GILLESPIE, ROBIN RACHELLE COX, Ph.D. Is the Leadership in the Black Church Complicit in the Perpetuation of Dominance and Oppression? (2009) Directed by Dr. H. Svi Shapiro. 155pp.

This dissertation investigates the relationship between church leadership and parishioners and hypothesizes that the leadership in the black church is complicit in the perpetuation of dominating and oppressive behaviors within the communities that are directly and indirectly served by the church. Chapter I chronicles socio-economic patterns in black church leadership from the time of slavery to the 21st Century and documents probable reasons and purposes for the behaviors of leaders. Issues concerning power and dominance, denominationalism, racism, classism, and sexism are integral to the investigation. Two central questions arise: (1) "Does the religious leadership of the black church unknowingly train congregations to internalize negative feelings, connotations, and behaviors regarding critical reflection, critical thinking, and critical questioning." (2) "Is this lack of critical questioning detrimental to a forward movement of liberation and social justice for African American people?"

Chapter II reviews the concepts of authority, power, and commodification as they relate to the silencing and injustice encountered when followers fail to voice their criticisms or other opinions. The concepts of authoritarianism and free-market fundamentalism as described by Cornel West in Democracy Matters (2004) are used to interrogate the relationship between leadership and parishioner and to determine the degree to which parishioners are encouraged to reflect upon and to question practices and behaviors of the leadership.

Chapter III reports the results of the interviews with five black church leaders who reflected on their own practices. They were questioned about who influenced them, their accepted philosophy of leadership, their relationships with "others", and their efforts to bring about social justice in their communities. Female and male black church leaders were interviewed in an effort to illuminate typical trends and patterns regarding leadership styles, attitudes toward critical questioning, and social justice practices. They were also asked to reflect upon their methods for promoting interaction among the congregation. It was determined that mentorship, self-identification, interaction and relationship have the ability to affect how leaders view, interact, and work for others. The general conclusions addressed personal, economic, and spiritual concepts that create complex situations when determining the needs of the people versus the needs of the self.

The concluding chapter reviews each chapter's themes and issues a call to action that involves a paradigm shift from asking for change from the leaders to asking for change from the followers. The church body will renew their ability to imagine that which seems impossible (Caputo, 2001), will use the voice to speak out for alternative ways of worship (Cox, 1973), will question and examine practices of the leaders, and will accept new beginnings (Brueggemann, 2001) that engage the prophetic and transformational rather than maintain the stagnant and conventional ways of worshiping.

IS THE LEADERSHIP IN THE BLACK CHURCH

COMPLICIT IN THE PERPETUATION OF

DOMINANCE AND OPPRESSION?

By

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H. Svi Shapiro
Committee Chair

To my husband Harry Gillespie

Your support through this second educational journey will be remembered.

To my parents, Ms. Gloria G. Cox and Rev. Robert L. Cox

Your living example provided the foundation and strength to write.

To my children Jharrison and Leoncia

We have learned to study together—continue to support each other's scholarly endeavors.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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PRELUDE

LIFTING UP THE NEED FOR CRITICAL QUESTIONING

As far back as I can remember I have been in the church, taking an active part in the service as a member, musician, the daughter of the pastor, and the granddaughter of the oldest Elder in the family denomination. Some people say that everything they learned was taught in kindergarten. Well, everything that I have learned has its roots in the testimonial services of Wednesday night Bible Study, the hard-to-get-to-on-time pre-service Sunday School classes, the hot and humid summer Bible Schools, the Friday night fervor of choir rehearsals, and of course, the culmination of all of it—the 11:00am worship (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003). I learned morals and values as traditionally defined in the Black church. This is the place where I was originally taught to *"pray for those who despitefully use you and say all manner of false things against you"* (Matthew 5:44) as well as the most honored *"thou shall nots"* (Exodus 20: 3-17). It is the place where children were told that they would be taught the right things so that when they grew older they would maintain relationship with God (Proverbs 22:6). Church was the place where girls grew up to become leaders and boys were "groomed" to become leaders. My experience in the church with all of its honor and respect is what made me question the church, the institution I define as the spiritual foundation of my life.

The Black church is not just a building or a gathering place; it is a culture and a community with a language and personality of its own. The culture has its own art forms, practices, language, and traditions. For example, music as an art form is polished and performed in church. In my Christian cultural experience, to be an accomplished

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musician one must be able to create and sing songs without instrumentation except the inherent percussion that comes with hand clapping and foot stomping. The elders sing in rhythms that have labels like "short meter, common meter, or long meter." These rhythms, which have definitions based on the number of syllables in a line, are called out to the congregation by male deacons who engage the congregation in a corporate worship experience by "lining" hymns in this manner. Sacred traditions are continued in the black church. These rituals include the washing of feet (John 13:4-17) and re-creating the procession to the Mount of Olives as was done at the conclusion of the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30). This Easter procession is a beautiful ceremony accompanied with appropriate singing and women dressed in white prepared to take the most reverent care of the communion linens as carefully as two girl scouts would fold the stars and stripes.

The church is a family of families. We are sisters and brothers by name and we greet each other as such. As family members, each person is trusted to help in the development or the "raising" of the children. Aunts and uncles who are no kin are just as responsible for one's upbringing as any aunt or uncle who lives hundreds of miles away. The "elders" are given ultimate respect regardless of their sometimes ungodly transgressions.

My first inclination to question church leaders came when I recognized inconsistencies in the behaviors of other Christians who were in authority in the church. I quickly realized that critical inquiry was considered disrespectful to those in leadership positions. For the first time I felt what I now label as "oppressed" realizing that I had no voice to disapprove of the 65 year-old man who conspicuously touched the hem of my

shorts as we were riding in the church van to Sunday School camp. The other children watched and asked why I said nothing, but I already sensed that his eldership would override my report of his sexual misconduct. Even if I had a voice, it was not considered credible over the voice of the Chairman of the Deacon Board. We later learned that this man had a previous legal and well-documented record of promiscuous behavior and that church leadership knew about it. My mother was appalled and frightened because she knew that this gentleman had keys to our then home, the church parsonage. This experience caused me to critically question the teachings of the church, the educational and spiritual foundation of my life. I was dismayed to have to accept such inconsistent behavior in a church leader without being able to expose the dirty underside of his nature. I could not understand the inconsistent behavior of this leader, given the teachings of the scripture. More importantly, I could not accept the neglect of other church leaders who permitted him to assume a top leadership position in the church.

This incident shook the foundations of my trust in leaders because the church was so critical to my educational and spiritual development. Why do I say that the church is the educational foundation of my life? Before ever attending school, I had already spent much time in religious instruction. My father was a minister who stood in many pulpits sending messages of deliverance and salvation to impoverished and lower middle class parishioners. He told his congregations that no matter how far away from Biblical principles they traveled their Father would forgive, welcome them home, and perhaps even throw a party (Luke 15:11-32)! Sunday school teachers made sure that we children understood that life's circumstances would challenge us but that we would need to

depend on God for instruction. Yes, I learned about Heaven and hell. I also learned to treat people with civility and to expect people to treat me in the same manner. I learned that tithes and offerings are required scripturally but that this funding pays the mortgage on the church, keeps the lights flickering, and supports the salaries of pastors like my father. This financial lesson was an education in itself because the spiritual and the temporal forces overlap at this point. The concept of tithing caused me to question church principles and the behavior of church leaders where money was concerned. The needs of the congregation and the needs of the spiritual leader sometimes seemed in conflict. I have sympathized when parishioners who wanted to tithe in order to obey their scriptural mandate could not because they did not have the money. I felt further inner conflict when pastors continued to demand pledges, membership dues, and donations even above and beyond the tithe. I often felt a disconnection between the economic state of the members and the community surrounding the church and the seeming affluence of the church leaders. I needed a voice, an opportunity to express my disillusionment, but I had none.

Church was the place where we were taught to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Love and faith were the keys to everything. Scripture instructs that when people use you and say all manner of false witness against you, you should be willing to forgive, forget and offer prayer for them. We learned that God was love and that He loved all people. However, there were always distinctions made about who was and was not acceptable in the church. These exclusions were often supported by scripture and most times by the leaders' interpretation of scripture. I felt confused because many of the

"unacceptable" were acceptable if their talent was needed in the workings of the church. Again, I silently began to question who had the authority to decide whom God loves. If God is love and could find favor in a harlot and her family (Joshua 6), could God not find favor for anyone else considered "other." If I were "the other," would I have access to God through the church and through the leadership?

My internal discontent with church leadership intensified, but as the daughter of a minister who had served Primitive Baptists, United Methodists, Congregationalists and followers of the United Church of Christ, I assumed that I had the right to question the leadership of the church both as a citizen in a democracy and as a believer in a faith that values free will. While participating in the formality of each denomination, however, I began to realize that most people blindly accept the dictates of the church leaders whether they make much sense or not. Most lay people have no opinion or feel no autonomy over the actions that frame the manner in which they live their spiritual lives (Appiah, 2005). It is doubtful that people even understand what they are professing when affirming their faith: "I believe…the Holy Catholic Church…" (General Conference, 2005). From congregation to congregation, there are varying rituals and routines that church members rarely question. People just seem to follow. However, the tenants of my belief leave me with the understanding that there is power in speaking up and voicing one's opinions on the critical issues of belief. Scripture even recognizes the value of expression in these verses: *"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth…out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing" (James 3: 5, 10).*

Participating in Christianity, however, should mean approving and disapproving where appropriate. There is more to this faith involvement than learning to be complacent and content with the requests of leaders who may selfishly manipulate unsuspecting followers. It is likely that this unquestioning response to the requests and rituals supported by the leadership in the Black Church has a great deal to do with how African Americans operate within relationships (Bauman, 1995), both individual and group. These automatic responses contribute to the manner in which congregants respond to situations within a variety of relationships, such as in education and across the generations.

