

The Church as a Prophetic Ministry: The Emergence of Community Based
Congregations and Commuter Church; The Implications for Prophetic Models and
Content of Expression

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Introduction

Black Prophetic Ministry in the context of Models of Ministry has been explored for prophetic content and expression over the past two to three decades. Expressing from a Traditional Black Christian Leadership and educational perspective, neighborhood and community based churches have served as models which utilized the some "Old-Time Religion" from biblical and historically-proven "discipline approach" used by Jesus.

It is save to articulate that generation ago a major denomination established an extensive missionary presence in central Africa. One particular compound included a chapel, school, health clinic, and community center. Individual homes had been improved, a basic sewage system installed, and a community well dug. Leaders of this compound, in consultation with their denominational leaders, decided to send a team to develop a new mission station some distance to the south. Using primitive maps and local guides, they plotted a three-day trek through the jungle to the targeted area. It seemed a demanding but reasonable plan. The first morning, before dawn, the contingent of European missionaries and African porters set out. They arrived on schedule, just after sunset, at the anticipated first day's destination. They pitched their tents, prepared a basic meal, ate quickly, and went to bed. They arose in predawn darkness, ate a hurried breakfast. packed the gear, and headed out again. The terrain was steeper than anticipated and the underbrush along the trail thicker than expected. but they arrived at the end of day two at the planned location. Utterly exhausted, they ate quickly and pitched camp hastily, knowing it would be a short night.

They arose the third day before dawn, confident they were on target to arrive at their ultimate destination by nightfall. The missionaries arrived at the center of the camp to find the porters sitting on their packs, clearly not ready to depart. "We're not going step further," a spokesperson said, "until our souls catch our bodies..¹"

¹ For more information, See Howard E. Friend Jr. Foreword by Loren B. Mead "Recovering The Scared Center". Church Renewal from the Inside Out.

Rising to the Challenge and Reflections on Leadership: The Black Community Based Church Dimension

Looking within the church itself for sources of Prophetic Ministry for Models of Ministry as a means to explore for prophetic content and expression, special attention must be paid to small to mid-size congregations; with comparative analysis between churches that emerge from community based congregation and commuter church. In many instances, the European Missionary Churches in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa were not community based model churches. These entities had specific clandestine objective. Some of which were (1) to civilize the native Africans, (2) to Christianize the savages, (3) to westernize the black Africans, and (4) to exploit their natural resources. It must be mentioned that contemporary Black/African churches need leaders who can rise to a formidable challenge, laced with danger and rich with opportunity, leaders who are self-transcending and self-motivated, inspired and inspiring. Such leaders are grounded in the best of tradition, yet discern and then embody fresh vision for the future. They are of deep rooting and clear personhood, flexible, resilient, and innovative. Based on comparative prospective, Churches that emerged from within the community, especially the black community has had blend character and competence. They have strong interpersonal relationships with the people and they are part of the people. The community based church physical and personal appearance and presence in the community create a strong bound and personal gracefulness, balance, and a sense of spiritual dependence and authority. Its memberships are called to artfulness and hard work for the sustainability of the community and its occupants. This, of course might not be the same with commuter based church congregation. This group is not absolutely loyalty to the community.

It is essential to elucidate that within the church itself, the source of prophetic ministry, models of ministry can explore for prophetic content and expression based on the following traditional proactive and prophetic activism and ministry as it relates to contemporary dimensions. The first is that there must exist prophetic and holistic black ministries and churches New and modified traditional black leadership, who must blend assertiveness and receptivity, firmness and flexibility, certainty and open mindedness. These new leaders must have growing self-awareness, a commitment to personal and professional development, an openness to feedback, and an attentiveness to self-care. These leaders axe ready to be assertive yet collaborative and comfortable with community based partnership as well. Such qualities, including those explored in the subject of this research, emerge from experiences, struggles, commitment to recover the sacred center of community empowerment. For as a prophetic leaders, especially black leader, the life of faith and the call to leadership can become frustrating and some times idealistically fragmented. There is so much to do. Issues and people. and agendas, reading lists and endless meetings beckon, clamor, for our attention, There are problems to solve and to resolve, letters to write and phone calls to make. There are - enough hours in the day, and our bodies race ahead of our souls.

In essence, from a black prophetic ministry prospective, all spiritual training rests upon the Bible and the Holy Spirit, and will empower you to be a leader who moves with authority within your community. You will experience individualized, specialized, one-on-one mentoring, allowing you to develop your unique areas of giftedness and ministry.

