

Black Moral Self-Criticism and the Role of Minister in the Church and Community Change: A Case Study of the Black Community Based Church

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Introduction:

The sense of community and humane living are highly cherished values of traditional African-African-American life, society, and community. This statement remains true in spite of the apparent disarray in the experience of contemporary social conditions and the dynamics of modern political, social, economic, Spiritual, and cultural consequences of brutal civil, ethnic, cultural conflicts in many parts of the world in general, and on the Black/ African continent, and the African-American Community, and South of the Saharan of predominantly Black Africans in particular. For traditional Africans in particular and African-American community in general. The African-American community is basically sacred, rather than secular, and surrounded by several religious forms and symbols of natural and meditating creative existences, African Scientific festivities, and rituals.

Based upon these analyses, there are five objective conceptualizations this study wishes to address: (1) to analyze the African-American community in the context of “ The Call to Return to Tradition”, (2) To objectively view African-American History and experience and declare the Church as a Prophetic Community for redemption”, (3) To analyze the social dynamics of African-American political, social, economic, and intellectual struggles as a Transcendence and Political Engagement, (4) to address Black contemporary Spiritual, and political leadership

failure to openly articulate in addressing some of the contemporary social ills and have failed in many instances to stoop to power as a Moral Self Criticism, and (5) analyze the Role of Minister, specifically Black Minister in The Black Church and The Black Community for Change.

Historically the Black church in the United States in particular, has maintained its political independence in order to fulfill its role as the moral conscience of society. The Black church never affiliated itself politically with one exclusive party, but rather took the position of affirming those issues that advanced the cause of the Black community. For instance, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was able to urge the Johnson administration to push legislation for public accommodations, voting rights, and economic justice, while later criticizing it for its policies during the Vietnam War. When Jesse Jackson ran for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, his partisanship signaled a change in the relationship between the Black church and politics. No longer would the church be seen as an independent voice, but rather as an advocate for a particular political persuasion. Today ministers have run for public offices ranging from the local to the national stage as Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Other Black churches find themselves beholden to particular politicians by accepting state and federal funds. The potential threat of losing government aid, should they criticize the administration that funds them, has silenced some churches and caused others to become advocates for their political friends. While we all were horrified by the events of September 11, very few prominent Black religious leaders have publicly questioned the Bush administration's rapid movement toward war with Iraq as King was willing to do

with President Johnson. And those who have sounded more political than prophetic Ministry. From a Prophetic Black Ministry and contemporary post-2004 Presidential Elections prospective, it would be unfair as it has been for government to exclude certain groups from funding if it is providing a society-wide benefit. This is the consensus view seemed to be experiencing by the writer in George W. Bush Administration.

This is quite a contrast with the lack of consensus on this point during Dr. Kings' Prophetic articulations to President Johnson's Administration. When George W. Bush launched his faith-based and community initiative, his aim was to lift barriers that kept faith-based groups from participating on an equal footing with secular providers in the government's funding of social services. Yet that initiative has run into a firestorm of opposition on Capitol Hill. For instance, research has revealed that the Dutch approach on this subject is illuminating. On the question of faith-based groups being able to obtain government grants and contracts on the same basis as secular groups, Dr. Sophie van Bijsterveld of the law faculty at the University of Tilburg said, "If a public authority spends money for an activity, it cannot exclude anyone due to belief or religion; to deny is not possible." Dr. Kees Klop, with the Protestant broad-casting network (NCRV), noted that government helps fund not only his Protestant network, but Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist programming as well. I asked whether some Dutch citizens would say it is a violation of religious freedom, as is often claimed in the United States, to collect taxes from non-Christians, for

example, and then to provide public funding to a Christian group to support its social service activities. Bijsterveld replied that in The Netherlands what would be considered unfair would be for the government to exclude certain groups from public funding. After all, she explained, all pay taxes and if only secular groups could receive the benefits from those taxes, it would not be fair.