It is with much apprehension that I embark upon this journey to question that which I have been taught to accept by faith and faith alone. Questioning the leadership of the black church may be viewed as negating faith, working against "the plan," or following a satanic urge to disrupt the church as one pastor recently exhorted from the pulpit. Ironically, it is this type of discourse that has caused me to question how leadership styles affect the manner in which followers learn to initiate and respond behaviorally in communicative situations in the church, in the community, locally and nationally. An example of this response to criticism is the storm that arose when Rev. Jeremiah Wright made controversial political comments from the pulpit in his church. Emotionally charged statements were pulled from the sermon and used to present a new and disruptive variable to the 2008 presidential election process. These statements had the potential to change the direction of voting based on the public reaction to the statements. Why did this well-respected pastor make history in the 2008 election

primaries? Reverend Wright, pastor of one of the largest United Church of Christ congregations in the country, had been Barack Obama's pastor of over twenty years when the message broke to the media. Laced with emotional references to the African American history of slavery and discrimination and presented in the arousing charismatic rhetorical style of many black ministers, this sermon was actually an intimate conversation (call and response "AMEN") between a pastor and his predominantly black congregation; however, it was used as a tool to try to damage the presidential campaign of Barack Obama. The image seen in the news was that of Reverend Wright making harsh statements about equality and social justice in America and members of his congregation waving their hands and screaming "Amen" in the background. It is clear that there was more to the sermon than the statements pulled from it, and that the media's presentation of the message had much to do with posturing in an election year. However, it must be understood that one who speaks from the pulpit undertakes great responsibility for the message he or she brings to the congregation. What used to be a private place of discussion between African American pastors and members is now open to all, thanks to technology. Therefore, a politically charged personal conversation with the church community is not so personal anymore. When reviewing this one incident of Black Church pastoral leadership in action, the reaction of congregation and outsiders, and the political clutter that resulted, I question whether or not these pastors even recognize the power and responsibility they have been given. Scripture again speaks to this point: *"Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Psalm 34:13).*

The central question of this study surfaces again: "Is there a practice of oppressive leadership in the black church that contributes to extinguishing the voices of large numbers of congregants?" Do these leadership behaviors perpetuate oppression and discourage necessary work for social justice that should come from the inside the black church out? It is worth questioning whether or not in the example of Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Barack Obama anyone in a congregation of a few thousand members questioned the manner in which the message was delivered, the language, or the vocabulary chosen? Did anyone feel the freedom or the permission to do so? In general, what is the posture of the leadership when the followers inquire critically regarding the teachings, the beliefs, the actions, and/or the administration of the church? What do the answers to these questions reveal as it relates to the struggle between humanization, often seen as one of the craved spoils in the civil rights movement led by church leaders, and dehumanization, which according to Paula Freire, is "…a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (1993). Cornel West, a major voice in Christian ethics and philosophy today, captures the goal of being Christian in the following passage:

> To be a Christian—a follower of Jesus Christ—is to love
> wisdom, justice, and love freedom. This is the radical love
> in Christian freedom and the radical freedom in Christian
> love that embraces Socratic questioning, prophetic witness,
> and tragicomic hope…To be a Christian is to live
> dangerously, honestly, freely—to step up in the name of
> love as if you many land on nothing, yet to keep stepping
> because the something that sustains you no empire can give
> you and no empire can take away…This is the kind of
> vision and courage required to enable the renewal of
> prophetic, democratic Christian identity in the age of the
> American Empire (West, 2004, p. 172).

As West affirms here, one of the central tenets of Christian practice is freedom—the ability to "live dangerously, honestly and freely." Churches must recognize that no empire, denomination, or specific leader should be permitted to remove that freedom. We must identify and name questionable practices or questionable messages presented by our church leadership and object, criticize, and seek corrective measures for these practices.

Another question in this search for responsible leadership from the church is what is the role of the church in seeking social justice and in eliminating the oppression suffered from racism, classism, and sexism? Ordinarily, this conversation takes place from the perspective of the dominant group over the minority group whether it be the African American, the poor, the gay, or the woman. It is somewhat different for one within the minority group to look inside the minority group for socially unjust behaviors that affect the very people that belong to the same faction. To ask the minority to look at its own complicity in perpetuating oppression seems to contradict the concept of majority versus minority oppression. In fact, to press the issue is particularly painful because the black church has valued itself as the bonding agent for African Americans. African Americans have traditionally praised the church and its leadership as the cohesive force that has held the community together through periods of slavery, oppression, discrimination, inequality, and hidden agendas. Theologian C. Eric Lincoln said, "…for African Americans, a people whose total experience has been a sustained condition of multiform stress, religion is never far from the threshold of consciousness, for whether it is embraced with fervor or rejected with disdain, it is the focal element of the black experience" (Collins, 2005).

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This dissertation will explore the complex dimensions of pastoral leadership in the black church. It will interrogate the possible effects of pastoral leadership styles upon the congregations involved by researching the religious, social, and political implications of church leadership. Chapter one will review the history of Christian leadership from the time of slavery to contemporary times. The intention is to demonstrate patterns of social leveling that serve to maintain power structures developed for economic and social control. There will be a historical review of how Christianity was delivered to slaves in America recognizing that Christianity was not necessarily the chosen religion of most transported Africans.   I suggest that the history of the passing down of Christianity to slaves is similar to a litany—the dominant culture made the statements of faith, passed down the stories, the curses, the parables, and the laws with knowledge of the responses that they desired. I also suggest that participation in this litany of receiving Christianity under the historical context of slavery promoted the initiation of manipulative religion in the Black Church. It is hypothesized that Black Church leaders continue to perpetuate a slave-like mentality within the churches by practicing behaviors that discourage followers from critical questioning, critical reflection, and overt examination of issues pertaining to worship and belief. Chapter one records the historical development of black church leadership through three key periods of time: Slavery, Civil Rights, and the present.

Chapter two will examine concepts of authoritarianism and loss of voice as they relate to the ability or inability of worshippers to critically question interpretations, methodologies, ideologies, and/or doctrine in the black church. A thorough examination of the hegemonic and hierarchical structures that have promoted contexts for "devoicing" and "internalized devoicing" will be conducted to explore their contributions to oppression, discrimination, and inequality enforced by the dominant culture. Questions posed are the following: Does the religious leadership of the black church internalize negative feelings, connotations, and behaviors regarding critical reflection, critical thinking, and critical questioning. Is this lack of critical questioning detrimental to the forward movement of liberation and social justice for African American people? Is it Christianity itself that causes this fear or the result of the delivery of organized religion in the institutionalized church?

The second chapter further examines whether or not parishioners have forfeited the ability to think, reflect, and question stated philosophies in this panoptical experience called membership. It will look at stated behaviors and practices of ministerial leadership that may promote a panoptical experience. Given these practices (and perhaps interpretation of scripture), has the membership internalized a fear of questioning interpretation of scripture, church policy, and or church decisions? Have the followers decided that it is better to just follow even when they know that the decisions, the interpretations, and the directives may be in error? The people may have operated under the watchful eye of leadership so long that they anticipate the wants and needs of the ministry without questioning the validity of the actions and how those actions will

ultimately affect others encountered (Appiah, 2005). In this chapter, the role of the "other" in society becomes a critical focus of the church and of this study: What roles do women accept in congregations and why? What have the church followers accepted in teaching as it relates to gender? How have the followers responded to issues of sexuality and sex? What inconsistencies seem to exist in the church in its treatment of homosexuals? What freedoms have the followers ultimately given up while operating under the regime of current Black Church leadership? What sacrifices have the followers experienced as a result of operating without critical thinking, critical reflection, and critical questioning? How does this silence and voicelessness of the membership intersect with the larger politics of community, state, and country?

To add a dimension of empirical evidence to this qualitative study, chapter three will offer the personal observations, responses and commentary from five African-American church leaders who were interviewed about their leadership styles. This interview offers each church leader an opportunity to respond to the history of leadership in the church and the effects of their leadership on their followers. Within this group of five (5) pastors, I interview both female and male church leaders to gain a multi-gendered perspective regarding the historical viewpoint. They respond to issues of leadership styles, critical questioning by their followers, social justice through a prophetic philosophy, classism, sexism, and most of all, the effect of their teaching styles on the future of the church, community, and nation. I interject Biblical texts in the narrative from time to time in an effort to create a discourse between the theologians, the scripture, and the hypotheses of this dissertation project.

Chapter four will request that there is some form of action that can be taken to to break the cycle as well as to end the perpetuation of oppressive behaviors in the leadership of the black church. Bauman, in Life in Fragments, wrote that anytime one group gains more liberation another group may suffer (Bauman, 1995). The question lies in what one is willing to give up so that others possibly grow. Full of potential is the church that works for the development of relationships built on communication of information, critical reflection of information, and action (West, 2004). What possibilities could be achieved if congregations were given leadership that promotes critical thinking and a prophetic philosophy (Cone, 2005)? Is it possible that the church could again take on the persona of the "linchpin of the community" in not only word but deed" (Collins, 2005)?

I believe that this move towards a more liberational and prophetic philosophy for the congregation sets the example for a more liberational and prophetic philosophy for one's life. Bauman reminds us that there is no guarantee that this more liberational and prophetic stance will assure anyone a better existence (1995). However, Caputo spoke of the belief of the impossible being possible when combined with faith, hope, and love (2001). One of the things that I do carry from my traditional upbringing in the Black Church is the continued belief in achieving that which sometimes seems impossible. I believe that the church leadership can demonstrate and teach the effects of faith, hope, and love in a prophetic manner in which people begin to act out for others. Critical reflection, critical questioning, critical thinking would effect a change in how we interact with others causing us to behave in a manner that promotes a positive change for others.

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Caputo asks that religion [in its historical and institutional form] test itself against itself as it relates to loyalty and works which is the love of God (2001). He also stated that love is not restricted, not an investment, and cannot be traded, sold, or purchased (2001). Therefore, there should be neither fear nor restriction on critical reflection, critical questioning or critical thinking as it relates to the church. Critical questioning may lead to the possibility of transforming the future and helping others in our society. "When thinking and acting in this manner, we can experience the translated, transformed…and the transcendent; it is the movement that it names, the deed that it demands, for the love of God is something to do" (Caputo, 2001).

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CHAPTER I

THE LITANY: A HISTORICAL LOOK AT CHRISTIAN

LEADERSHIP FROM AMERICAN SLAVERY TO PRESENT

While attending a conference on African American culture and experience, I talked with a young man who was puzzled that I did not admit to knowing much about the history of Christianity nor the history of the Black church. He chastised me for not giving myself credit for knowledge of the Bible given my experience as a Christian. I responded that my studies of church history are an educational experience that is clearly connected to but different from my personal study of the Bible. I have had a continuing interest in the history of the church as well as the contemporary issues which face the church. Historical studies have opened spaces for exploration of how Christianity and Christian leadership were delivered to African slaves during colonial times as well as how Christianity and Christian leadership have evolved over time.

