

The Holy Spirit and Black Worship

Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition

James H. Cone

Since the appearance of black theology in the late 1960s, much has been said and written about the theme of liberation in black religion.¹ Figures such as Henry Highland Garnet, David Walker, Daniel Payne, and Henry McNeil Turner have been widely quoted in black theological circles, because they related the Christian gospel to the politics of black liberation. For the same reason, such spirituals as "Go Down Moses," "O Freedom," and "Steal Away" are often quoted in contemporary black theological discourse. Black theologians feel the need to show the liberating character of black Christianity in our struggle for social and political justice. But in our effort to show that the gospel is political, we are sometimes in danger of reducing black religion to politics and black worship to a political strategy session, thereby distorting the essence of black religion. This point is forcefully stated—in fact overstated—by Cecil Cone in *Identity Crisis in Black Theology*.²

My concern here is to examine the spiritual foundation of black worship as reflected in its components of preaching, singing, shouting, conversion, prayer, and testimony. I will attempt to clarify the connection between the experience of holiness in worship and the struggle for political justice in the larger society.

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Black worship is essentially a spiritual experience of the truth of black life. The experience is spiritual because the people encounter the presence of the divine Spirit in their midst; the worship is truthful because the Spirit's presence authenticates the people's experience of freedom by empowering them with courage and strength to bear witness, in their present existence, to what they know is coming in God's own eschatological future.

Have I got a witness?
Certainly Lord!
Have I got a witness?
Certainly Lord!
Certainly, certainly, certainly Lord.

This call and response is an essential element of the black worship style. Black worship is a community happening wherein the people experience the truth of their lives as lived together in the struggle of freedom and held together by God's Spirit. There is no understanding of black worship apart from the presence of the Spirit who descends upon the gathered community, lighting a spiritual fire in their hearts. The divine Spirit is not a metaphysical entity, but the power of Jesus breaking into the lives of the people, giving them a new song to sing as confirmation of God's presence with them in historical struggle. It is the presence of the divine Spirit that accounts for the intensity with which black people engage in worship. There is no understanding of black worship apart from the rhythm of song and sermon, the passion of prayer and testimony, the ecstasy of shout and conversion, as the people project their humanity in the togetherness of the Spirit.

The black church congregation is an eschatological community that lives as if the end of time is already at hand. The difference between the earliest Christian community as

an eschatological congregation and the black church community is this: The postresurrection community expected a complete cosmic transformation through Jesus' immediate return, because they thought the end of time was at hand. The eschatological significance of the black community is found in the belief of the people that the Spirit of Jesus is coming to visit them in the worship service, each time two or three are gathered in his name, to bestow upon them a new vision of their future humanity. This eschatological revolution is not so much a cosmic change as a change in the people's identity; no longer are they named by the world, but by the Spirit of Jesus. Roberta Flack expresses the significance of this eschatological change in identity in her singing of "I told Jesus it would be all right if he changed my name. He told me that the world will turn away from you, child, if I changed your name." This change not only affects one's relationship with the world but also one's immediate family. "He told me that your father and mother won't know you, child, if I changed your name." Because the reality of the Spirit's liberating and sanctifying presence is so overwhelming on the believer's identity, the believer can still say with assurance, "I told Jesus it would be all right if he changed my name."³

The Holy Spirit's presence with the people is a liberating experience. Black people, who have been humiliated and oppressed by the structures of white society for six days of the week, gather together each Sunday morning in order to experience another definition of their humanity. The transition from Saturday to Sunday is not just a chronological change from the seventh to the first day of the week. It is rather a rupture in time, a *kairos*—an event that produces a radical transformation in the people's identity. The janitor becomes the chairperson of the deacon board; the maid becomes the president of Stewardess Board Number I. Everybody becomes Mr. or Mrs. and Brother or Sister. The last becomes first, making a radical change in the

perception of self and one's calling in the society. Every person becomes "somebody," and one can see the people's recognition of their newfound identity by the way they stand and talk and carry themselves. They walk with the rhythm of assurance that they know where they are going, and they talk as if they know the truth about which they speak. It is this experience of being radically transformed by the power of the Spirit that defines the primary style of black worship. This transformation is found not only in the titles of deacon, stewardess, trustee, and usher, but also in the excitement of the entire congregation at worship. To be at the end of time, where one has been given a new name, requires a passionate response commensurate with the felt power of the Spirit in one's heart.