In the United States the current major controversy is about whether faith-based groups that receive government funding may still take religion into account in hiring staff members. How is this issue handled in The Netherlands? Under Dutch law, religion may not be taken into account in hiring or firing most employees, but it can be taken into account for persons who fill roles that are important to the religious or ideological identity of an organization. The religious or ideologically distinctive character of organizations is thereby protected.

A. Even though the Election is over and George Bush remains in the Whitehouse, The political, social, economic, and religious disparity within the Black Community and Church persists.

The topic of this research has morally concerned the researcher because of the contents and implications it projects as it reflects to the conscience of the grass roots black Christian churches and communities, the young generation who massively participated in the 2004 elections, without a comprehensive and preferable result across America and the global community. **B. The Church as a Prophetic Community in the articulation of Public Justice:**

It is essential to point out that if the Black Church is viewed as a primary institution, then it is theoretically and philosophically essential to deduce that the Black Church serves as a prophetic community. One could speak of the family and the school as primary institution... The church, however, differs from those earthly institutions. In that it was divinely instituted. The spiritual foundations of the are primary. The church is the house that love built. The black church is an extension of the incarnation. It is more than an organization. Failure to fulfill these tasks wills an ultimate Black Moral Self-Criticism. Ministers have the task instructing and leading others in a deeper understanding of Christian discipleship. For more than two hundred years the black church has been a formidable force in black life. This chronicle of religious history has been well presented by eminent black writers such as W... B. Un Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, Miles Mark Fisher. And Carter G. Woodson,' and many more. Historical discussion provided by Gayraud S. Wilntore in his "Black Religion and Black Radicalism", had substantiated the fact that The Church, especially the black church, serves as a prophetic vision for the black community. Because Black Ministry in the Black Church has been ministry to an oppressed community. This is important and true because black people have been caught up in a bid for survival during their entire sojourn in the United States. The struggle continues in the context of prophetic vision of the Black Church as a community of nation.¹

¹ For more information, see Veronica G. Thomas and Michelle D. James: Indigenous Organizations and Neighborhood Stability: A Selected Assessment of the Role of Black Churches.; Institute for Urban Affairs and Research, Howard University, Washington, DC.

Post 2004 Elections Black Prophetic Ministry, Transcendence, and Political Engagement: The Rise of Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural New Deal Dimension : The Case of the Religious Communities in Liberia..

Black/African-Liberian Church and other spiritual and cultural entities are institutions of governance which are transcendence of political, social, ethnic, and cultural engagement must once again be re-engineered and implemented as future realities in the 21st century and post-conflict Liberia's development. It must be mentioned that those who minister to an oppressed, struggling, marginalized, underprivileged, devalued, underestimated people and their community, must face political and social realities. After all is said and done, those at the bottom of the social order face survival issues. Once again, the Liberian religious, cultural, spiritual, and ethnic communities must continue their struggles from all levels of Liberian realities. "Self help has recently been bandied as a cure all for the needs of the Liberian underclass. Self-help has a long effective history and tradition among Liberian people, especially the indigenous people. The significant progress Liberians have made in many areas of life, especially during the Liberian's experiences of the Doe/Taylor's 27 years holocaust, is a concrete testimony to the self-help Liberian tradition. This tradition through political engagement must persist forever in the Liberian religious institutions and areas of spiritual, cultural, and ethnic fellowship . However, in light of the oppression and repression of the past, there is a need for massive and continuous government assistance to right the wrongs visited upon the Liberian people hundreds of years in this society and in the Doe/Taylor Administration. It is commonly observed that the crisis of good political governance

and human rights relations dominates the arena of Liberian life. This crisis has been precipitated by two factors: (1) determined resistance of reactionary elements in the South to the Supreme Court's momentous decision outlawing segregation in the public schools, and (2) the political, social and radical change.² Therefore African Americans had more control over their religious practices in their communities, which, of course, transcend constructive political engagements within the Black Political organizations. For instance, during the Civil Right Movement, the Black-Baptist Church, The Black Islamic-Muslim Organizations and other religious Faith-Based Initiatives were and are specific engaged in the politics of community defense and other areas of Black Political, Social, Religious, and Community organizations.