Church history and particularly studies of Christianity have been of prominent interest since the days of the Roman Empire. Returning to this era permits scholars, philosophers, and theologians to investigate how Christian leadership styles have evolved from slavery until today. Frameworks for Christian leadership-parishioner relationships today can be compared to similar relationships during Constantinian times. In <u>The Ethics of Identity</u> by Kwame Anthony Appiah quotes John Stewart Mill who said,

There is no human being (with whom I can associate with in terms of equality) who acknowledges a common object with me, or with whom I can cooperate even in any practical undertaking, without feeling that I am only using a man, whose purposes are different, as an instrument for the furtherance of my own (Appiah, 2005, p. 2).

Appiah wrote: "… his sensitivity about using another in this way surely flows from his sense that he himself had been thus used—that he had been conscripted into a master plan that was not his own" (2005).

Chapter one will explore the influences of the Roman Empire on Christianity as the foundation for future oppression of "others" during and following the time of the colonization of America. This chapter will then demonstrate parallels between conditions prevalent in the church during the Roman Empire and similar conditions in the contemporary church in the areas of power, racism, classism, and sexism. Historically, these themes will be explored from the time of colonization, American slavery, civil rights, and into the 21st century. It is my purpose to show that the African American church leadership has often perpetuated dominance and oppression in its church structure and has protected the power and authority of its leadership by maintaining the status quo rather than serving its followers in the manner that they should be served.

Foundation: The Influence of the Roman Empire

Cornel West depicts the changes in general church structure and leadership through a historical and political lens in Democracy Matters (2004). In the chapter, "The Crisis of Christian Identity in America," West explains what he calls two opposing Christian identities in America that have basically dominated church relationships

through the generations since the Roman Empire. These opposing identities are the

Constantinian versus the Prophetic identities. During the Roman Empire, Christianity was

viciously challenged because of its movement towards impartiality and humility which

threatened to destabilize the Roman imperial rule. Roman authorities viewed the

message of salvation and life after death which was believed by followers of Jesus as

rebellious and threatening to the social order. As the message of justice and love

continued, growth of those who wanted to follow in this vein also continued. The politics

of the growing acceptance of the Christian message forced the Roman leaders to act:

> Roman power appointed the priests who were in charge of the religious sites of
> Palestine. And Jesus openly denounced these priests, so much is known. This
> indirect threat to Roman power, together with the Roman perception that Jesus
> was claiming to be the 'King of the Jews', was the reason for his condemnation.
> The Roman apparatus saw itself merely dealing with a minor problem which
> otherwise might have grown into a greater threat to their authority. So in essence,
> the reason for Jesus' crucifixion was politically motivated (http://www.roman-
> empire.net/religion/religion.html).

West states that the Roman Empire co-opted Christian beliefs in order to control the

movement of Christianity. Constantinian Christianity was a joining of the religion with

the politic of the Roman Empire. It served to separate the message of love and justice

from the prophetic stance Christianity was based upon. "Constantine himself seems to

have converted to Christianity partly out of political strategy and imperial exigency, and

then proceeded to use the cloak of Christianity for his own purposes of maintaining

power" (West, 2004). West goes further to state that the Christian church had become

even more fraudulent due to its relationship with state powers.

West describes how this relationship can be influenced negatively by issues of power and dominance. Christianity was a religion that targeted an emotional connection between individuals and God, the need for faith, and a more fulfilling life after death. The number of followers grew because of Christianity's sympathy towards impartiality, equality, and humility especially as these attributes related to the underprivileged, poor, and needy. Followers of the political leaders in the community felt that the Roman Empire would suffer a loss of power if the people placed their trust in Christian principles. The Jewish doctrine of a returning messiah meshed with the position of the new believers to threaten the Roman leadership even more:

> Many of his followers believed him [Jesus] to be the messiah whom the Jewish prophets had been predicting since the days of the Babylonian Captivity, and expected him to eventually lead a Jewish army against the Romans and establish a Jewish state…Jesus, however, directed his followers towards more otherworldly goals (http://www.loyno.edu).

After much persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, the imperial rulers finally felt the need to co-opt Christian beliefs in order to maintain control of the people as well as the religion (West, 2004). Between the years of 311-313 AD, Constantine confirmed the Edict of Toleration which was put in place by Galerius. Constantinian Christianity was a joining of the religion with the politic of the Roman Empire (http://www.loyno.edu). "The general historical view: the wily emperor had found a new source of stability for his realm and a new authority which could prop up the tottering Roman imperial system" (http://www.loyno.edu). This fusion of powers served to separate the message of love and justice from the prophetic stance Christianity was based

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upon. According to Cornel West, the union of church and state during the reign of

Constantine began to destroy the Christian principles of love and justice for others

(2006).

Constantinian Principles: **Colonial Times**

West follows that train of thought into the early American society, providing the

example of how the Puritans, who were persecuted victims of the British Empire, came to

America in search of liberty and security. He points out that their actions against the

Native American Indians revealed how "strains of Constantinianism were woven into the

fabric of American Christian identity from the start" (West, 2006). West states that it was

the Constantinian influence on Christianity that found justification, legitimizing myths, to

support slavery and unequal treatment of women. John Caputo offers additional insight

into how this mindset can be established and maintained. In his book, <u>On Religion</u>,

Caputo states the following:

> Religion is for passionate lovers of the impossible, lovers of God…; these
> unhinged and impassioned lovers of the impossible are also impossible people
> who confuse themselves with God and threaten the civil liberties and sometimes
> even the lives of those who disagree with them. Instead of making sacrifices for
> the love of God, religion is inclined to make a sacrifice of the love of God
> (Caputo, 2001, p. 92-93).

West reminds us that it was the prophetic tradition that pushed for social justice

(West, 2006). He also states that Constantinian-like Christians (conservatives) do not

understand their infringement of love and justice because they swim in dominance and

have lost their "fervor for the suspicion of worldly authorities and for doing justice in the

service of the most vulnerable among us, which are central to the faith" (2006). Caputo states that fundamentalism is a "failure to see that the love of God is uncontainable and can assume uncountable and unaccountable different forms" (2001). West states that most Constantinian-like Christians are ignorant of the imperialistic issues because they do not understand the relationship of the Roman Empire, its political needs, and the ultimate crucifixion of Jesus Christ (West, 2006). James Cone agrees that Jesus was crucified because he would not "stay in his place" (1990). He was not containable.

Power: Classism and Denominationalism

Cornel West writes that the Christian church had become fraudulent due to its relationship with state powers. This historical example shows that differential power will cause leadership to do whatever it takes to maintain hegemonic relationships even in religious contexts. Lisa Delpit captured her views of power in these principles:

1. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a 'culture of power.'
2. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.
3. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
4. Those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (Delpit, 1995, p. 24).

Power offers the authority for a person to determine her own position in relationships in society (Cone, 2006). Power helps to produce hierarchies which in turn produce elitism and classism. H. Richard Niebuhr, a Christian ethicist, author of The

Social Sources of Denominationalism, wrote about how elitism fueled by power and economic growth separated Christians within their religious groups systematically in America. There is a history of different worship styles, leadership patterns, connections, and disconnections documented in this text which demonstrate his concern about the relationships of human beings and how they responded to each other.   In his first paragraph, Niebuhr introduces his stance regarding the church by saying:

> In dealing with such major social evils as war, slavery, and social inequality, it has discovered convenient ambiguities in the letter of the Gospels which enabled it to violate their spirit and to ally itself with the prestige and power those evils had gained in their corporate organizations (Niebuhr, 1929, p. 3).

Niebuhr was actually saying that the church itself can use the Bible to justify such atrocious acts as wars and slavery. Gary Howard stated, "The temporal power of the Christian church has also at times been subverted to serve the purposes of White social dominance" (2006). Niebuhr further made the point that when specific ideals were brought into any institution, there was a loss of the original ideals that were already established. He established the fact that the church was not immune from this phenomenon. Niebuhr reminded us that the concepts of faith, love, charity, and salvation have to contend with the "…instinctive life of man…" as well as a "…world of relativity" (Niebuhr, 1929).

Donaldo Macedo writes that there is the issue of an adopted classism that has also been internalized by way of a history of oppression. In his introduction to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Macedo quotes Paulo Freire in his assertion that "…a thorough understanding of oppression must always take a detour through some form of class

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analysis" (1993). In this same introduction, Macedo reminds us that race does not guarantee unity (2000). Neither does membership. Within Christianity, there are different disciplines of worship called denominations. Each denomination has different stereotypical descriptions often utilized by outsiders who may be Christians of some differing denomination. Baptists have been plagued by jokes regarding their social status and practices. Methodists are too quiet. Presbyterians are too formal. Evangelicals--- too loud. However, it is even more ironic that within the Black church there are divisions of classes. Intra-congregationally, the poor and the middle class African-Americans do not always worship together. The more affluent may worship at the 11:00 am hour, while the less educated, more charismatic, or the poor may be inclined to join the early morning praise and worship hour. James Cone wrote that Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "…failure to identify classism as a problem as harmful to the cause of freedom as racism and sexism" was a major limitation of his leadership (1991). Classism in America is caused by the effects of the political economy on groups of people in the country (Cone 1991). In 1986, Cone wrote that he had made a major mistake in not including an economic class analysis as it related to oppression in his original publication of A Black Theology of Liberation. Further, he stated that all people given personal need have the capability to take advantage of those less fortunate in order to advance their economic and political agendas (1986).

Before starting his sermon on the establishment and disconnection of denominations, Niebuhr introduced the notion of compromise. He viewed the relationship of Christianity in the human world as a situation of compromise. He wanted us to know

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that just the ability to compromise does not in itself make compromise good. He stated

that compromise created a bogus gospel oblivious of its exodus from the faith as it was

delivered to the followers. It was at this point that he stated:

> Denominationalism in the Christian church is such an unacknowledged
> hypocrisy. It is a compromise made far too lightly between Christianity
> and the world…It represents the accommodation of Christianity to the
> caste-system of human society (Niebuhr, 1929, p. 6).

He then established the binaries of this system as privileged versus poverty, elevation

verses abasement, and equality verses inequality. He surmised that these separations

happened as men were able to satisfy the need for personal promotion (Niebuhr, 1929).

These lines of distinction established through history in the church followed similar lines

of separation as they relate to race, class, and economic difference. This division fostered

confusion, self-elevation, and hatred (Niebuhr, 1929). Gary Howard (2006) stated that

"human systems are predisposed to form social hierarchies, with hegemonic groups at the

top and negative reference groups at the bottom." A historical example of this hierarchy

was the division of Lutheranism and Calvinism into national groups which engaged in

similar forms of worship but did so in churches where "blacks and whites find it easier to

confess than to practice their common sonship to God" (Niebuhr, 1929).