In the act of worship itself, the experience of liberation becomes a constituent of the community's being. In this context, liberation is not exclusively a political event but also an eschatological happening. It is the power of God's Spirit invading the lives of the people, "buildin' them up where they are torn down and proppin' them up on every leanin' side." When a song is sung in the right way, and the sermon is delivered in response to the Spirit, the people experience the eschatological presence of God in their midst. Liberation is no longer a future event, but a present happening in the worship itself. That is why it is hard to sit still in a black worship service; the people claim that "if you don't put anything into the service, you sure won't get anything out of it." Black worship demands involvement. Sometimes a sister does not plan to participate too passionately, but before she knows what is happening, "a little fire starts to burning and a little prayer-wheel starts to turning in her heart." In response to the Spirit and its liberating presence, she begins to move to the Spirit's power. How and when she moves depend upon the way the Spirit touches her soul and engages her in the dynamics of the community at worship. She may acknowledge the Spirit's presence with a song.

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Everytime I feel the spirit
Moving in my heart I will pray.
Everytime I feel the spirit
Moving in my heart I will pray.

Upon the mountain my Lord spoke.
Out of His mouth came fire and smoke.
In the valley on my knees,
Asked my Lord, Have mercy, please.

Everytime I feel the spirit
Moving in my heart I will pray. . . .

However, song is only one possible response to the Spirit's presence. God's Spirit also may cause a person to preach, pray, or testify. "I believe I will testify to what the Lord has done for me" is an often-heard response in the black church. But more often the presence of the Spirit elicits what W. E. B. DuBois called the "frenzy" and what the people call the "shout," which refers not to sound but to bodily movement.⁴ "When the Lord gets ready," the people claim, "you've got to move"—that is, "stand up and let the world know you are not ashamed to be known as a child of God."

There is no authentic black worship service apart from the presence of the Spirit—God's power to be with and for the people. It is not unusual for the people to express their solidarity with John on the Island of Patmos and to say with him, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). Like John, black people believe that to be in the Spirit is to experience the power of another Presence in their midst. The Spirit is God's guarantee that the little ones are never—no not ever—left alone in their struggle for freedom. It is God's way of being with the people and enabling them to shout for joy, even when they have no empirical evidence in their lives to warrant happiness. The Spirit sometimes makes you run and clap your hands; at other times, you want just to sit still and perhaps pat your feet, wave your

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hands, and hum the melody of a song, "Ain't no harm to praise the Lord."

It is difficult for an outsider to understand what is going on in a black worship service. To know what is happening in this eschatological event, one cannot approach it as a detached observer in the role of a sociologist of religion or a psychologist, looking for an explanation not found in the life-experience of the people. One must come as a participant in black reality, willing to be transformed by one's encounter with the Spirit. If people are willing to let the Spirit hold sway, being open to what God has in store, then they will probably understand what is meant when they hear,

Glory, glory, hallelujah
Since I laid my burdens down.
Glory, glory, hallelujah,
Since I laid my burdens down.

I'm going home to live with Jesus,
Since I laid my burdens down.
I'm going home to live with Jesus,
Since I laid my burdens down.

It is the people's response to the presence of the Spirit that creates the unique style of black worship. Its style is an integral part of its content, and both elements point to the theme of liberation. Unlike whites, who often drive a wedge between content and style in worship (as in their secular/sacred distinction), blacks believe that a sermon's content is inseparable from the way it is proclaimed. Blacks are deeply concerned about *how* a thing is said in prayer and testimony and its effect upon those who hear it. The way I say "I love the Lord, he heard my cry" cannot be separated from my intended meaning as derived from my existential and historical setting. For example, if I am one who has just escaped from slavery and my affirmation is motivated by that event, I will express my faith-claim with the passion

and ecstasy of one who was once lost and is now found. There will be no detachment in my proclamation of freedom. Only those who do not know bondage existentially can speak of liberation objectively. Only those who have not been in the "valley of death" can sing the songs of Zion as if they were uninvolved. Black worship is derived from a meeting with the Lord in the struggle to be free. If one has not met the Spirit of God in the struggle for freedom, there can be no joy and no reason to sing with ecstatic passion, "I am so glad that trouble don't last always."