Your in-depth exploration of what the Bible says about the vocation/ministry you pursue enables you to become an empowered leader. As stated by C. Eric Lincoln , “A good way to understand a people is to study their religion, for religion is addressed to that most sacred schedule of values around which the expression and the meaning of life tends to coalesce. . . . Religion, seriously considered, is perhaps the best prism to cultural understanding.”

The study of the Black church in the content of Prophetic Ministry is critical in understanding the true character of Black people. It was one of the first independent institutions organized by Africans in the Americas during and after slavery. Born out of struggle and oppression, the Black church has been the vanguard for social, economic, political, emotional, and spiritual liberation of African people. It has produced the most eloquent and educated visionaries who advanced the movements of freedom for Black people throughout the centuries, and gave them dignity when all other American voices were noticeably silent. It has maintained its place at the center of the Black community as its only consistent advocate for justice and equality. Alone, it has been willing to sing “the Lord’s song in a strange land.” As we view the past with gratitude and wonder we must ask ourselves What does the future hold for this enduring institution? What are the issues that are still left unanswered and the mountains still left to climb? What are the potential problems that will test the Black church in the future? I would like to suggest ten challenges that the Black church will have to face. The Black-African people desire a traditional prophetic ministry with contemporary vision of political, social, economic, spiritual, and moral leadership and liberation.

Political or Prophetic

Historically the Black church 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. 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 have sounded more political than prophetic. How will this growing trend toward

the political arena and partisanship impact the Black church's ability to maintain its prophetic role in society?

Generation Gap

Younger versus Elder The recent controversy over the movie *Barbershop* dramatically demonstrated the strained relationship between the generations. Many of the millennial's generation (this generation's youth) recognize the name Rosa Parks only because of their familiarity with the rap song of that title, performed by the hip-hop rap group Outkast. This disconnect with Black history and the Black struggle has caused tremendous concern from the parents and adults of this generation's youth. Historically the Black church has been at the forefront of reaching out to the younger generation and developing programs to meet their needs. But this was done in an era when most youth were brought to church by parents, who were involved in the church themselves. With the growing trend toward teen pregnancy and single parenthood, more of our youth are growing up unchurched and irreligious. They have no knowledge of or affiliation with today's church or religion in general. Some don't even own "church clothes" and are unfamiliar with basic church liturgy or hymns that we once thought every Black person knew. The absence of church role models is being filled by hip-hop and gangsta rap artists. The deaths of Tupac and Biggie were as significant to many of our youth as the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X were to their parents. How will the Black church face this growing generation gap? What will the Black church do to reach young people where they are today? Will the church need to embrace unconventional methods and rethink its approach in order to reach a growing generation of unchurched and irreligious youth?

Rich Man, Poor Man

Andrew Hacker, in his book *Two Nations*, begins with the premise that in America we are becoming two separate communities: one Black, one White, separate and unequal. While this reality remains true between the races, it is becoming just as true within the Black race. The expanding Black middle class, which makes up a growing number of all Black households today, is moving further away from its poorer underclass brothers and sisters. The recent CEO appointments of Richard Parsons, AOL Time Warner; Kenneth Chenault, American Express; and Franklin Raines, Fannie Mae, highlight this new Black movement into the economic mainstream. The Black church was once the incubator for most of the economic, educational, and professional advancement in the Black community. The opportunities created and developed through the gains of the civil rights movement have made that less the case today. The Black middle class have been the chief beneficiaries of these gains in the Black community and are beginning to flex their economic muscles. Well-to-do Blacks that once were prevented from moving into moderately wealthy communities are now finding their options to be limitless. Buppies are moving out of the hood into upwardly mobile suburban enclaves and distancing themselves from the poor neighborhoods of their parents. Atlanta, Greater Washington, D.C., and other large metropolitan areas are developing Black housing communities for the professional, middle-income Black family. Black congregations are beginning to follow this Black suburbanization, and several megachurches have sprung up in these new buppie enclaves. Will this growing economic separation within the Black community serve to alienate us further and to cause greater distrust, jealousy, and resentment? Have the talented tenth forgotten the challenge of DuBois to uplift the community?