Describing the break-up of denominations based on classism, economics, and race,

Niebuhr offered countless historical divisions of denominations based on economic

differences (1929). He stated that economic classes had distinctive characteristics that

resulted in educational and psychological distinctions. He demonstrated how this

economic phase of denominationalism demonstrated a cycle of the abandoned

impoverished sector of the church developing a more charismatic type of Christianity that was unacceptable to the middle class. They were diligent in their worship and praise sometimes being viewed by others as participants in mystical behaviors. Given the advantages of acquired education and the ability to become more financially stable, this impoverished group would subsequently move ahead on the economic scale to find themselves more self-sufficient. This newly established middle class socioeconomic group became a part of the elite. At this juncture, they too became neglectful of the newer division of the poor. Niebuhr stated that this exclusion was a regular occurrence in the history of Christianity. "…for the division of the church have been occasioned more frequently by the direct and indirect operation of economic factors than by the influence of any other major interest of man" (Niebuhr, 1929). Niebuhr was able to demonstrate that first generations in denominations were usually comprised of "lower economic and cultural scale" and that their churches could be distinguished from other denominations whose previous immigrants had moved up the economic scale (Niebuhr, 1929). Niebuhr followed these splits due to classism from the failure of the Reformation to divisions in almost every denomination. What he found in 1929 was that the "organization which is loudest in its praise of brotherhood and most critical of race and class discriminations in other spheres is the most disunited group of all, nurturing in its own structure that same spirit of division which it condemns in other relations" (Niebuhr, 1929). He demonstrated this by looking at the relationship between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He stated that the rift between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was not about

any major religious distinction. It had more to do with social differences. It was just

about the same for Christian groups at the time of his writing (Niebuhr, 1929).

History: Repeating Itself?

A review of the history of land acquisition for the dominant culture

demonstrates the use of Christianity to justify the movement of the natives off the land

that they originally occupied in order for European colonists to pilfer resources and claim

the property as their own. Joel Spring wrote in <u>The American School 1642-2004</u>:

> …English colonists sincerely believed they were bringing a superior civilization
> to a 'heathen' and 'uncivilized' people…For English colonists, the cultural
> resistance of Native Americans was an affront to the teachings of Christ and a
> hindrance to colonial expansion (Spring, 2005, p. 9).

There is a history of dominant cultures militaristically moving into other countries in the

name of introducing Christianity, displacing the natives to properties unknown to their

culture, and utilizing what was known as the "uncivilized" as workforce. Carter G.

Woodson in <u>History of the Negro Church</u> wrote the following:

> One of the causes of the discovery of America was the translation into action
> of the desire of Europeans zealots to extend Catholic religion into other parts…;
> some of the French who came to the new world to establish their claims
> by further discovery and exploration, moreover, were either actuated by
> similar motives or welcomed the cooperation of earnest workers thus
> interested (Woodson, 1985, p. 1).

There is also the history of the separation of Africans from their native lands. Their

families were packaged and shipped body to body in over-crowded ships, and sold like

animals as slaves in America (Haley, 1976). Much of this behavior was justified by Biblical scriptures, translated and misconstrued in order for those in power to have other people work the land that they had so cleverly acquired from Native Americans.

Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his 1949 "Autobiography of Religious Development" that "[I]t is impossible to get at the roots of one's religious attitudes without taking in account the psychological and historical factors that play upon the individual" (Cone, 1992). A look at the history of Christianity as it was passed down from slave owners to slaves will reveal various perspectives in which to view the transfer of leadership styles. Johnetta Betsch-Cole and co-writer Beverly Guy-Sheftall in Gender Talks: the Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities wrote that patriarchal behavior did not necessarily originate in Africa. Gender roles in many African countries were more fluid and complex (2003). Cole and Guy-Sheftall noted how women and men did what was needed in order to keep the family and community moving in the desired direction (2003). Therefore, this role of black men needing a place of power over others actually developed when they were brought to the West as slaves. The move to the New World brought with it an exchange in gender roles whereas black women were treated as the male slaves and lost much of their ability to exercise the political power they possessed in Africa. While slavery leveled the playing field in gender issues for male and female slaves, it also paved the way for African men to find their only refuge of power in the pulpit. "…Most Africans in America were slaves and it was the condition of slavery that framed the worldview from which their theological discourse/reflection emerged" (Ross, 2007). Cole and Guy-Sheftall reminded the readers that most of the

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church pastors were men who were chosen by white men to take on this leadership role (2003). The church was the only institution that allowed black men to exercise authority as religious leaders during slavery (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). This power, however, was authorized by white slave owners in an attempt to maintain mental and physical control of the servants (Cone, 1990).

There were some slave owners that recognized the incongruity of owning slaves and believing in the freedom and liberty for all people. Quakers were willing to explore the radicalism that it would take to act on the belief of Christianity and stand up for the freedom of slaves (Cone, 2006). The Quakers were known to introduce Christianity to slaves believing that they were

> ....friends of all humanity....In accepting these persons of color on a basis of religious equality and denouncing the nakedness of the religion of the colonists at the same time, the Quakers alienated their affections and easily brought down upon them the wrath of the public functionaries in these plantations (Woodson, 1985, p. 14-15).

The Quakers were known to have supported literacy skills by teaching reading and writing to slaves. This exceptional stance caused the Quakers to be alienated from the rest of society (Woodson, 1985).

However, Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, who were contemplating their religious beliefs in light of their ownership of slaves, chose Africans as leaders in slave churches after hearing them speak in their own churches. Many believed that these slaves had the gift to deliver the religious message. The following passage describes the elevation of George Liele to the position of clergyman:

> George Liele…moved with his master, Henry Sharpe, to Burke County Georgia, a few years before the Revolutionary War. As his master was a deacon of the Baptist church of which Matthew Moore was pastor, George, upon hearing this minister preach from time to time when accompanying his master, became converted and soon thereafter was baptized by this clergyman…. Upon discovering that he [George] had unusual ministerial gifts, this church permitted him to preach upon the plantations along the Savannah river and sometimes to the congregation of the church to which he belonged (Woodson, 1985, p. 37).

These actions by the denominations involved were met with "displeasure and opposition of the aristocratic churchmen" (Woodson, 1985). This displeasure was clearly demonstrated when African ministers who had been freed from slavery by their masters were returned to slavery upon the death of their masters if the heirs to the master's property were not in agreement with the manumission (Woodson, 1985). African ministers were persecuted, their meetings were interrupted, and they were often forced to hold services or meetings in hiding (Woodson 1985).

While many slaves were becoming Christians in spite of resistance by some owners, an opposing view developed regarding the manner in which Christianity could be used to benefit slave owners. A Constantinian attitude began to form. Slave owners began to allow Christianity in the homes of the slaves in order to maintain the slave mentality. Slave owners taught that authorizing slaves to participate in the Christian faith was acceptable because Christianity did not secure civil freedom (Cone, 1990). Although many missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were directed to release their slaves, they were not to interfere with their civil conditions. Missionaries were not allowed to support a movement towards freedom, as Woodson records here:

For half a century from the commencement of Methodism the slaves never expected freedom, and the missionaries never taught them to expect it; and when the agitation of later years unavoidably affected them more or less, as they learned chiefly through the violent speeches of their own masters, or overseers,… it was missionary influence that moderated their passions, kept them in the steady course of duty, and prevented them from sinning against God by offending against the laws of man. Whatever outbreaks or insurrections at any time occurred, no Methodist slave was ever proved guilty of incendiarism or rebellion for more than seventy years, namely from 1760 to 1833 (Woodson, 1985, p. 23).

History: The First Black Ministers

Carter G. Woodson wrote that slaves who were allowed to worship with the colonists and present speeches during the service. Sometimes they were recognized for their ability to "expound the scriptures" (1985). Slave preachers were recognized for their ability to speak of the future freedom. Methodists and Baptists, with much confusion, led the way by traveling across the land proclaiming all evils including that of slavery (Woodson, 1985). According to Woodson, the Methodists advised their white ministers to set their slaves free (1985). The Baptists in 1789 stated

that slavery is a violent depredation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government, and therefore, recommend it to our brethren, to make use of their local missions to extirpate this horrid evil from the land; and pray Almighty God that our honorable legislature may have it in their power to proclaim the great jubilee consistent with the principles of good policy (Woodson, 1985, p. 27).

Many of the most elite of the community disagreed with the elevation of slaves to the position of minister (Woodson, 1985). Some of the churches began to allow the slaves to preach, but the elitists of the religious community found this practice appalling and began to quote the law which forbade Negro ministers from preaching and exercising their gifts

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(Woodson, 1985). Cone recorded this action as well by showing that the dominant

culture was able to use the passages that referred to the origins of slavery or the

encouragement of slaves being obedient in order to promote submission to the dominant

culture (1990). Cone went further to explain that black churchmen realized that the white

interpretations of the gospel were not concerned with freedom of their bodies as he

reports in the following passage:

> … Whites began to set up stricter laws to govern the behavior of slaves. Whites
> realized that the black man could not be trusted to remain obedient, subservient to
> the will of the master, if the former was permitted to hear the gospel of the black
> independents or black slaves inspired with the spirit of freedom…. In an effort to
> dissipate the slave's passionate desire for freedom, white missionaries sough to
> interpret the meaning of Christianity in the light of a futuristic eschatology, trying
> to convince the slave that the Christian gospel was concerned with pietistic
> moralities in this life as a means of gaining eternal life upon death (Cone, 2006, p.
> 101).

One of the reasons slave owners were uneasy, besides fear that slaves would find

hope in Christianity, was the delivery of the message. Raboteau explained the unique

fusion of Christianity and African cultural religious practices which allowed for the

understanding of Christian belief in the context of the remnants of the African religious

experience (1978). The understanding is that Christianity was not the chosen religion of

most transported Africans. Africans who were enslaved in America had religious beliefs

and practices that embodied traditions and practices from both Muslim and Catholic

faiths (Raboteau & Willis, 2003). This combination could be the basis for what seemed

so compelling to many of the white church members who enjoyed the "gifts" of the slave

speakers. Ross noted that the Africanisms that remained included "isolated songs,

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rhythms, movement, belief in the curative powers of roots, and belief in the efficacy of a world of spirits and ancestors," which were intertwined in the worship of the Christian God (2007). Indeed, these actions could have helped fuel the position of the elite who had a history of separating themselves from those who practiced high-spirited and mythical-like worship (Niebuhr, 1929).