The Components of Black Worship

There are six principal components of black worship: preaching, singing, shouting, conversion, prayer, and testimony.

Preaching

Expressing his admiration for the black preacher, W. E. B. DeBois called him, among other things, "a leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist."⁵ Dubois did not include "prophet" in his list, although certainly it is the black preacher's most important office. The black preacher is a prophet who speaks God's truth to the people. The sermon therefore is a prophetic oration, which "tells it like it is," according to the divine Spirit who speaks through the preacher.

In the black church, the sermon is not intended to be an intellectual discourse on things divine or human. That would make the preached Word a human word and thus dependent upon the intellectual capacity of the preacher. In order to separate the sermon from ordinary human discourse and thereby connect it with prophecy, the black church emphasizes the role of the Spirit. No one is an authentic preacher in the black church tradition until he or

she is called by the Spirit. Persons, according to this tradition, should not decide to enter the ministry of their own volition. Preaching is not a human choice; it is a divine choice. Just as God called Amos from Tekoa, Jeremiah while he was only a youth, Isaiah in the temple, and Paul on the Damascus Road, so also he speaks directly to those whom he sets aside for the ministry. It is expected that the preacher will give an account of his calling—how and when the Lord touched his soul and set him aside for the proclamation of divine truth. A preacher might testify that it was late one Wednesday evening or early one Thursday morning. There is no rigidity about the time or the circumstances of the call. But it is important that the call be authenticated, so that the people know they are encountering God's Word through the sermon's oration, and not simply the personal interest of a given preacher.

In the black tradition, preaching as prophecy essentially is telling God's story, and "telling the story" is the essence of black preaching. It is proclaiming, with appropriate rhythm and passion the connection between the Bible and the history of black people. What have the Scriptures to do with our life in white society and the struggle to be "somebody" in it? The answer to that question depends upon the preacher's capacity to tell God's story so that the people will experience its liberating presence in their midst. That is why the people ask of every preacher, "Can the Reverend tell the story?" To "tell the story" is to act out, with the rhythm of the voice and the movement of the body, the truth about which one speaks. We can speak of the black preacher in the way B. D. Napier speaks of the Old Testament prophet: "The symbolic acts of the prophets are simply graphic, pictorial extensions of the Word, possessing both for the prophet and for his observers-hearers a quality of realism probably unfathomable psychologically to the Western mind."⁶

If the people do not say "Amen" or give some other

passionate response, it usually means that the Spirit has chosen not to speak through the preacher at the time. The absence of the Spirit could mean that the preacher was too dependent on his or her own capacity to speak or that the congregation was too involved in its own personal quarrels. Whatever the case, the absence of a "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord" when the preacher speaks God's Word is uncharacteristic of a black worship service, for these responses let the preacher know that he or she is on the right track, and that what is being said rings true to the Spirit's presence in their midst. An Amen involves the people in the proclamation and commits them to the divine truth that they hear proclaimed. It means that the people recognize that what the preacher is saying is not just Reverend So-and-so's idea, but the claim that God is laying upon the people.

Song

Next to preaching, song is the most important ingredient in black worship. Most black people believe that song opens their hearts for the coming of God's Spirit. That is why most church services are opened with a song and why most preachers would not attempt to preach without a "special" song which not only prepares the people for God's Word, but also intensifies the power of the Spirit's presence. Through song a certain mood is created in the congregation, and the people can experience the quality of the Spirit's presence. One cannot, through manipulation, force the Spirit to descend. The Spirit always remains free of human choice. By singing, the people know whether they have the proper disposition for the coming of the Spirit.

In many black congregations, there are special songs that are led by particular people, and no one would dare sing another's song. That would be a sure way to "kill the Spirit." I grew up in the Macedonia AME Church in Bearden,

Arkansas, and I can remember the special songs of several people in that congregation. My mother's song was,

This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine;
This little light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine.

Sister Ora Wallace, unquestionably the best singer at Macedonia, would always sing,

I'm workin' on the buildin'
It's a true foundation,
I'm holdin' up the blood-stained banner for my Lord.
Just as soon as I get through,
Through working on the buildin'
I'm goin' up to heaven to get my reward.

Of all the songs of Macedonia, I will never forget Sister Drew Chavis' favorite, because she sang with intensity and passion that never failed to bring tears to the eyes of most of the people assembled.