Heaven-bound or Earth-ground

The latest growth trend in the Black community is the megachurch. Megachurches with memberships between 10,000 and 25,000 members are springing up all over Black America. The megachurch, with its multifaceted programs, businesses, and, in most cases, media ministries, has brought with it the temptation toward kingdom building on earth. Some of these large, costly structures reside in poor, crumbling Black communities. Will this tendency toward kingdom building detract from the greater good of community building? Will celebrity swallow up the churches' true mission of service? Will this further exacerbate the indifference and alienation felt within the Black community between the haves and the have nots? What of ethical issues of stewardship and accountability? If the church is to represent Christ as community, how does the Black church reconcile this extravagant excess in a time of economic extremity? Can the church truly justify the investment of the resources needed to operate and maintain these multiplying megachurches?

Mono or Multiculturalism

When Tiger Woods declared himself "Cablinasian," he reflected a growing trend in the African-American community toward multiculturalism. More people of multiethnic origins are rejecting the one-drop rule in determining their ethnic identity. The 2000 census saw an increase in the number of individuals who opted to identify themselves as multiracial instead of African-American or some other race. Interracial marriages, once taboo, are now on the increase. The music industry has capitalized on this growing tendency by combining

unlikely and divergent music styles that appeal to today's generation of music consumers. Gospel music has also followed this trend by combining hip-hop, rap, and contemporary Christian with traditional gospel. What implications will this new trend toward multiculturalism have for the future of the Black church? How will this tendency impact the unique personality of the Black church and its way of expression? Will the Black church need to expand its arms to embrace the idiosyncrasies of other cultures and heritages to remain current in an ever-changing ethnic landscape? Will this multicultural change make the need for the Black church unnecessary in the future? If it does remain, will the Black church of today recognize the church of tomorrow?

Denominational or Nondenominational

The Black church has always utilized various organizational forms while maintaining its unique identity. The split of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion churches and the existence of various Baptist branches confirm the fluidity of the organizational structures that the Black church has been willing to embrace. However, these changes have for the most part happened within the traditional denominational structure. Today more churches are opting for independence and are carving out their own set of doctrines, beliefs, sacraments, and organizational structures. Nondenominationalism appeals to postmodern minds that tend to reject organizational affiliations that they view as being confining and restrictive. How will old-line Black denominations respond to this growing tendency toward organizational independence in the church? How will this nondenominational tendency impact the future of denominationalism among Black churches?

Conservative or Charismatic

The rise of neo-Pentecostalism also challenged the traditions of conservative Black churches. Neo-Pentecostalism has contributed to phenomenal church growth in urban areas where many conservative mainstream churches were dying, unable to proselytize new, younger members. The AME church, under the leadership of John Bryant, Jr., and the Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship, led by its founder, Paul S. Morton, are examples of two mainstream conservative denominations that have embraced neo-Pentecostalism, resulting in exponential church growth. The movement has also been effective in attracting a wider socioeconomic base than its more conservative parent organizations, whose appeal has generally been to the middle class and above. They have been successful in building a membership that represents the broad socioeconomic spectrum of the Black community. They have also been successful in blending high spirituality with sociopolitical activism, much in the tradition of the Black church. High emotionalism, spirited worship, and speaking in tongues have accompanied neo-Pentecostalism. Yet in most cases the move toward neo-Pentecostalism has come under fire from more traditional church members.

Gender Issues

Black women have been and continue to be the backbone of the Black church. Today they make up 66 to 80 percent of the church's membership. There are 2.5 to 3 females for every male member. While there have always been female preachers in the church, dating back to slavery, historically women have assumed a supportive role in the patriarchally dominated church. Today more and more women are answering the divine call to ministry and are enrolling in seminaries across the nation. While some denominations have been quick to embrace women in ministry, others have been hesitant to ordain women and allow them the full privileges to minister as their male counterparts. Those who have been ordained and are pastoring congregations find themselves limited administratively by the glass ceiling of gender. How will the Black church address this bias that continues to stymie women based solely upon their gender?

Media or Men

The introduction of technology has forever changed our understanding of how we view the church. The media has created a new, innovative way for the Black church to reach people who would never have stepped into their sanctuary. It has made religion convenient and accessible to everyone. Preachers, healers, and teachers of the Word have become celebrities overnight, and churchpeople have become media icons. Church events that once appealed to only a small specific audience now sell out stadiums around the nation. But is bigger better? Does the impersonal nature of media ministry prevent the church from truly ministering to the needs of people? Does the inaccessibility of today's televangelist send to humanity the wrong message of an unapproachable God? Jesus was always accessible to all people, thus the woman with the issue of blood was able to touch Him and find healing. Is the church in danger of losing its human touch? How will this disconnect be exacerbated by the technological advances of the future?