Colonists who were slave owners introduced the statements of faith, Biblical stories and parables, curses and the laws with knowledge of the mental and physical responses that they desired. Fraser explains this action:

> …That it shall be …declared lawful for any Negro or Indian slave…to receive and profess the Christian faith, and be thereunto Baptized…. He or they shall not be manumitted or set free…or their owner, master, or mistress lose his or their civil right, property, and authority over such slave…but that the slave….remain… in the same state and condition that he or they was in before the making of this act (Fraser, 2001, p.5).

Receiving Christianity under the historical context of slavery promoted the initiation of manipulative religion in the black church. The black preachers of this time solidified the teachings of the slave owner thereby giving authenticity to the scriptures and stories used to make slaves believe that their position of servitude to the dominant community was ordained by God. In chapter III, "Pioneer Negro Preachers" in The History of the Negro Church, Carter G. Woodson explains the perils and obstacles faced by black ministers during slave times. "When …these Negroes of unusual power preached with such force as to excite not only the blacks but the whites, steps were generally taken to silence these speakers heralding the coming of a new day" (Woodson, 1985). Ministers were freed by their masters in order to preach to the slaves only later to

be forced back into slavery upon the death of the original owner. Many were forced to travel constantly up and down the east coast and to the Jamaican Islands in order to maintain freedom and the ability to preach (Woodson, 1985). Given these circumstances, it would be easy to maintain some sense of control over black ministers who were not strong enough to overcome the obstacles of being minister to the slaves as well as loyal to the white master that freed him. However, Cone reminds the reader that many of the slaves were able to look at their own condition in relationship to Christianity and look towards a more liberatory existence (Cone, 1990). Sooner than needed, the "secret church" that fought against slavery began to interpret salvation in heavenly terms and the push for a liberational existence became confused in the newness of life after death (Cone, 1990). In other words, the slaves began to look at a liberatory existence after life instead of seeking hope for a chance at equality and liberty during this life. What was lost Biblically? Cone supports the earthly liberation movement by supporting this stance with several scriptures:

> In the Old Testament salvation is expressed by a word which has the root meaning of 'to be wide' or 'spacious' 'to develop without hindrance' and thus ultimately 'to have victory in battle…'   He who needs salvation is one who has been threatened or oppressed, and his salvations consists in deliverance from danger and tyranny or rescue from imminent peril (I Sam. 4:3, 7:8, 9:16)…; to save another is to communicate to him one's own prevailing strength (Job 26:2), to give him the power to maintain the necessary strength (Cone, 1990, p. 128.)

History: Patriarchy and Oppression

The role of minister was passed down to males even though females eventually had the opportunity to exercise their callings.   Cole and Guy-Sheftall state that the

patriarchal system was introduced to the people as they began to participate in the functions of the newly established black church during slavery (2003). Most of the church pastors were men who were chosen by white men to take on this leadership role (2003). The church was the only institution that allowed black men to exercise authority as religious leaders during slavery (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). This power, however, was authorized by white slave owners in an attempt to maintain mental and physical control of the servants (Cone, 1990) as described in this passage:

> Perhaps it is not surprising that African American men, who were prohibited from exercising power in other public arenas, would be adamant about maintaining authority in the one institution they did manage to control, black churches (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p.109).

The black church is still led primarily by African American males who have made it a practice by word (disciplines) and deed (actions) to determine women's roles in the church (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003) and to lead in a "messianic manner" that silences the voices of the people who may question practices, rules, and rituals (Cone, 1991).

> The 'messiah complex' is a danger that pervades the leadership expectations of the African-American community…. Messianic expectation also encourages 'self-appointed men and women of God' to manipulate the African American liberation struggle for their own interest (Cone, 1991, p.273).

The interpretation of what "woman" represents has been initiated and supported through use of the Bible by the dominant culture. Therefore, the stories of women's complex relationships in the Bible helped to solidify the foundation of patriarchy in the church in general. Textual interpretation emphasized the insignificance

or negative characterization of women in the Bible.   Stories of Adam and Eve, Sarah, and Hagar were used to explain the plight of all mankind because of the disobedience and promiscuity on the part of the women. These Biblical stories of women's faults still help to solidify the foundation of patriarchy in the church in general. However, black women also contend with historical formulations of stories that describe her sexuality and inferiority. These stories of female sexual appetites translated to immorality within a religious context were perpetuated by white missionaries who contended that black women were less than white Christian women. Cole and Guy-Sheftall wrote: "…it was the duty of white people to tame the crude carnal desires of Black women and men" (2003). It did not help that performers such as Sarah Bartman and Josephine Baker (early1800's and 1900's respectively) were making their living as performers of exotic dance, scantily dressed and gyrating in cages like animals for European audiences (Collins, 2005). All of these perceptions translated into images of the immorality of black women that has followed throughout decades as indicated in this passage:

> …A conservative view of sexuality was advanced in the churches blacks founded. One explanation points to the conservative theologies of White Christianity…. It was imperative for African Americans to refute all of the negative beliefs about their sexuality; so the Black church became a major site for the rehabilitation of Black people's morality (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p. 116).

The church internalized morality issues and fought for the rehabilitation of morality in women; as a result, these actions further complicated the problems of combined sexism and classism within the body of the church. African American women seeking solace for what has been labeled the triple threat of racism, classism, and sexism

still face the same challenges within the church. Some examples of this treatment of Black women can be seen in several historical events.

The Black Feminist Movement was started during the Abolitionist Movement in the 1800's. During this time, black women were fighting for the right to vote and the right to have equal rights in the community, which included the church. It was church leaders, men, who challenged women by telling them "to beware of selling their birthright of consideration and deference for a mess of equality pottage" (Cone, 1984). Another preacher proclaimed that the privileges of men rested on the manhood of Christ. Sojourner Truth responded by stating that it was God and a woman who had produced Christ and "man had nothing to do with Him" (Cone, 1984). Sojourner also defended women's rights to vote as well as women's rights to act and speak in the church. She stated the following:

> There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about colored women; and if colored men get theirs, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be the masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as before. So I am for keeping the thing going while the things are stirring; because if we wait til it is still, it will take a great while to it going again (Cone, 1984, p. 125).

Along with Sojourner Truth, other women were also fighting for the freedom of all slaves. Harriet Tubman was reported to have led over 300 slaves out of bondage for which she was nicknamed Moses. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was known for her fight against lynching. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell and Francis Ellen Watkins Harper were instrumental in the organization of Black women in clubs. Terrell and Harper were leaders in the establishment of the National Association of Colored Women in 1897

(Cone, 1984). It is undeniable that Black women have a history of fighting for the rights of their people. However, black women in the church had to contend with the negative connotation of women's rights. For example, women were not licensed in the African Methodist Episcopal denomination until 1884. In 1888 the General Conference wrote this position on the ordination of women:

> …whereas said act is contrary to the usage of our church; and as it cannot be proved by the scriptures that a woman has ever been ordained to the order of the ministry; therefore be it enacted, that the bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church be and hereby are forbidden to ordain a woman to the order of deacon or elder in our church (Cone, 1984, p. 126).

On July 11, 2000, the AME Church elected, its first female bishop, Dr. Vashti McKenzie. Dr McKenzie had prepared well for the post because she had attended Howard University, in Washington, DC, and received a Master of Divinity degree. She then went on to earn her Doctor of Ministry degree from Union Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. In 1984 she was ordained a deacon and assigned to a seven-member congregation in Chesapeake City, Maryland.
(http://www.nathanielturner.com/vashtimckenzie.htm).

> Perhaps it is not surprising that African American men, who were prohibited from exercising power in other public arenas, would be adamant about maintaining authority in the one institution they did manage to control, Black churches. Their embrace of patriarchy in Black churches was aided by passages in the Bible that support the subordination of women (2003).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's is viewed as one of history's most effective movements of activism. Today, professors and pastors compare what is (or

isn't) happening in the country to what happened as a result of the Civil Rights

Movement. However, the Civil Rights Movement, which was led by various groups of

African American ministers including Dr. Martin Luther King, was not without fault as it

relates to the treatment of women. James Cone in <u>Martin & Malcolm& America: a</u>

<u>Dream or a Nightmare</u> speaks of the attitude of males during this revolutionary

movement. He states that the stance that black men had toward women in the movement

had already been established by the societal norm which was patriarchy. "Following the

pattern of white religious bodies, the Black church and the Nation of Islam provided

religious justification for the subordination of women" (Cone, 1992).   The view of

women keeping their place in the home and supporting the movement from the

background became an unpopular one because the Feminist Movement was just

beginning to contest this whole idea in the mainstream society. There was conflict over

which was most important—the fight for racial equality or the fight for women's rights.

Black leaders viewed the emerging Feminist Movement as a movement of "bored white

middle-class suburban housewives… and… that race, not gender, was the primary factor

determining the life chances of black people" (Cone, 1992). There was an underlying

myth also of the emasculation of Black men by racism which thrust them into a stance of

claiming if not demanding their position as "man" (Coles & Guy-Sheftall, 2003).

Although equally mythological, it did not help at all that women were seen as privileged

because of their positions as matriarchs who were undergirding the Black male (Cole &

Guy-Sheftall, 2003). It was indeed a struggle to assert one's rights as a woman in the

1960's when Black men (as well as some women) viewed the emergence of the Feminist

Movement as trivial in comparison with the Civil Rights Movement (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003).   Martin Luther King, Jr. was quoted as having said:

> The Negro man in this country…has never been able to be a man. He has been robbed of his manhood because of the legacy of slavery and segregation and discrimination, and we have had in the Negro community a matriarchal family…in the midst of a patriarchal society…and I don't think any answer to that problem will emerge until we give the Negro man his manhood by giving him the kind of economic security capable of supporting a family (Cone, 1991, p. 277).

It is clear that the emphasis on manhood during the Civil Rights Movement was led by well respected religious leaders such as Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, and Ben Gay. Coles and Guy-Sheftall mentioned that the marginalization of women in the Civil Rights Movement was apparent when one considers the March on Washington in 1963. There was only one woman on the planning committee for the march. After a written protest concerning the participation of women in the march because of their contributions, wives of the Big Six were added as platform guests and a quickly planned tribute was placed on the program (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). Cone explains in his writings that Dr. King failed to give written credit to the women arrested with him in Albany; furthermore, he left "no record of gratitude for Ella Baker,...Fannie Lou Hamer,…Jo Ann Robinson, Mary Fair Burks, and other women of the Women's Political Council who played in the success of the Montgomery bus boycott" (Cone, 1991). These were the examples left for future pastors and leaders to follow as they began shaping and molding the framework and operations of their churches, even in the years that followed when many congregations consisted of a majority female membership. Cone adds that

...contrary to what many black men say (especially preachers), sexism is not merely a problem for white women. Rather it is a problem of the human condition. It destroys the family and society.... Any black male theologian or preacher who ignores sexism as a central problem in our society and church (as important as racism, because they are interconnected), is just as guilty of distorting the gospel as is a white theologian who does the same with racism (Cone, 1986, p.xvi).

