned to the United States in the Spring of 1912.

Upon their return, Bishop Lambuth reported at the sixty-seventh meeting of the Board of Missions of the MECS that there was a great opportunity in the Congo for evangelization. He revealed that Belgian authorities were friendly and seemed willing to grant Americans the privileges of missionary work among Africans. A land concession had been ceded to the church in the Atetela region.

Gilbert, after his arrival in the U.S., offered himself to the Board of Missions of the MECS as a candidate for African mission work and was accepted. Both Lambuth and Gilbert assumed that Gilbert would go back to the Congo to help establish the mission. For a while after 1912, the CME Church continued to be eager about cooperating with the MECS in this venture.

The MECS's Congo Mission was launched officially at the meeting of the Board of Missions in May 1913. The work was to begin in the village of Wembo Nياما. Three White missionaries and their wives were accepted by the Committee on Candidates and scheduled to sail for Europe in late 1913 in order to hear lectures on tropical life, the care of health, and missionary methods and policies. Bishop Lambuth was to join the group in Antwerp and then they would all proceed to the Congo. With these missionaries, and "with the entrance into that field at a later date of Prof[essor] and Mrs. J. W. Gilbert, representatives of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church," Lambuth believed that the MECS would be able to establish a strong and viable mission.

On November 8, 1913, Bishop Lambuth and the party of six missionaries set sail from Antwerp, Belgium, without Professor Gilbert, to open the MECS's Congo Mission. They arrived at Matadi on November 28 and reached Luebo on Christmas Eve day. With the full cooperation of the nearby American Presbyterian Congo Mission, the Methodist Episcopal Congo Mission was organized on February 12, 1914, at Wembo Nياما, and the missionary dream of the MECS in Africa became a reality.

At the 1914 General Conference of the CME Church in St. Louis, Reverend Gilbert made an appeal for CME cooperation with the MECS. But despite Gilbert's plea, and a prior interest in placing Africa under special episcopal superintendency, by the time the CME Church met in 1914, it was indifferent to the idea. This spirit of detachment made it impossible for the

conference to recommend a bishop for Africa, despite assurances from the MECS that it would assist the CME Church in supervision of the African work.

At the 1918 meeting of the General Conference of the CME Church, the body turned its attention to the development of educational programs, an area that the church always had given first priority. In 1918 Reverend Gilbert was elected the first editor of Sunday School materials of the CME Church. In the 1922 episcopal address CME bishops spoke of African missions, affirming, "we wish to say, with all emphasis, that we are in thorough sympathy with [the idea of missions], but we do not see where we can get men and money for such an enterprise at this time, when other older and better equipped churches find it a trying task to foster the missions which they have projected in that land [Africa]." Obviously, the idea of a union between the CME Church and the MECS was dead by this date.

As it was conceived, the unification scheme of an African mission of the MECS and the CME Church never had a chance of getting beyond the planning stages. Although Bishop Lambuth and Professor Gilbert made a propitious trip to the Congo, nothing ever could have come of the idea of combining MECS finances with CME Church labor. In spite of the initial support of both churches, probably the greatest obstacle was the Belgian government, which refused to issue permits to African Americans seeking to reside in the Belgian Congo.

As early as 1878 King Leopold of Belgium and his concessionary companies had shown an interest in using African Americans as workers in the Congo. However, during the 1890s two African Americans—the historian, George Washington Williams, and the missionary, William Henry Sheppard—led a campaign which depicted Leopoldian rule in the Congo as exploitative. This did not ensure an attitude of trust of Black Americans by Congo authorities. The reluctant Belgian government had been forced to assume control of the Congo in 1908, after years of worldwide condemnation of the atrocities of the Leopoldian regime. In addition, in 1909 Sheppard, of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission, was tried in Leopoldville for libel against a Belgian concessionary company operating in the Congo. Although Sheppard was found innocent, soon after the trial he returned to the United States permanently. From this date onward, Belgian officials discouraged and limited Black American missionaries from work in the Congo. Bolstering their exclusionary policy were recent uprisings in Kenya, Nyasaland (today Malawi), South Africa, Southwest Africa (today Namibia), and Tanganyika (today Tanzania), some of which the European colonialists erroneously tied to African

American missionary activity. This atmosphere helps to explain why the Belgians dissuaded American churches from using African Americans in their African missions, particularly well educated Blacks such as Gilbert.