Case in point: The Black Churches, (i.e.) The Black Methodist Church, and many Black organizations were more participatory unconstrained emotional services which were sometimes preferred over the quiet, solemn services of other denominations free blacks did not feel it was enough to be accepted in a white congregation, but whites protested independent black organizing their own churches. Free Blacks felt that church was not for the slave, but it was a structure, institution. A corner of the world where whites could not hinder it. Church was the center of Black life. Black churches founded black schools black political movements. Therefore, the Black/African-American Church, historically, is a transcendence of political engagement.

D. Black Moral Self-Criticism:

² For more information, see Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther

One of the great theological insights of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was to see an unbroken line between the Old Testament prophets of social justice and the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was not only a priest. He was also a prophet. If we used in this instance the typologies of Richard Niebuhr, we could say that as prophet, Jesus was “against culture” His words and deeds were iconoclastic vis-à-vis both the religious and political establishments. His sense of the righteousness of God applied to more than personal and interpersonal relationships. Theologically, Jesus was obsessed with the” righteousness of God.’ This has to do with the ethical attributes of God. Jesus came preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15). The “kingdom” of which he spoke is equivalent to the “will of god”.’ Thus, to ‘seek the kingdom” is to seek righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Jesus was not ant legal or antinomian in his out look. He viewed his message in relation to Old Testament Jewish law in terms of ‘promise and fulfillment.’ He challenged his hearers to embody in their convictions and life—styles the substance of God’s requirements He distinguished between the esse (essence) and the bene-esse (nonessentials,) of the Law. His concern for morality_began with the “motives and dispositions of the heart. Thus, if” the root of ethics is God’s righteousness, love of God and neighbor.

For instance, “The Public Ministry of Jesus,” here refers to the manner in which Jesus engaged the evils inherent in the systems of” power in his time and place.’ Religion comes from the Latin word which means reverence for the gods holiness in a system of religious beliefs.” hence, to bind together). Religion usually implies belief

in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed or worshiped. It includes the expression of such a belief in conduct or ritual. Having defined these key terms, let us now look briefly at some of the Black Moral Self-Criticism as reflected on this study, as a basic for our discussion. First, humans have a great propensity for religious experience. Wholesome religious experience contributes to the enrichment, empowerment, and fulfillment of human life. Second, people in our nation are presently faced with a crisis of value in their lives in the areas of politics of values, politics of equality, and politics of vote unequally counted. Young people are confused about the distinction between value and disvalue. Many seem to be facing life situations with no obvious knowledge of the existence of value. This seems to be more pervasive among the very poor and the extremely rich. Yet a crisis of value is wide spread in our midst especially the black community. This, of course, has had a profound implication on the Black Church, The Black Ministers, and Black Moral-Self-Criticism Third;; this discussion assumes that some moral standards need to be inherent in the educative process within the Black Church, The Black Schools, and other Black Organizations. Morals at their best are founded upon and sustained by Black Religious Experiences during their lives struggles in the Western Hemisphere (North America in particular. If these religious sources are diluted or neglected, morals will eventually dissipate, the substance of morality will be lost. And fourth, human beings are born morally neutral. It is a categorical mistake to assert that humans are inherently good or evil. They are potentially either or both, depending upon nurture. It is precisely because of the potential of humans, as free but responsible selves, that moral education is so critical to their growth and

development. This is absolutely factual in the Black Community of today. Many would agree that young black people are growing up without role models and a system of values. Among young black males, there is a 'Blue crisis of gigantic dimensions. It is reflected in the craving for: clothes, sports jackets, and sneakers. Many young boys and young men of great potential have been killed over such items. Drug dealers have cashed in on the sneaker craze. Some maintain a closet full of sneakers: enhance their status. The failure to tenaciously combat this civil war in the black community will have a profound implication of the Black Church as a Black Moral Self-Criticism.