During the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr. and his entourage of black male ministers gave no clear statement on sexism. King vaguely included women in his struggle for equality for all. In Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or A Nightmare, James Cone quotes an excerpt from a 1961 issue of Redbook in which Martin Luther King, Jr. states the following: "...I love the church, and I feel that civil rights is a part of it...; my struggle for integration...into every phase of American life—is something that began with a religious motivation..." (Cone, 1992). What myths were generated or continued during this era? While King did not support the mistreatment of blacks by whites as firmly demonstrated by his belief in the God of the Exodus (Cone 1992), he did participate in what is described as the "messiah complex." This concept espouses that there will be leader who will come to deliver black people from suffering. Cone goes further to say that the messianic complex, which works from both the expectation side of the people as well as the self-appointment of the person, was used "to manipulate the African-American liberation struggle for their own interest" (1992). For example, while King believed that all people, regardless of race and gender, were created to cohabitate this Earth as children of God, he did not recognize sexism as a problem plaguing the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. King did not lead the way in

supporting women in their work during the Civil Rights Movement. Even Coretta Scott King spoke of her husband's respect for her, but she recognized his desire for her to be in the home raising the children (Cone, 1992).

According to Cone, it took some time and education for King to recognize classism as an issue during his fight for equal rights and freedom (1992). King took a trip to Sweden which opened his eyes to socialism versus his lived experience of American capitalism. He wanted to know how and why Sweden had no poverty. The answer he received was that Scandinavia had put energy and work into creating a more equitable system of wealth (Cone 1992). Cone further explains that King soon recognized that the black poor community was getting poorer while rich people continued to gain wealth (Cone, 1992). In 1966, he finally stated at the Gandhi Memorial Lecture at Howard University that the country was working within a class structure and struggling "between the privileged and underprivileged" (Cone, 1992). However, he feared mixing the civil rights struggle with a message of socialism because his message could be misconstrued as "communism"; therefore, King kept his message quite guarded (Cone, 1992). Classism was a complicated concept to intertwine with the fight against racism (Cone 1992). As a result of these conflicting ideologies, the movement toward a conversation that included race, class, and gender issues was hard to push forward in an environment where some wanted the fight against racism to be at the forefront while others wanted gender issues to come to the forefront. Class issues were hard pressed to make it to the top of the heap (Collins, 2005).

History: Forming In the Present

By the turn of the 21st century in 2000, classism was an obvious concern in the black church especially since the large scale, mega churches became a phenomenon. In an article, "Where Do We Go from Here," which was published in <u>Crisis</u> magazine (2006), Vern E. Smith investigates the popularity of the black "Word- based" mega congregations that preach prosperity messages. Smith quotes Robert M. Franklin, President of Morehouse College and former professor of religion at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, who refers to the leadership of this type of congregation as an "entrepreneurial, ecclesiastical executive who embraces capitalism and prosperity while urging followers to be pious and hard working" (Smith, 2006). The spoils obtained by this type of leadership in the black church include the ability to live millionaire life-styles on the gifts and pledges of the large memberships of the mega churches (Smith, 2006). Dr. Franklin states that this phenomenon represents a culture war that includes "not only a struggle for theological and political primacy among Black preachers, but also the larger question of what Black Christians want to do with their collective might in 21st century America" (Smith 2006). Instead of our church leaders continuing to support a "culture of compensation and material reward," Smith would like to see the church leadership demonstrate a cohesive effort to, for example, help the incarcerated rejoin the community with integrity and support (Kwon, 2006). In his book, <u>Crisis in the Village</u>, Dr. Franklin asks for collective work of several predominately black denominations to help uplift communities by doing and not just preaching (Kwon, 2006). It seems that Richard Niebuhr's paradigm of a "loss of the original ideals" has struck again. The black

church is still suffering from the fight between the concepts of faith, love, charity, and salvation and the "…instinctive life of man…" as well as a "…world of relativity" (Niebuhr, 1929).

Summary

One theme that becomes apparent from this discussion is the inability of some to speak up for their rights—thus experiencing a state of voicelessness. As a slave, an individual could not question his or her own position in the society. As a slave minister, the individual could not openly take a stand against the plight of his or her followers; he had no voice. Such freedom to analyze or even to question one's societal condition was a long time in coming. During the Black Feminist Movement, women had to fight, sometimes against black ministers' voiced opinions, for their right to vote. This research documents the controversy over which was more important during the Civil Rights Movement—the fight against racism or the battle against sexism. The prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement did not recognize immediately that all of these inequalities are connected. Again, voices were silenced in order to promote one cause over another. To that end, it seems clear that silencing the voices of the followers causes the politics of the leadership to be skewed toward the promotion of the leadership's social and economic gain at the expense of the welfare of the people within the system. Cornel West in Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism demonstrates that this battle in Christianity is not new. This manipulative attitude has been evolving since 312 AD when Roman Emperor Constantine brought Christianity into the empire as the

official religion. West is correct in asserting that most of today's Christians are not aware of the parallels between the Constantinian era and the imperialism of western Christianity. West's assessment of the typical individual's understanding of church history is clearly stated in the following passage:

> I have no doubt that most American Constantinian Christians are sincere in their faith and pious in their actions. But they are relatively ignorant of the crucial role they play in sponsoring American imperial ends. Their understanding of American history is thin and their grasp of Christian history is spotty, which leaves them vulnerable to manipulation by Christian leaders and misinformation by imperial rulers (West. 2005, p. 150).

West offers examples of this exploitation by stating that Constantinian based Christianity helped to justify displacement and mistreatment of Native Americans during colonization and to maintain the injustices of slavery, racism and sexism in this country. He asserts that these injustices can be traced to the roots of the Christian church in America (2005).

Another major theme of this research concerns critical questioning and silencing in today's black church. The following question is one of the guiding themes this study: is there an underlying connection between historical behavioral responses to the manner in which Christianity was delivered to the black church and the way in which it is delivered within the black church today? In other words, how has history determined the way we perceive our church leadership today? I am concerned with the interpretation of what we hear, what we see, what we experience, and how that determines how we act and react in relationship to "others." There seems to be an unspoken but real rule in the black church that discourages and even forbids critical questioning of topics, concepts, or ideologies that control the basic manner in which people perform life. Parishioners

understand this tacit denial of a person's right to question actions of the church leaders because critical questioning could be viewed as disobedient, defiant, and disrespectful from both the perspective of the questioner and the person viewed as the authority. This practice of silencing or devoicing does not promote personal investigation, reflection, or questioning—the very skills needed in order to navigate life in a country with a history of marginalization of minorities, the perpetuation of slave-like mentality, and continued discriminatory practices.

Chapter two examines the following questions: "Does the religious leadership of the black church unknowingly teach congregations to internalize negative feelings, connotations, and behaviors regarding critical reflection, critical thinking, and critical questioning." And further: "Is this lack of critical questioning detrimental to a forward movement of liberation and social justice for African American people?"

CHAPTER II

INVOCATION: A SUMMONS FOR CRITICAL QUESTIONING

Chapter two investigates the dynamic relationships between leadership and parishioners in the black church. This investigation questions whether congregations tend to avoid critical reflection, critical thinking, and critical questioning because of the hegemonic and hierarchical structures in place. Patterns of dominance and authority seem to suppress the voices of the church members. Issues of authority, power and commodification are addressed to illustrate how people have been silenced in a manner that is detrimental to the forward movement of liberation and social justice for African American people in this country. This discussion demonstrates that the black church is a microcosm of the larger American society, both structurally and functionally repeating behaviors that have been internalized from the dominant society. Cornel West and other leading researchers and critics have advanced theories on freedom and democracy in the dominant society that have a bearing on this study.

Cornel West explains that there are three codes of action that are destroying democracy in America. Two of those codes are free-market fundamentalism and escalating authoritarianism (2004). Free-market fundamentalism has its foundation in the elevation of a corporate-dominated, political, financial system. This system allows large corporate entities to operate in an unethical manner, acquiring as much financial wealth as possible, while mistreating those who work to create the products needed to create the

wealth (2004). In 1998, Paulo Freire reminded us that the lack of restrictions on commerce should not be ethically privileged over that of liberty by nature of being human (1998). He then writes that this ability for commerce to operate with minimal regulation gives the financially dominant the opportunity to put the dollar above all else. "It becomes the privilege of few, who in favorable conditions increase their own power at the expense of the greater part of humanity, even to the point of survival itself" (Freire, 1998). Free-market fundamentalism belittles the apprehension of working people, keeping them in a state of anxiety while the leaders continue to reproduce themselves at the highest levels of authority and wealth (2004). Ordinary workers have felt justified in their desire to have the material wealth that they have seen the dominant culture maintain from the cotton fields to the advent of the microchip. However, bell hooks states that the problem with this reasoning is the emphasis placed on the significance of having material goods which leads to consumerism that mimics addiction (hooks & West, 1991). In the contemporary black churches of the 21st century, a division has developed based on philosophical differences that have much to do with economics and indifference to the poor (Smith, 2006). Many families have decided to embrace the prosperity doctrine of the mega-church, leaving the prophetic and traditional principles of the traditional black church in the wind. However, those who oppose this new philosophy do so because they view this commodification of Christianity as "uncritical of American society" when there are so many unsolved issues for blacks in this country (Smith, 2006). This philosophy of prosperity is captured in the following excerpt from Keilholtz:

At the crux of mega-church philosophy is the doctrine known as Word of Faith.

Critics call it the prosperity gospel. Its main premise is that submission to God's will promises Christians an abundance of wealth. Word of Faith prosperity gospel centers heavily on the spiritual riches those tested and devoted souls are guaranteed to receive, while at the same time preaching tangible returns as evidence of His preferential treatment (Keilholtz, 2008, p. 35).

Some say that the capitalism that mega-churches promote creates a false impression that financial growth makes the "seeker member" a more intelligent Christian than the follower whose membership is in the smaller more traditional setting. Actually, one could question the commodification of religion that mega-churches promote which supports the financial growth of those who benefit from the consumerism of the followers. This idea, in fact, positions religion in a manner that establishes and maintains social advantage for those who benefit. The marriage between evangelism and capitalism creates a foundation upon which the leaders of mega-churches can perpetuate a hierarchal framework. In light of these thoughts, how does this readily affect the relationship between those who have and those who have not, especially in smaller socioeconomic environments such as black churches? Is this not contraindicative to the meaning of social justice?