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light,
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

By the time she reached the second stanza and began to sing "When my life is almost gone, Hear my cry, hear my call, Hold my hand lest I fall," the eyes of the entire congregation were wet, because they knew they had to cross the River Jordan. Thus they waited patiently for the familiar lines in the third verse, "At the river I stand, Guide my feet, hold my hand. Take my hand, precious Lord, Lead me home."

It is possible to "have church," as the people say, without outstanding preaching, but not without good singing. Good singing is indispensable for black worship, for it can fill the vacuum left by a poor sermon. There are those who would say that "a good sermon ain't nothing but a song." In recent years, taking their cue from their white counterparts, many black churches have replaced congregational singing with choir singing, thereby limiting the people's involvement in worship. While choirs have their place in certain restricted contexts, the true black service involves the entire congregation in song.

Shouting and Conversion

Good singing naturally leads to shouting, which is often evidence that one has been converted. As elements of black worship, shouting and conversion belong together because they are different moments in a single experience. To shout is to "get happy." It happens in the moment of conversion and in each renewal of that experience in the worshiping community. Shouting is one's response to the movement of the Spirit as one encounters its presence in the worship service. For white intellectuals, including theologians, the shouting of black folks is perhaps the most bizarre event in their worship services. White intellectuals often identify the shouting in the black church with similar events in some white churches, attempting to discover a common sociological and psychological reason for the phenomenon. Such an approach is not only grossly misleading from my theological perspective, but also from the premises and procedures that white scholars claim guide their examination. How is it possible to speak of a *common* sociological and psychological reason for religious ecstasy among blacks and whites, when they have radically different social and political environments, thereby creating different psychological and religious orientations? It is absurd on sociological, psychological, or theological grounds

to contend that the Ku Klux Klansman and the black person who escaped him are shouting for similar reasons in their respective church services. Because the worship services of whites and blacks arise out of differing historical and theological contexts, the people do not shout for the same reasons.

The authentic dimension of black people's shouting is found in the joy they experience when God's Spirit visits their worship and stamps a new identity upon their persons, in contrast to their oppressed status in white society. This and this alone is what the shouting is about. This experience is so radical that the only way to speak of it is in terms of dying and rising again. It is a conversion experience. In one sense conversion is a once-and-for-all event and is associated with baptism. In another sense, one is continually converted anew to the power of the Spirit, and this usually is connected with shouting. "God struck me dead," recalled a former slave, likening his conversion with the experience of dying.⁷ But on the other side of death is the resurrection, a new life, and the determination to live for God. Since one cannot stay on the "mountaintop" but must return to the "valley of life," there is always the need to return to the place where one once stood, in order to experience anew the power of God's Spirit. On Sunday morning, at the altar call, the preacher invites all in the congregation to renew their determination to stay on the "Lord's journey" and "to work in his vineyard."

Testimony and Prayer

One's determination is often renewed with prayer and also with testimony, when one stands before the congregation and bears witness to one's determination to keep on the "gospel shoes." A sister might say,

I don't know about you, but I intend to make it to the end of my journey. I started on this journey twenty-five years ago,

and I can't turn back now. I know the way is difficult and the road is rocky. I've been in the valley, and I have a few more mountains to climb. But I want you to know this morning that I ain't going to let a little trouble get in the way of me seeing my Jesus.

Prayer, like song, creates the mood for the reception of God's Spirit and is the occasion when the people specifically request Jesus to come and be with them. The people believe that they can call Jesus upon the "telephone of prayer" and tell him their troubles; his line is never busy, and he is always ready to receive their call. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "Jesus is on the main line; call him up and tell him what you want." Prayer is communication with the divine. That is why prayer before entering the pulpit is so important to most black preachers.