There is also evidence that such an interracial enterprise was opposed by some leaders in the MECS and the CME Church. One CME member explained why: "Perhaps the colored church was not quite ready for such responsibility. Perhaps the White church was not quite Christian enough to treat Negroes as brothers as Bishop Lambuth had done." In the end, it was not feasible to carry out the plan of cooperation between the MECS and the CME Church. The suspicions of the Belgian government and the attitude of some MECS and CME Church administrators help to explain why the scheme of the two churches in 1911–1912 to open a Congo mission never materialized.

*The Baptists:* Black American Baptists also became involved in African mission work in the nineteenth century. The result of this missionary consciousness among Black Baptists was the organization and spread of many independent regional organizations throughout the United States, including the Providence Baptist Association formed in 1835 and based in Ohio; the Wood River Baptist Association created in 1838 in Illinois; the General Association of Western States and Territories organized in 1873; and the New England Baptist Missionary Convention established in 1874.

In 1840 Black Baptists from the New England and middle Atlantic states met to organize the first national Black Baptist missionary group, the **American Baptist Missionary Convention**. The second national Black Baptist missionary organization, the Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention, was formed in 1864 to serve those areas not reached by the American Baptist Missionary Convention. In 1866 the American Baptist Missionary Convention and the Northwestern and Southern Baptist Convention joined to form the **Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention**. Although the Consolidated Baptists had home missions they made no efforts in foreign missions. In 1878 the work of the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention terminated and in 1880 the **Baptist Foreign Mission Convention of the United States** (BFMC) was organized.

Interest among Black Baptists in African missions came from the efforts at organization from southern Black Baptists, particularly in the southeastern states of South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. In 1878, the Baptist Educational, Missionary, and Sunday-School Convention of South Carolina, founded in 1866, resolved unanimously to send a missionary to Africa.



The group selected Harrison N. Bouey as its missionary appointee. Bouey was born on August 4, 1849 in Columbia County, Georgia but he grew up in Augusta. He was converted in 1870, ordained in 1876, and completed the theology course at Augusta Institute (moved to Atlanta in 1879 to become Atlanta Baptist Seminary; today Morehouse College). He worked as a public school teacher in Augusta.

On April 21, 1878 Bouey, a bachelor, sailed to Liberia on the *Azor* with the group of 206 South Carolina emigrants including the AME missionary Samuel E. Flegler. Bouey retorted: "Go to Africa? Yes, my Lord commands, and I am afraid not to go." During his two year stay in Monrovia, Bouey worked among the Gola people. While there he helped construct a road outside Royesville, eighteen miles northwest of Monrovia, which came to be called the "Bouey Road." Bouey also helped organize the Liberia Baptist Missionary Convention. The two Baptist churches established by the South Carolina emigrants were accepted into the Liberia Baptist Missionary Convention in December 1879. Bouey returned to the United States in 1880. He settled in Selma, Alabama, and served as the first vice president of the BFMC.

In April 1882 Bouey married Laura P. Logan of Charleston, South Carolina. He served as pastor and superintendent of missions for Missouri Baptists. After the death of his wife in 1897 Bouey again sailed to Africa in January 1902 but returned to America in 1905. On December 11, 1906, Bouey and three of his four sons returned to Africa. His elder son later joined them. Bouey continued to work in Liberia as a National Baptist Convention missionary until his death on December 15, 1909 at Cape Mount. He was buried on the banks of Lake Peause alongside Hattie J. Pressley and, allegedly, Henderson McKinney, although McKinney's grave has not been found there.

In 1879 the Black Baptist State Convention of North Carolina followed the lead of South Carolina and appointed James O. Hayes as a missionary to Liberia. Hayes went to Africa as a missionary-emigrant, as had Lott Carey and Harrison Bouey.

Hayes had been born in eastern North Carolina. He was one of the first students to enter Shaw University (Raleigh, North Carolina), graduating from the scientific department in May 1879. Hayes did not sail to Liberia until June 1881. He was one of the founders and the first teacher of Ricks Institute in Montserrado County. In 1883 he married Ada Ellen Merritt.

When the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention (LCC) opened its first mission in Brewerville, Liberia, in 1897, Hayes became its first missionary. He had affiliated with the convention immediately after its

founding that year. Hayes pastored a church in Brewerville to which an industrial school was added to train Liberian youth. He served as a member of the Liberia Baptist Missionary Convention.