"Social justice is the responsibility of individuals to advance the well-being of the vulnerable (i.e., the powerless, the poor, the sick, the aged, children, crime victims, and prisoners), particularly by the critique of the social structure and social institutions" (Alexander, 2005, p.4). To be just by others, one must strive for fairness and equity, equality of rights to protection, opportunities, commitments, and social benefit (Alexander, 2005). Alexander further states that social justice "entails advocacy to confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequities" (2005). Alexander

paraphrases Rawls (1971) when he asserts that all people deserve to be treated with proper respect. Rawls explains further that all people have an "inviolability" that is supported by justice, but the breakdown of democracy comes when citizens witness the relationships the American government develops with other countries. We claim a democratic process and a democratic society, but we oppress those considered "other" in our own country and outside our country.

Christian fundamentalism closes the door to the openness that is needed to promote and maintain the dream of a democratic society (West, 2004). It appears that the black church leadership has internalized the behaviors associated with free-market fundamentalism in this country and knowingly or unknowingly has promoted inequities of rights, has belittled the disquiet of the congregation keeping them in a state of anxiety, and finally has rendered their voices silent. West and bell hooks agree that upwardly mobile black people are engaging in a religious behavior that promotes and sustains consumerism (1991). Followers have few opportunities to question rules, regulations, activities or policies in the church; therefore, it is difficult for them to feel a sense of social justice. "Many privileged black folks obsessed with living out a bourgeois dream of liberal individualistic success no longer feel as though they have any accountability in relation to the Black poor and underclass" (hooks & West, 1991).The church is, at this point, in the business of setting a bad example of the value of critical thinking and critical questioning for those who are supposedly under its care.

Another element in the relationship between church leader and follower is authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is defined as blind submission to an entity in the

position of leadership. This trait has its foundations in paranoia, fear of liberties, and distrust between people (Alexander, 2005)." Because of these fears, the people stop communicating, cease discussion, and refuse to admit their disagreement or difference. Authoritarianism breaks down the democratic process and closes the doors for action for and with others (West, 2004). What kinds of behaviors by those in power cause this response? West examines monitoring of opinions, disrespect for disagreeing, and the lack of a space where people can hold critical discussions freely (2001).

The most recent example of this critical questioning and its consequences, for the purposes of this discussion, is that of Reverend Jeremiah Wright whose message to the National Press Club on April 28, 2008 and video clips of his "The Day of Jerusalem's Fall" sermon have stirred national political controversy about leadership and social justice. Reverend Wright, a prophetic, African-American Christian church leader in Chicago, intended "The Day of Jerusalem's Fall" as a sermon focused on self-examination and social transformation of the individual and of our nation. He spoke candidly, charismatically, and vividly on our nation's relationships with "others," and he challenged his congregation to understand that "we have got to change the way we have been doing things as a society." His message was delivered in a black church to black people who have either experienced or understood the hardships of being of African descent in America. The full sermon contains Biblical metaphors and culminating lessons calling for social justice by asking our nation to pay more attention to AIDS, racism, injustice and greed (The Roland Report, 2008, http://essence.typepad.com/news/2008/03/listen-to-rev-j.html, Retrieved June 30, 2008).

However, the media concentrated on the harshest imagery and piecemeal illustrations that were provocative, especially media who do not view American society through the historical lenses of enslavement, abuse, poverty, and discrimination. Since the fallout of this media blitz, Wright has cancelled numerous engagements because of threats to his security and has receded from public view. (http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/03/26/politics/printable3970073.shtml, Retrieved June 30, 2008). This media spotlight has brought Reverend Wright under scrutiny and has attempted to silence him by dissecting out of context bits and pieces of his often emotionally delivered sermons. Many of his sermons have been publicly available for years, but they received no attention until this election year and the prospect of an African American presidential candidate stirred the electorate and the media to examine Obama's Christian relationships. Wright's situation seems to be an appropriate example of the dominant society bringing corrective action to a subdominant entity that has a history of social and political activism in the community. In fact, Wright's case becomes a good example of prophetic black church leadership being silenced nationally and publicly when it goes against the grain of the dominant leadership.

Michel Foucault addresses authoritarianism, power, and regulation in <u>Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity</u> (Ferguson, 2004). Ferguson believes that abuse of authority by the dominant group over others has intended purpose, as he asserts in this passage:

> ... Disciplinary control is a modern mode of power that comes into existence with
> The formation of the bourgeois democratic state as a technique of regulation
> Particularly suited to a form of governance predicated on the idea of formal

equality. Under this type of regime, our status in a hierarchical system is no longer formally ascribed by birth but appears to be derived from how we measure up with regard to institutionally generated norms (Ferguson, 2004, p. 53).

Of interest in this discussion is whether or not the black church functions as a microcosm of the dominance model of American society. Freire reminded us that we must be watchful that the oppressed does not become an oppressor (1993). In general, the church's failure to permit critical analysis and critical questioning within the church tends to silence members. The church begins to look like, act like, and reproduce the environment of the dominant culture that attempts to silence those like Jeremiah Wright. "It is not difference which immobilizes us but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken" (Lorde, 1984). How is this immobilization represented in the black church? What is the price paid by followers who have internalized this sense of conformity and nihilism? "This despair mirrors the spiritual crisis that is happening in our culture as a whole. Nihilism is everywhere…these feelings of alienation and estrangement create suffering" (hooks & West, 1991). What types of suffering are the congregations in the black church living through based on their experiences with authoritarianism and silence? Authoritarianism takes away the natural inquisitiveness that we develop as children and keeps us from searching and questioning—rendering us devoid of liberty (Freire, 1998).

The Merit of Voice

> *The spoken demand (the articulated demand, the verbalized demand) has the modality of a rule. Like the rule, it spells out what is to be done, and – by commission or omission –what must not or need not be done…. The spoken demand saves the actor a lot of trouble; whether coming in the*

form of a universal rule, or in the shape of a request from the partner of the encounter who invokes such a rule, it can be weighed according to the merit of the case…. In a rule governed encounter, the actor is not confronted with another person, but with a spoken demand; the true relationship is between the actor and the rule, while the other person, the cause or the target of the action, is but a pawn moved around the chessboard of rights and duties" (Bauman, 1995, p.55).

Voice is the ability to speak out and to be heard by others for which the message is intended. Voice is the ability of a speaker to control one's own breath to release a sound, a facial expression, a body posture, that articulates a message that is understood by someone else. It entails a certain amount of control and power over oneself in the communication process. Delgado and Stefancic in Critical Race Theory define voice as "the ability of a group, such as African Americans or women, to articulate experiences in ways unique to it" (2001). Therefore, there is also the opportunity to authenticate one's uniqueness by the ability to freely use the sound of voice, to express an opinion, to state a case, or just to respond to others in one's own way.

Voice entails power—the ability to engage in discussion and support thoughts. The use of voice enables a person to make their mark upon others, shaping their thoughts and their ideas as well as their future responses. Historically, voice has been used as a means of intervention in a variety of discriminatory contexts such as slavery, where ministers were sometimes given the right to interpret the Bible, the Women's Rights and Suffrage Movements, and the Civil Rights Movement (Myrsiades & Myrsiades, 1998). However, speaking out during these times and stating a controversial or opposing view from the dominant culture's view often resulted in beatings, lynching, or burning of crosses. The power of the voice was evident as early as 1852 when William Grant Allen

told students to "be diligent and cultivate oratorical skills because it would be this 'weapon' that would make America free in both word and deed" (Foner & Branham, 1998). To be able to express oneself eloquently, to participate in the art of "persuasion," and to generate and transform ideas have worth in great historical movements such as the aforementioned (Foner & Branham, 1998). Critical theorist bell hooks emphasizes its importance in this quote:

> Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects, can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others (hooks, 1989, p. 12).

The defiant voice was the means for African slaves to develop committed followers focused on the prize of freedom across a number of states. "It was Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Henry Highlander Garnet, David Walker, Henry McNeil Turner, and others like them, who helped young black radical preachers articulate a black version of the gospel" (Cone, 1984). This group spoke out in the name of freedom gathering large groups of insurrectionists to rebel against the oppression of slavery (Cone, 1984). These people demanded freedom of black bodies, black lives, and black minds from the perils of servitude. Rebellions against slavery may never have been initiated if these persons had remained silent and cooperative.

An examination of the feminist movement also reveals the power of voice. This political agenda was born out of the need for women to have the same rights and privileges as men as the country viewed the combined challenges of capitalism, industrial growth, democratic theory and socialist critique (Freedman 2002). However, the early

development of the feminist movement was not inclusive of women of all races and ethnicities. For instance, Black women initially were not perceived to be "women" during their era of servitude to white women (Freedman, 2002), or they too would have been included in the fight (Grant, 1993). In the fall of 1920, a group of feminists from churches, women's clubs and the Young Women's Christian Association met in Memphis, Tennessee to discuss their views on women's rights. That October, four black women were given the opportunity to speak to the convention. The words of Charlotte Hawkins Brown stirred the conscience of all of the people who were present at the conference. It was that day that Charlotte Hawkins Brown spoke of the humiliation she faced when coming to the conference on a train where white men forced her from her seat and sent her to a segregated car for blacks only. She expressed that her humiliation was not necessarily due to the move but to the fact that there were women on the train who did not voice rage regarding the degrading incident (Freedman, 2002). After asking these women to place themselves in the shoes of African-American women, she reminded the women that they all prayed to the same God. She then stated: "but I know that the dear Lord will not receive it if you are crushing me beneath your feet" (Freedman, 2002). Charlotte Hawkins Brown demonstrated the power of voice on that day. Freedman writes that Brown illustrated,

> …the power of personal testimony to teach across social boundaries. Brown forced white women to think outside of their own experiences, to reconceptualize womanhood as a more complicated entity, and to build a politics of coalition across a racial divide…. Their dialogue provided an opportunity to 'pivot the center,' …to learn from the experience of others how to question the dominant culture…By doing so, women's movements can incorporate difference, not merely for the sake of inclusion or diversity but

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also to change their fundamental goals for social justice (Freedman, 2002, p. 74).