Harold Carter, a Baptist preacher in Baltimore, accurately describes the essence of black prayer: It is "more than a word spoken; it [is] an event to be experienced. The spirit of what happen[s] [is] as important as the words [being] spoken."⁸ Black prayer should not be read, but heard, because the rhythm of the language is as crucial to its meaning as is the content of the petition. To understand black prayer, one needs to *hear* the deacon say,

Almighty and all wise God our heavenly Father! Tis once more and again that a few of your beloved children are gathered together to call upon your holy name. We bow at your footstool, Master, to thank you for our spared lives. We thank you that we were able to get up this morning clothed in our right mind. For Master, since we met here, many have been snatched out of the land of the living and hurled into eternity. But through your goodness and mercy we have been spared to assemble ourselves here once more to call upon a captain who has never lost a battle.⁹

At this point in the prayer, the deacon is ready to go through his list of requests, which normally relate to the bestowal of

strength on the people so that they can survive in a sin-sick world. After the requests, he moves toward the conclusion.

And now, oh, Lord; when this your humble servant is done down here in this low land of sorrow; done sitting down and getting up; done being called everything but a child of God; oh, when I am done, done, done, and this old world can afford me a home no longer, right soon in the morning, Lord, right soon in the morning, meet me at the River of Jordan, bid the waters to be still, tuck my little soul away in your chariot, and bear it away over yonder in the third heaven where everyday will be a Sunday and my sorrows of this old world will have an end, is my prayer for Christ my Redeemer's sake, and Amen and thank God.¹⁰

One fact is clear from our examination of black worship: It is primarily a happening in the lives of the people. Both the content of what is said and the manner in which it is expressed emphasize that black worship is an eschatological event—a time when the people experience a liberation in their present of the way they believe life will be fully realized in God's coming future.

Sanctification, Liberation, and the Struggle for Justice

On the basis of our interpretation of black worship as an eschatological event, it is not difficult to understand why Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, was so "confident that there was no religious sect or denomination [that] would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodist."¹¹ The process of salvation in terms of repentance, forgiveness, and new birth, so important for John Wesley, is also dominant in the black religious tradition generally, and in black Methodism in particular. Black worship is the actualization of the story of salvation as experienced in the lives of oppressed black people.

However, the claim that the black church was influenced

by Methodism and other forms of evangelical Protestantism does not mean that there are no essential differences between them. In fact, the dissimilarities are perhaps more important than the similarities, and it was for this reason that Richard Allen and other blacks walked out of St. George Methodist Church of Philadelphia in 1787 and later, in 1816, founded the AME Church. Similar events happened in other black/white Methodist contexts, giving rise to the AME Zion Church and much later to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.¹² The central difference between black and white Methodism was and is the refusal of black people to reconcile racism and social injustice with the experience of conversion and new birth. We do not believe it is possible to be sanctified and a racist at the same time. If conversion and new birth have any significance at all, they must involve the historical actualization of the experience of salvation in works of piety and mercy on behalf of the oppressed of the land. John Wesley seems to have recognized this historical vocation, since he not only took a radical stand against slavery but also insisted on the social character of the experience of salvation.¹³ "Christianity," he wrote, "is essentially a social religion; and . . . to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it."¹⁴ But John Wesley notwithstanding, North American Methodism, unfortunately, did not institutionalize this stand on slavery.¹⁵ The failure of white Methodism in this regard led to the creation of a white spirituality that is culturally determined by American values and thus indifferent to oppressed black people's struggle for social justice.

In contrast, black American spirituality was born in the context of that struggle. The contradiction between the experience of sanctification and human slavery always has been a dominant theme in black religion. It is found not only in the rise of independent black churches but also in our songs, stories, and sermons.¹⁶ When the meaning of sanctification is formed in the social context of an oppressed

community struggling for liberation, it is difficult to separate the experience of holiness from the spiritual empowerment to change the existing societal arrangements. If "I'm a chile of God wid soul set free" because "Christ hab bought my liberty," then I will find it impossible to tolerate slavery and oppression. Black slaves expressed this point in song.

Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom!
 Oh Freedom, I love thee!
 And before I'll be a slave,
 I'll be buried in my grave,
 And go home to my Lord and be free.

The historical realization of the experience of salvation has always been an integral part of the black religious tradition. The idea that black religion was and is otherworldly and nothing more is simply not true. To be sure, black religion is not a social theory that can substitute for a scientific analysis of societal oppression. But it is a spiritual vision of the reconstruction of a new humanity in which people are no longer defined by oppression, but by freedom. This vision can serve as an important force in organizing people for the transformation of society. Because black people know that they are more than what has been defined for them, this knowledge of that "more" requires that they struggle to realize in society the freedom they experience in their worship life.