During the years 1880 to 1883 the BFMC laid the foundations for future missionary endeavors and the movement for African missions gained momentum. From 1883 to 1886 the African mission movement of the BFMC experienced success. In 1883 the BFMC commissioned six missionaries to Liberia: William W. Colley and his wife (full name unknown), James H. and Hattie J. Harris Pressley, John J. Coles, and Henderson McKinney.

**William W. Colley** headed this mission party, which sailed in December 1883. Colley was born a slave on February 12, 1847, probably in Winchester, Virginia. He attended Richmond Institute and was graduated in 1887 (chartered in 1876, name changed to Richmond Theological Seminary in 1886, united with Wayland Seminary in 1897 under the name Virginia Union University). Colley was accepted for African mission work in 1875 by the Southern Baptist Convention and worked at Lagos and Abeokuta in southern Nigeria. In Lagos he helped erect a chapel and residence. When he was recalled in 1879 the Lagos mission had twenty-four members.

Back in the United States Colley helped organize the BFMC and served as its first corresponding secretary from November 1880 to December 1883, when he sailed to Liberia. In Liberia the six pioneer missionaries established the Bendoo Baptist Mission at Grand Cape Mount among the Vai people of western Liberia. Colley began publication, at his own expense, of the periodical *African Missions*. He returned to America in 1886 because of poor health.

James Pressley, also a graduate of Richmond Institute, and Hattie Pressley of Virginia arrived in Liberia in December 1883 with the BFMC pioneer party. Hattie Pressley helped with the establishment of the Bendoo Baptist Mission. Reverend Pressley organized a Baptist church among the Vai people and baptized more than one hundred persons.

But the mission had problems from the beginning, the foremost one was health. Hattie Pressley was pregnant when she arrived in Liberia but she lost the baby. And less than a year after their arrival Hattie Pressley died of fever on August 15, 1884. She was the first BFMC missionary to die in Africa and was buried in Liberia.

Reverend Pressley was sick most of his two years in Liberia. Weakened by periodic bouts with fever and disheartened by his child's and wife's deaths, he returned to the United States in 1885 as an invalid. In a

poem entitled “The Cry of the Heathen,” published in 1896, Reverend Pressley emphasized a continuing need for missions by erroneously portraying Africa as devoid of any religious development:

Hear the voice of Ethiopia  
Coming from that distant land;  
Would you answer to that crying?  
Give to them a helping hand.  
Don't you hear that heathen mother,  
Praying to the gods of stone?  
Trying to heal a heart of trouble,  
A heart by sin and sorrow torn.

In this land we have our Jesus,  
Who will save us when we die;  
When we leave this world of trouble  
We shall live with Him on high.  
But they know no God of mercy,  
Who will hear them when they pray;  
There they have no loving Jesus,  
Who will take their sins away.  
Thus they die in awful darkness,  
Die without the Gospel light;  
Die without the love of Jesus,  
Die and sink to endless night.  
If you cannot go and teach them,  
You can help those who are there,  
You can with a cry of pity,  
Carry them to God in prayer.

John J. Coles was born on April 26, 1856 in Shattersburg, Virginia. Coles entered Richmond Institute in 1878 and was graduated five years later, in 1883. He was licensed to preach by the Baptist Church on July 14, 1878 and ordained on November 4, 1883. On December 1, 1883, he sailed to Liberia with the BFMC pioneer party. Coles was assisted financially by the New York Colonization Society.

Coles and McKinney entered Liberia College to study Arabic under Edward Blyden. Coles was first stationed at the Bendoo Baptist Mission and was elected president of the mission on January 20, 1885. Having learned the Vai language, he preached to the people without an interpreter. A book that Coles wrote during his mission work in Liberia, *Africa in Brief*, was published in 1886. The same year he returned to America, traveling throughout the South lecturing on the need for financial support of the BFMC Liberian mission.

While on furlough in the United States he met and on December 21, 1886 married Lucy A. Henry of Memphis, Tennessee. The pair traveled to Liberia in

early 1887 accompanied by four other missionaries, Edgar (or Egbert) B. and Mattie E. (full name unknown) Topp and James J. Diggs and his wife (full name unknown). Upon his return to Liberia John Coles was assigned to the Bendoo and Jundoo stations where he organized and maintained a school for African boys. Lucy Coles aided her husband in the work at the Bendoo and Jundoo stations where she taught at the mission school.