There are other challenges that the church will undoubtedly face. The society of tomorrow will hardly resemble the communities of today. How will the church face the uncertainties of the future? By remembering

the only indispensable entity for the church's future success. That indispensable element is found not in an idea, program, or philosophy, but instead in a person. As long as Jesus Christ remains at the center of the Black church its future will be assured. James Weldon Johnson put it best in the last stanza of the Negro national anthem:

"God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way, Thou who hast by Thy might, led us into the light, Keep us forever in the path, we pray."

5 Ingredients Every Church Will Need to Face the Future

Christ Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Jesus must remain at the center of the church. While cultural worship styles and various approaches to ministry have their place, nothing must overshadow Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. If the church desires to reach a generation of youth who believe in "keeping it real," the most real being the church can offer is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must be Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

Compassion/Charity John 13:35 says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." There is no substitute in the church for love. It is what we as children of God owe every person (Romans 13:8), and it has the ability to compensate for any of our shortcomings (1 Peter 4:8). Love must be the motivating factor in our service to God (John 14:15) and to humanity (John 21:15-17). While the gifts of healing, prophecy, apostleship, and others have their place in the church, the greatest gift is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Creativity While principles are constant, standards do change. The church must be willing to be innovative without being inconsistent. The apostle Paul's approach was to become "all things to all men, that I might . . . save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Tradition is not sacred. The church must be open to new ideas and new approaches for reaching and ministering to people.

Collaboration The Black church is not owned by any individual, group, or community. The leaders of today must be ready and willing to pass the torch of leadership to the next generation. Jesus chided His disciples when they tried to reprimand someone who healed in Jesus' name but was not following them. He told them, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:50). Each generation must be allowed to reinvent the church to meet the challenges of its age. Programs, procedures, and protocols must never take precedence over people. New wine must not be forced into old wine bottles (Matthew 9:17).

Cooperative Leadership The principle of administration espoused by Christ was servant leadership (Matthew 23:10-12). Spiritual gifts are based on the notion of cooperation and servanthood. The church is called the body (1 Corinthians 12:27), with Christ as its head (Ephesians 4:15). Paul's use of the body to illustrate how the church should be organized and function gives us a clear mandate to work collaboratively. If the Black church of the future is to reach its full potential, it will need to embrace cooperative leadership.

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(a) religious disparity that has had contemporary implication on today's church, even on today's political, social, and ethical, and moral consensus and debates. (i.e.,) The Pledge of Allegiance, the Separation of State and Church, etc...) Also, the position taken by "Pope

Cornelius who elected by the judgment of God and of Christ,” (Cyprian, EP. Iv, 24), by the testimony of almost all the clergy, by the vote of the people present, by the consent of the agreed priests and of good men, at the time when no one had been made before him, when the place of Fabian, that is the place of Peter, Pope Cornelius’s position is an examporary of contemporary Leftist Religious position with an implication of the doctrine of the New Testament’s interpretation of religion and man. This, of course, is a clear manifestation of Today’s contemporary Church. These arguments, debates, and issues are eminent in our day today political, social, cultural, spiritual, ethical, and human life.

References

The two Latin letters will be found in all editions of CYPRIAN. A better text is in MERCATI, *D'alcuni muori sussidi per la critica del testo di S. Cipriano* (Rome, 1899). They will be found with the fragments in COUSTANT, *Epp. Rom. Pontt.* And in ROUTH, *Reliquæ Sacræ*. There is a spurious letter to St. Cyprian in the appendix to his works, another to Lupicinus of Vienne, and two more were forged by Pseudo-Isidore. All these will be found in the collections of councils and in MIGNE. The pseudo-Cyprianic *Ad Novatianum* is attributed to Cornelius by NELKE, *Die Chronol. der Correspondenz Cyprians* (Thorn, 1902); but it is by an unknown contemporary. On Cornelius see TILLEMONT, III; *Acta SS.* 14 Sept.; BENSON, *Cyprian* (London, 1897). The *Acta* of St. Cornelius are valueless.”

In his *Commentary*, cap. xix. p. 57, ed. Baltimore, 1847. This useful edition contains the text, and a translation, with valuable notes, by the Late Bishop Whittingham of Maryland.

His elaborate chapter (xivii. and the note) must be read by all students who wish to understand the matter, or even to read Cyprian advantageously.

See the last portion of Section Second of Neander's *Church History*.

Defensio Fid. Nicaen. Works, vol. v., p. 374.

Dr. Schaff; *History of Christian Church*, vol. ii, p. 851.