Sometimes this experience of God's gift of a new identity actualizes itself in political revolution, as found in the well-known insurrections of Gabriel Prosser (1800), Denmark Vesey (1822), and Nat Turner (1831).¹⁷ Black religion is, by definition, the opposite of white religion; it was born in black people's political struggle to liberate themselves from oppression in the white church and in the society the white church justifies. Even when black slaves could not actualize their experience of salvation in revolutionary struggle, they

often verbalized the distinction between black and white religion. Harriet Martineau recorded the comment to a mistress by one of her slaves, "You no holy. We be holy. You in no state of salvation." A similar point is emphasized in a joke about a "slave's reaction to the news that he would be rewarded by being buried in the same vault with his master: 'Well, Massa, one way I am satisfied, and one way I am not. I like to have a good coffin when I die [but] I afraid, Massa, when the debbil come to take you body, he make mistake and get mine.'"¹⁸

Sanctification in black religion cannot be correctly understood apart from black people's struggle for historical liberation. Liberation is not simply a consequence of the experience of sanctification—sanctification *is* liberation—that is, to be politically engaged in the historical struggle for freedom. When sanctification is defined in that manner, it is possible to connect it with socialism and Marxism—the reconstruction of society on the basis of freedom and justice for all.

Although black religion grounds salvation in history and refuses to accept any view of sanctification that substitutes inward piety for social justice, there is also an eschatological vision included in salvation. It is important to emphasize that this vision in black religion is derived from Scripture and is not in any sense a rejection of history. To reject history in salvation leads to passivity and religion then becomes the opiate of the people. Black religion, while accepting history, does not limit salvation to history. As long as people are bound to history, they are bound to law and thus to death. If death is the ultimate power, and life has no future beyond this world, then the heads of the state who control the military are ruling in the place of God. They have the future in their hands and the oppressed can be made to obey the law of injustice. But if the oppressed, while living in history, can see beyond it; if they can visualize an

eschatological future beyond this world, then the "sigh of the oppressed creature," to use Marx's phrase, can become a revolutionary cry of rebellion against the established order. It is this revolutionary cry that is granted in the resurrection of Jesus. Salvation then is not simply freedom *in* history; it is freedom to affirm the future that is *beyond* history.

Indeed, because we know that death has been conquered, we are truly free to be human in history, knowing that we have a "home over yonder." That home, vividly and artistically described in the slave songs, is the gift of salvation granted in the resurrection of Jesus. If this "otherness" in salvation is not accepted seriously, there is no way to sustain the struggle against injustice. The oppressed will become tired, and they will be afraid of the risks of freedom. They will say, as the Israelites said to Moses when they found themselves between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt?" (Exod. 14:11 RSV). The fear of freedom and of the risks that attend the struggle is an ever-present reality. But the "otherness" of salvation, its transcendence beyond history, introduces a factor that makes a difference. The difference is not that we are taken out of history while living on earth—that would be an opiate. Rather it is a difference that plants our being firmly in history because we know that death is not the goal. The "transcendence factor" in salvation helps us to realize that our fight for justice is God's fight, too; and his presence in Jesus' resurrection has already defined what the ultimate outcome will be. It was this knowledge that enabled black slaves, although they lived in history, not to be defeated but to triumph over their limitations in history. To be sure, they sang about the fear of "sinking down" and the dread of being a "motherless child." They encountered trouble and the agony of being alone,

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where they "couldn't hear nobody pray." They encountered death and expressed it in song.

Soon one mornin', death comes a creepin' in
my room.
O my Lawd, O my Lawd, what shall I do?

Death was a terrible reality for black slaves; it often visited the slave quarters, leaving orphans behind.

Death done been here, took my mother an' gone,
O my Lawd, what shall I do?

Death done been here, left me a motherless child,
O my Lawd, what shall I do?

In these songs are expressed the harsh realities of history and the deep sense of dread at the very thought of death. But because the slaves knew that death had been conquered in Jesus' resurrection, they believed they also could transcend death and they interpreted salvation as a heavenly, eschatological reality. And that is what they sang.

You needn't mind my dying,
Jesus' goin' to make up my dying bed.

In my room I know,
Somebody is going to cry,
All I ask you to do for me,
Just close my dying eyes.