The ill health of Reverend Coles forced the couple to leave Africa in 1893. Financial problems forced the Bendoo Baptist Mission to be closed after their departure. The old mission houses were sold for lumber. Upon their return to the United States, John Coles was elected the third corresponding secretary of the BFMC but he died a few months after his election. Lucy Coles was elected to finish his unexpired term, which she did until 1895 when the **National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.** was organized.

The sixth and final missionary who was commissioned by the BFMC in 1883 was Henderson (nickname Hence) McKinney. McKinney was born in Edwards, Mississippi, in 1860. In May 1883 the first graduation was held at Natchez Seminary and McKinney was one of the first seven students to receive a high school diploma. The coeducational school was founded at Natchez, Mississippi in 1877 and was operated as a private church school by the American Baptist Home Mission Society until 1938. In the fall of 1883 Natchez Seminary was moved to Jackson, Mississippi, and by common consent, the institution's name was changed to Jackson College, in honor of Andrew Jackson, for whom Jackson, Mississippi was named (today, Jackson State University; Jackson, Mississippi).

On December 1, 1883, McKinney traveled to Africa in the party with William Colley. McKinney also was supported by the New York Colonization Society. Before his departure, McKinney cautioned: “Fear not the African climate, for God in the form of man visited Africa long ago.”

McKinney received additional seminary training, and learned Arabic at Liberia College under the West Indian emigrant Edward Blyden. In 1884 McKinney was appointed as an active missionary. He opened the Marfa station near Grand Cape Mount. On April 15, 1887, McKinney died at his post. He had set out on a mission tour in the interior of Liberia and apparently died in a ferry accident. A Liberian chief had entrusted to McKinney a young Liberian man to be sent to the United States to be educated. But before final arrangements could be completed, McKinney died. Edgar (or Egbert) Topp later brought the young man to

Jackson College as the school's first foreign student. From 1887 to 1894, a time of nationwide economic difficulty, the African mission movement of the BFMC declined because of the limitation of financial resources.

In 1895 the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention of the United States joined with the American National Baptist Convention (organized in 1886) and the Baptist National Educational Convention (established in 1893) to form the National Baptist Convention of America (NBC). The National Baptist Convention split into two conventions in 1915, the National Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A., Incorporated.

R. A. Jackson, an independent Baptist missionary in South Africa, affiliated with the National Baptist Convention in 1896. Jackson, a Baptist preacher from Arkansas, financed his own way to South Africa in 1894 and established a mission at Cape Town. He later was joined by Joseph I. Buchanan, a Black sailor from Baltimore, Maryland.

As an independent missionary, Jackson traveled 25,000 miles into the interior, and within four years he had founded five mission stations. In 1896 the NBC agreed to sponsor Reverend Jackson as their superintendent of South African work. His brightest convert, John Tule, was elected an official missionary by the NBC and later was educated in the United States. Tule and his American-born wife, Mamie Branton Tule of North Carolina, returned to South Africa in 1897 as missionaries of the NBC and the Lott Carey Convention.

In July 1897 Jackson and his wife (full name unknown) took a six month furlough in the United States. For a short time in 1898 Jackson defected to the Lott Carey Convention because of inadequate financial support from the NBC. But by 1900 Jackson had withdrawn from the LCC. The Jacksons remained at their post until October 1906 when they permanently returned to the United States.

In 1897, a majority of the Virginia and North Carolina delegates of the newly formed National Baptist Convention met in Washington, D.C., where they set up the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention (later the Lott Carey Baptist Home and Foreign Mission Convention). Separation centered on the issues of the declining importance of foreign missions in the National Baptist Convention, and a desire by these delegates for Black control of mission work without any cooperation with White Baptists.

In the early years the LCC cooperated with other Baptist boards engaged in mission work in foreign fields. In 1900 the LCC agreed to join with the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU) to mutually support Reverend Clinton Boone and Eva Boone in the Congo.

Clinton Caldwell Boone was born on May 9, 1873 in Winton, North Carolina. At the age of nineteen he entered Waters Normal Institute in Winton. Scholarships helped him to complete Waters Institute and Richmond Theological Seminary. He was graduated from the seminary on May 21, 1900 with a B.D. degree. It was probably in Richmond that he met Eva Roberta Coles, his first wife, and Rachel A. Tharps, his second wife, both of whom were graduates of Hartshorn Memorial College (Richmond), which was opened in 1883. On January 16, 1901 Boone married his first wife.