E. The Role of the Minister in Church and Community Change:

It is essential to introduce this aspect of this research by giving a brief historical analysis of the subject in question. During Reconstruction, freed people established their own places to worship. White churches became more segregated because they refused to integrate their facilities or allow blacks to hold leadership roles. By 1866 African Americans had established eleven churches. In the rural areas freed people held church in cabins and outside. Most blacks went to Baptist churches, while others went to Methodist Episcopal Churches. During this time religion played a stronger role in encouraging education among blacks. Freed people also used the church to promote political participation. Old tightly knit slave communities that were on larger plantations begun to break up especially with the spread of family sharecropping and the building of separate cabins. With the failure of Reconstruction and the return of Democratic Party rule, the new autonomy compared favorably to slavery, which helped African American family's churches,

and schools endure to provide a lasting legacy. The oldest African American institution was the church. The church brought African Americans together as no other institution could. By 1906 more than half of the 7 million African Americans age 10 or older belonged to churches. The largest black institution in the United States, the National Baptist Convention, claimed more than 2.2 million members. African American Christians are fundamentalist who tend to read their Bibles literally and worship energetically. In the rural South, black Americans demanded that their ministers evoke powerful, shouting sermons. The greatest ecstasy was often reached in Holiness and Pentecostal churches, which emphasized the personal experience of the Holy Spirit. In much of the rural areas or small towns, churches were the gathering places outside of small business establishments. People held meetings there to discuss items of importance like the migration and movements of blacks to Oklahoma or to Northern cities.

- Atlanta-

Churches did after collections each Sunday to help members in financial distress.

- Louisville — Fifth Baptist Church collected and distributed clothes and money to pay for funeral, burials, and scholarships, and held fund raising drives for orphanages etc. The Black Christians have not vetted fully thought through a theological rationale for mixing faith and politics. If one seeks a logical explanation it moves smoothly from faith to politics, one is not likely to find it. Often black Christians hold to the same theological views as whites in their denomination and yet are more socially concerned and politically active in applying their toward social transformation. It has been main challenge of black theology to under gird this

political activism a theological foundation. Black Church Theology and Political Involvement has been the doctrine of contemporary role of the Minister in the Black Church as a comprehensive and constructive social, political, economic, and moral development and change...

An example of the above analysis can be alluded to: Black history is peopled with men and women whose ideas have had a powerful effect upon the outlook of black Americans. Persons like W. E. B. Du Bois, Sojourner Truth, Booker F. Washington, and Margaret Walker are representative. During more than two hundred years of black church history they have produced the formal expression of ideas that have been the basis for a theology of protest against social injustices a series of serious engagement with black theological discourse will incorporate insights from this rich political tradition of America. Therefore it becomes absolutely essential to point out those conditions of black people in the United States in particular, and the world in general must vigilantly move toward the persistence perpetuation and comprehensive definition of the role of contemporary minister in church and community change...

In essence: a. The Church as a Prophetic Community is a way forward for the Black Liberation struggle.

b. The Call to Return to Tradition is an essential traditional a spiritual philosophy that holds the black social dynamics together.

c. Transcendence and Political Engagement is a prelude to black political empowerment. This development must persist in our community across the globe.

d. Black Moral Self-Criticism is a powerful cleansing and purification aspect of atonement. This is absolutely imperative for the Black Religious Ethics.

e. The Role of the Minister in Church and Community Change has been a tradition since slavery and post slavery. This development has been very successful in many parts of the Black communities across the glob. This movement must continue unabated without compromise.

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9. For more information, see, “Implementing the Faith-Based Initiative” by Dr. Stanley Carlson, from the Public Interest, spring, 2004, pp. 57-74.