The Methodist Witness and the African Situation

Kwesi A. Dickson

It is true to say that Africa is in the spotlight of world attention today. The reasons are many and varied, and it is important that we look at some of them, if even briefly, as a necessary preliminary to a discussion of Methodism in the African context.

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Africa is in the postindependence era; most of the countries of black Africa have achieved independence from colonial rule and have been running their own affairs for many years. On the one hand, the attainment of political independence was a necessity, if only because it removed an important cause of degradation and strife; on the other hand—and paradoxically—the political situation today is considerably more complex and a potential source of unrest. There is a general feeling that things have not gone as well as they might; the rule exercised by African governments over their own peoples has not always proved to be the panacea for social, economic, and political ills that it was expected to be. Of course, world inflation has had its impact on the uncertain economies of many African nations, but it remains a fact that this general inflationary trend often has been exacerbated by corrupt and incompetent rule, with the result that increasingly, the necessities of life are eluding many. Military regimes have sprung up in quite a few

NOTES FOR PAGES 164-172

2. Abel Stevens, *The Women of Methodism* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1866), pp. 10-11.
3. See Stevens, *Women of Methodism*; Henry Moore, *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher* (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1856), and *An Account of the Experience of Hester Ann Rogers* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1889); Annie E. Keeling, *Eminent Methodist Women* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1889); John Kirk, *The Mother of the Wesleys* (London: Henry James Tresidder, 1864); Helen Knight, *Lady Huntington and Her Friends* (New York: American Tract Society, 1853).
4. W. H. Withrow, *Barbara Heck* (London: Robert Culley, 1893).
5. Outler, *John Wesley* (1974), p. 99.
6. Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 47, 58.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
8. Stevens, *Women of Methodism*, pp. 63-64.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
10. Phoebe Palmer, *Promise of the Father* (Boston: Henry V. Degen, 1859), pp. 115, 117.
11. Stevens, *Women of Methodism*, p. 64.
12. Adam Clarke, *Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1883), Galatians 3:28 (vol. 6, p. 402).
13. See for example, Luther Lee, *Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel* (Syracuse: the Author, 1853); Phoebe Palmer, *Promise of the Father*; Catherine Mumford Booth, *Female Ministry* (London: n.p., 1859; reprinted, New York: Salvation Army Headquarters, 1975); David Sherman, "Woman's Place in the Gospel," preface to John O. Foster, *Life and Labors of Mrs. Maggie Newton Van Cott* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1872), preface; Frances Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit* (Boston: D. Lothrop Co., 1888); Roberts, *Ordaining Women*.
14. *Works*, 6, pp. 350-60.
15. Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1848; reprinted Taylors, S.C.: Van Hooser Publications, 1976), p. 412.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
18. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 207, 372n.
19. Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness* (New York: the Author, 1854), pp. 19, 63-4, 38.
20. Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), p. 67.
21. Walter C. Palmer and Phoebe Palmer, *Four Years in the Old World* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1870), p. 635.
22. Donald W. Dayton, "The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Its Emergence and Significance," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, vol. 13 (Spring 1978), pp. 114-26; "Theological Roots of Pentecostalism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1980).

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23. Phoebe Palmer, "Model Revival," *Guide to Holiness*, vol. 46 (September 1864), p. 61.
24. *Notes*, Matt. 3:2 (p. 22).
25. Stevens, *Women of Methodism*, p. 61.
26. Lee, *Five Sermons*.
27. Laura S. Haviland, *A Woman's Life-Work* (Chicago: Publishing Association of Friends, 1889).
28. Palmer, *Promise of the Father*, p. 361.
29. F. de L. Booth-Tucker, *The Life of Catherine Booth*, vol. 1 (London: Salvation Army Headquarters, 1892), p. 86.