Eva Roberta Coles was born on January 8, 1880 in Charlottesville, Virginia. Although it has been claimed in some publications that she was the daughter of the missionary couple John J. and Lucy A. Henry Coles, this was not likely since the Coleses did not marry until December 21, 1886. Coles taught in Charlottesville before marrying Clinton Boone.

The Boones left New York on April 13, 1901 reaching the Palabala station in the Katanga province of the Congo on May 24. They went out under the auspices of the ABMU (today the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.) in cooperation with the LCC.

Clinton Boone preached and taught the Congolese in their own language. Eva Boone took charge of the infant class and conducted the kindergarten. She was one of the first ABMU missionaries to advance the idea of a sewing school. Despite the difficulty of enlisting African women, who saw sewing as men's work, Eva Boone enrolled more than forty women in her sewing group before her death. After several weeks of illness, brought on by a poisonous bite, Eva Boone died on December 8, 1902, barely twenty-two years old, and was buried at Palabala.

In 1905 Clinton Boone was transferred to Lukunga, where he assisted in building a new station. He spent five years in the Congo and in 1906 he returned to America. He took the medical course at Leonard Medical School, Shaw University (Raleigh, North Carolina), which he completed in 1910.

The same year Boone traveled to Liberia as a LCC medical missionary. He first was stationed at Brewerville but later was transferred to Monrovia where he opened a day school. In 1918 he became minister of Providence Baptist Church, which had been organized in 1822 by Lott Carey.

After nine years in Liberia, he returned to the United States and allegedly took a course in mechanical dentistry at Bodee Dental School (New York City). Boone received training both as a physician and a dentist at the expense of the LCC. His education equipped him as one of the best-prepared missionaries ever sent out by any convention.

In 1919 Boone married Rachel Tharps. Rachel A. Tharps was born in Richmond, Virginia. After graduation from Hartshorn Memorial College, she became a school teacher in Richmond. The Boones traveled to Monrovia, Liberia in 1920 as LCC missionaries. Clinton Boone worked as a medical and dental missionary, and as pastor of Providence Baptist Church. Rachel Boone opened a school in the city.

The Boones and their two children (both born in Liberia) left the country in 1926 and returned to America permanently. Reflecting on his mission work in Africa, Boone reminisced: "I do not regret a single sacrifice that I have made for the redemption of Africa and if I had ten thousand other lives I would be delighted to spend them all to lift up the fallen and care for the dying in Africa."

In 1908 the LCC agreed to co-sponsor, with the NBC, D. E. Murff in South Africa. D. E. Murff was born on May 17, 1857 in Laurensville, Mississippi. He attended Wayland Seminary (opened in Washington, D.C. in 1865, moved to Richmond, Virginia in 1899 after merging into Virginia Union University). On December 11, 1906 Reverend Murff sailed to South Africa with his wife Mattie E. Wilson Murff, who had been born in Natchez, Mississippi on May 15, 1867. The Murffs took up NBC work in Cape Town.

During his superintendency, Reverend Murff assisted in laying the foundation for the Shiloh Baptist Church and finished building a school house. Mattie Murff was a faithful and efficient assistant to her husband. The couple returned to America in July 1910 because of impaired health.

Also in 1908 the LCC appointed three new missionaries to Liberia. Cora and William Thomas sailed to Liberia as LCC missionaries in December 1908, arriving in January 1909. G. D. Gayles arrived in mid-1909.

Cora Ann Pair was born in Knightdale, Wake County, North Carolina on September 8, 1875. She was graduated from Shaw University (Raleigh, North Carolina) in 1895 with a higher English diploma. Between 1904 and 1906, she took post-graduate courses in missionary training at the theological school of Fisk University (Nashville, Tennessee). Before going to Africa Pair acted as principal of an orphanage for Black children in Oxford, North Carolina. In November 1908 Cora Pair married William Thomas.

William Henry Thomas was born on March 31, 1881 in Duncans Parish of Trelawny, Jamaica. He completed his elementary and secondary education in Jamaica but came to the United States as a young man to continue his higher education. He was graduated from Shaw University in 1908 with an A.B. degree and B.Th.

degree. Pair and Thomas had met at Shaw University. Cora Thomas was sponsored by the Woman's Baptist Missionary Convention of North Carolina.

The couple was stationed at Brewerville. Shortly after their arrival, William Thomas became a naturalized Liberian citizen. At Brewerville, Reverend Thomas served as LCC superintendent of the mission as well as a preacher and teacher. For thirty-three years he served as principal of the Baptist boarding high school in Brewerville. He extended the work of the convention into journalism and for a while operated the only printing press among Black Baptists in Liberia. In 1909 he began publication of the *Watchman*, a monthly paper of the Brewerville station.

Cora Thomas encouraged the LCC mission board to establish an industrial school, which was later named the Lott Carey Mission School. She taught hundreds of boys and girls and young women and men at the school. After Reverend Thomas' death on September 4, 1942 Cora Thomas was appointed superintendent of the mission, succeeding her husband. She served in that capacity for four years. In 1946 she left Liberia because of failing health. Cora Thomas returned to Liberia in 1951 with the Lott Carey Pilgrimage Group. After a severe attack of malaria, she died at Brewerville on May 10, 1952. She was buried on the Lott Carey Mission School campus next to her husband.

The third missionary that the LCC appointed to Liberia in 1908 was G. D. Gayles of Baltimore, Maryland. Gayles' travel expenses were paid by Baptists in his home city. He arrived in Liberia in mid-1909 and was also stationed at Brewerville.

The paucity of financial resources of the LCC and NBC tended to limit their missionary activities in Africa. By 1915 the LCC had placed most of its American-born missionaries in West Africa, primarily in Liberia. In that country the LCC could build upon the foundation laid by James Hayes. NBC missionaries, by that date, had served in South Africa, Liberia, and Nyasaland.

The African mission work of African American churches changed after 1920. By the end of World War I, European imperialists had occupied all of the continent of Africa except for Liberia and Ethiopia. These colonialists believed that the African American presence in Africa caused unrest among Africans. European officials felt that Black missionaries were dangerous to the maintenance of law and order in Africa because Africans might identify with their better educated and more politically conscious brothers and sisters. The European powers feared that these Black American missionaries might unwittingly, or wittingly, encourage political revolts among Africans. By that date, the general consensus of European governments in Africa

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was that African American missionaries upset the status quo and caused too many disruptions to warrant their effectiveness in the "civilizing mission" in Africa.

During the forty year period between 1920 and 1960 very few Black American missionaries not already stationed in Africa were assigned there by White boards. Black boards continued to send African American missionaries to Africa, but their efforts basically were confined to several countries. After 1960 Black Americans were again appointed as missionaries to Africa, but by that date African indigenous missionaries made up the majority of missionaries on the continent and these Africans replaced foreign missionaries.

Between 1820 and 1980, from 250,000 to 350,000 Americans served as missionaries in Africa. Black Americans represented an infinitesimal percentage of that figure. During this period probably no more than six hundred African Americans, sent out by over two dozen missionary societies served in sub-Saharan countries. About half of these were sent out by Black church boards. Of the total six hundred, at least half were women, with about two-thirds of these unmarried commissioned missionaries and one-third "missionary wives." Over 50 percent of all the Black American missionaries who were stationed in Africa before 1980 served in Liberia and another 25 percent served in three other West African countries, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.

African Americans served as missionaries in a total of twenty sub-Saharan countries. Because language was a crucial determinant to placement, thirteen of these colonies or countries were English-speaking. There were five French-speaking colonies and two Portuguese-speaking colonies with Black American missionaries. None were assigned to German, Italian, or Spanish-speaking colonies.

The significance of the mission work of African American churches in Africa was that it helped to bridge the chasm between Africans on the continent and African Americans that had been created by the slave trade. Black boards had fewer missionaries stationed in Africa than White boards because less financial resources were available for mission support. Therefore, since a smaller number of missionaries were sent to Africa by Black boards during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in comparison to the numbers sent by White boards, any contribution that these missionaries of Black boards made to African mission work was as individuals more so than in a collective or denominational sense.

Regardless of how historians assess the impact of the mission movement on Africa, African American churches felt that they had a "special" relationship and

"special" obligation to Africa and Africans. This belief was a significant if not the determinative factor in their motivations for African mission work, and in their continued interest and multiple activities on the continent.

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