Chapter 9. James H. Cone

1. The earliest publication on black theology was by James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*; see also James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation, The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), and *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). Other writers on the subject include J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1971) and *A Black Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); Major Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); William Jones, *Is God a White Racist?* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1973); Cecil Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*. For a historical account of the development of black religion and black theology, see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1972) and G. Wilmore and J. Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979).
2. Cecil Cone, *Identity Crisis*.
3. From "I Told Jesus," Roberta Flack's record album, "First Take," Atlantic Recording Corp., New York, 1969.
4. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1968), pp. 141-42.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
6. "Prophet, Prophetism," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, George A. Buttrick et al., vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 912.
7. See Clifton Johnson, ed., *God Struck Me Dead* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969).
8. Harold Carter, *The Prayer Tradition of Black People* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1976), p. 21.
9. A prayer offered in South Nashville, Tennessee, in the summer of 1928 and reproduced in Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, *Book of Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1958), p. 256.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-57.
11. Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Right Reverend Richard Allen* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 29. For

biographies of Allen, see Charles Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1935) and Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of the Independent Black Churches 1760-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Wesley's description of the order of salvation emphasizing repentance, justification, new birth, and assurance are prominently present in Allen's account of his conversion experience:

"I was awakened and brought to see myself, poor, wretched and undone, and without the mercy of God must be lost. Shortly after, I obtained mercy through the blood of Christ, and was constrained to exhort my old companions to seek the Lord. I went rejoicing for several days and was happy in the Lord, in conversing with many old, experienced Christians. I was brought under doubts, and was tempted to believe I was deceived, and was constrained to seek the Lord afresh. I went with my head bowed down for many days. My sins were a heavy burden. I was tempted to believe that there was no mercy for me. I cried to the Lord both night and day. One night I thought hell would be my portion. I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a poor sinner, and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and, glory to God, I cried. My soul was filled. I cried, enough for me—the Saviour died. My confidence was strengthened that the Lord, for Christ's sake, had heard my prayers and pardoned all my sins. I was constrained to go from house to house, exhorting my old companions, and telling to all around what a dear Saviour I had found." (*Life Experience*, pp. 15-16)

12. The best history of black religion is Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. For an account of the rise of black Methodism, see Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1976). Unfortunately Richardson's book fails to point out the significance of the relation between black faith and history. Careful attention to the theological importance of this relationship would have disclosed the difference between black and white spirituality in Methodism. Richardson seems to be unaware not only of the recent rise of black theology, but also of the *theological* importance of the rise of independent black Methodist churches and also of the emergence of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal in contemporary United Methodism. He includes only one sentence on black theology and one short paragraph on BMCR, in the context of "Protest Movements."

Although it is old, Carter G. Woodson, *History of the Negro Church* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1945), is still very important. See also James Cone, "Negro Churches (in the United States)," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 12, Macropaedia, 15th ed. (1974), pp. 936-37.

13. See *Works*, 11, pp. 59-60.
 14. Cited in Wearmouth, *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), p. 185. Despite Wesley's emphasis on works of piety and mercy, his view of

salvation seems to see social justice as a secondary ingredient of salvation and at most, a mere *consequence* of it.

15. In the beginning, American Methodism took a radical stand on slavery. In 1780 at the Baltimore Conference, Methodists condemned slavery as "contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society." And four years later at the Christmas Conference of 1784, they "voted to expel all slaveholding of Methodist societies . . . who would not, within twelve months after due notification, perfect a legal document to manumit all their slaves when they reached certain specific ages. The conference also voted to expel immediately all Methodists who bought (except for the purpose of liberation) or sold slaves." However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century cotton had become king, and the Methodist, like other white churches, allowed the change in social reality to influence its stand on slavery. Not only did it suspend the 1784 rules within six months, but in 1816 a General Conference committee reported that "emancipation is impracticable" (Cited in H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972], pp. 37, 38, 45). For a historical account, see Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).
16. For a theological interpretation of slave songs, often called Negro spirituals, see *The Spirituals and the Blues*. In *God of the Oppressed*, songs, sermons, stories, and prayers were primary sources for a black theology of liberation.
17. Wilmore interprets these insurrections in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, ch. 3. For a detailed account of more than 200 slave revolts, see Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publisher, 1943).
18. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 34, 35.

Chapter 10. Kwesi A. Dickson

1. Kwesi Dickson, "The Minister—Then and Now," *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. J. S. Pobee (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).
2. Bruce G. (Brodie) Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast*, vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass, 1853).
3. Methodist Mission Society Archives, London (letter, January 1868).
4. F. L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 66.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
6. Thomas W. Madron, "Some Economic Aspects of John Wesley's Thought Revisited," *Methodist History*, vol. 4 (October 1965), p. 45.
7. Guenter Lewy, *Religion and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 583-84.
8. Methodist Mission Society Archives, London (Freeman's 1847 Report).
9. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, pp. 117, 150.