The Civil Rights era offers the most obvious and most memorable illustration of the power of voice in the fight for equality in this country. Most people today either remember marching with Martin Luther King, hearing stories of his life and death, or reading about his legacy. Everyone has some semblance of the "I Have a Dream" speech etched in their memories, yet Dr. King had much more to say than is remembered in his most published speeches. Most people do not remember nor do they choose to quote his critique of the black church from the sermon, "Remember Who You Are." In this sermon he admonishes members of the black church to look for equality and freedom on earth as well as in Heaven. In the following excerpt, King says that we have problem if we are always looking for equality and freedom in Heaven:

> There is something wrong with any church that limits the gospel to talkin' about Heaven over yonder. There is something wrong with any minister…who becomes so other worldly that he forgets about what is happening now…; something wrong with any church that is [so] absolved in the hereafter that it forgets the here. Here where men are trampled over by the iron feet of oppression…, where God's children are caught in an air-tight cage [of poverty]…, religion must be concerned not merely about mansions in the sky, but about the slums and the ghettos in this world. …A proper religion will be concerned not merely about the streets flowing with milk and honey, but about the millions of God's children in Asia, Africa, and South America and in our own nation who go to bed hungry at night.… It will be concerned not merely about silver slippers in heaven but about men and women having some shoes to wear on Earth (Cone, 1992, p. 147-148).

In speeches such as this one, Dr. King called his own people to task not only to work for liberation and freedom here on Earth but also to go beyond our nation and fight for global social justice. In this same speech, he condemned the results of classism in the church. He

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criticized churches that pride themselves on exclusivity based on the professional status of membership. "In such a church the worship service is cold and meaningless, the music dull and uninspiring, and the sermon little more than a homily on current events" (Cone, 1992). He chastised his membership to realize that the result of classism forces out the understanding of "the cultural and religious heritage of Negros" (Cone 1992). Most importantly, this sermon emphasized that "this type of church tragically fails to recognize that worship at its best is a social experience in which people from all levels of life come together to affirm their oneness and unity under God" (Cone, 1992). This sermon, "Remember Who You Are," was Dr. King's most direct effort to address the issue of classism in the black church. Cone wrote the more African Americans began to achieve what they believed to be middle-class status, the more classism became a problem in the church (1992). King used voice to make his own church membership aware of the issues of classism in the church; moreover, this awareness on his own part led him into the politics of integration and the movement for blacks to have access to the same opportunities as whites in America. While King himself was a product of this very class-driven Baptist context, he did realize his dedication and commitment to that of the "least of these" (Cone, 1992).

Clearly, the art of using the voice opens spaces for discussion in the black community on physical and mental abuse, sexuality, the "down-under" phenomenon, and of course the diseases that plague the African American race more than others (HIV/AIDS, Hypertension, Prostate Cancer, etc.) in the 21st century. While issues of sexuality and abuse in the black community have been largely kept not only within the

community but within the family, the ability to bring these problems to the forefront of our conversations has largely been done through the use of the literary voice. Books like Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* have initiated discussion groups that have contemplated the issues of abuse and incest within the African American race (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). Patricia Hill Collins wrote in Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism, that the black church has not "made the grade" in its conversation regarding sexual deviance based on what it deems acceptable. The church, she writes, has "incorporated dominant ideas about the dangers of promiscuity and homosexuality within its beliefs and practices" (Collins, 2005). She brings to the forefront the double standard practiced by many black churches. While the black church is often seen as punitive in action towards single mothers, the fathers of the children "escape censure" (Collins, 2005).

Writing is another means of voicing one's view. It can be a *pharmakon*, both a poison and cure (Derrida, 1981). Writing down one's thoughts leaves a lasting testimony of how things have been perceived, right or wrong. The written work itself may not be able to defend that which was penned days, months, or years ago (Derrida, 1981). However, it may spawn the conversation needed to move beliefs and practices to a higher place of social justice. "The way out is to tell: speak the acts perpetrated upon us, speak on the atrocities, speak the injustices, speak the personal violations of the soul" (Pierce-Baker, 1998).

Without the voices of these who have spoken on behalf of freedom, equality, and access, African American people could not have moved from a place of servitude and

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discrimination to a place of opportunity in this country.   West reminds his readers that

the prophetic church leadership has not died (2004). Reverend Jeremiah Wright has led

his congregation in a ministry called "Church in Society." The mission of this group is

expressed in these words:

> To identify and to address political justice and social justice issues which have
> particularly adverse effects on the lives and rights of persons of African descent in
> the United States and throughout the Diaspora. CIS has a political justice and a
> social justice committee which are committed to educating and empowering the
> individual and the community to improve our world by standing up to injustice
> http://www.trinitychicago.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewed$id=
> 52 , Retrieved June 30, 2008.

The ministry conducts dialogues with political candidates, provides school supplies for

children, and organizes voter registration activities. Other churches around the country

engage in political and social justice activities. Reverend Kenneth Hammond of Union

Baptist Church in Durham, NC, is a prophetic minister who has added to the church's

ministries the vision and subsequent building of a private school that will educate

children from some of the most impoverished communities of Durham at little to no cost

to the families. While building the school, the pastor and his congregation are in constant

dialogue with community schools and educational entities. They are aware of the

educational needs of the community, and they meet these needs through workshops,

tutorials, group discussions, test preparation courses, and tutorials. Another prophetic

minister, Dr. J. Alfred Smith of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California,

leads his congregation by "championing the causes of the poor, the down-trodden, the

left-outs and the left-behinds." A voice for the marginalized community he serves, Dr.

Smith uses the pulpit to uplift those who are struggling with life's challenges. He also strongly encourages those who are more fortunate to act on their religious beliefs by helping those who are less fortunate http://www.jalfredsmithsr-ministries.org/index.htm Retrieved June 30, 2008. Reverend Paul Anderson of Baptist Grove Church in Raleigh, NC participates in ministries that get people socially and politically involved through community action. The church operates its own version of the "Meals on Wheels" program on the weekends, recognizing that people need to be fed on Saturdays also. They are active in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program which provides mentorship to teens. Reverend Anderson and his congregation are active in The Future Black Men of America program that is designed to provide leadership to African American Males in education. The program focuses on strong moral, ethical, and spiritual values. This church's goal is to foster social and economic responsibility in African American males (baptistgrovechurch.org). Prophetic leadership and prophetic action by the black church have been evident in many cities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Trader-Leigh wrote the following account in her study, "Understanding the Role of African American Churches and Clergy in Community Crisis Response."

> In addition to their spiritual mission, Black clergy and churches have long stood ready to meet pressing human needs in the community, including food, clothing and shelter. They are fully aware that social conditions all too often mean the difference between good health outcomes or chronic illness among their parishioners. It thus comes as no surprise that within hours of Katrina's landfall, African American ministers and other pastors in the Gulf region became the disaster's de facto *first responders*. As front-line workers, they worked day and night to provide intensive relief and recovery services. They worked tirelessly to reunite family members widely scattered during evacuations. Their churches housed as many displaced residents as the American Red Cross. Moreover, they

enlisted doctors and nurses from the community to provide critical healthcare for anyone who needed it (Trader-Leigh, 2008, p.6).

Trader-Leigh's qualitative study included twenty six congregations and pastors from cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, and Houston. She found that African American pastors, their congregations, and denominations were first responders who pulled together resources and funding by working with service providers, and they acted as social justice advocates for the evacuees. She noted that it is important to recognize the collective workings of the African American pastor and his congregation during this time of catastrophic disaster and make sure that they are a part of future disaster preparedness committees. She outlined the needs and training required to act as emergency responders in a more organized manner. She suggested the need for funding to help cover the costs of future efforts, while recognizing that many churches incurred debt and sacrificed for this social justice effort (Trader-Leigh, 2008).

These are prominent examples of prophetic leadership in the black church, although there are many more examples of prophetic leadership in black churches across America. West asserts that these voices have been somewhat shunted to the periphery of the Christian movement and have become overshadowed by those who act in a more Constantinian, authoritarian and consumerist manner (2004). Trader-Leigh wrote, "…the role and contribution of Black faith-based institutions has been insufficiently recognized as a critical component of the disaster response system linked to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita" (2008). The effort has not been voiced. If the use of voice as a tool is an example of forward movement towards a more liberated and socially just community, then what

happens when free-market fundamentalism and escalating authoritarianism begin to silence "the voice," especially in the black church?

The Silenced Voice

There is value in the communicative experience where communication is defined as "exchanging information and ideas between participants" (Owens, 1992). Each participant in this exchange must be vigilant regarding the needs of the other in order to convey effectively the intended message (1992). Therefore, there is value in both areas of communication—the speaker as well as the listener must practice silence when listening. Paulo Freire reminds us in Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage that silence has value when used correctly. He writes that silence actually affords the communicator the ability to "hear the question, the doubt, the creativity of the person who is listening" (1998). Mohanty wrote in Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity:

> So what does it mean to think through, theorize, and engage questions of difference and power? It means that we understand race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, and colonialism not just in terms of static, embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that tie us together—that are fundamentally interwoven into our lives (Mohanty, 2003. p. 191).

Therefore, the ability to listen, to be silent, affords us the opportunity to hear the views of other people given their history and their experiences across time. There is also value in the ability to respond effectively after patiently listening. Freire speaks of a silencing

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tactic that endeavors to crush "constructive diversity, constructive criticism, and ultimately freedom" (1998).   According to Freire,

> Whoever has something worth saying has also the right and the duty to say it. Conversely, it is also obvious that those who have something to say should know that they are not the only ones with ideas and opinions that need to be expressed…; they should be conscious that , no matter how important the issue, their opinion probably will not be the one truth long and anxiously awaited for by the multitudes…; the person listening also has something to say and that if this is not taken into account, their talking, no matter how correct and convincing will not fall on receptive ears (Freire, 1998, p. 105).

A disturbing trend toward silencing of the membership is taking place in the black church. Some leaders are promoting themselves through aggrandizement and hegemony while demeaning the value of the voices of the congregation. It is clear that the use of voice gave way to transformative action when Charlotte Hawkins Brown addressed the women's conference in Memphis. Now, what are the consequences of the lack of voice in the microcosm of the black church if voice is silenced? Before answering this question, it is necessary to look at whose voices have typically been silenced, how it happened, and why?

In order to determine who becomes silenced, it is advantageous to look at who has the privilege of shutting down the voices of those who need to be heard. When Cornel West speaks of the perpetrators of free-market fundamentalism and authoritarianism, he defines these people as "plutocratic leaders, corporate elites, elected officials, arrogant authoritarians" (2004). Basically, they are those who are in socially constructed leadership positions who have the ability to silence those who are not. In the miniature version, the black church, the perpetrators of de-voicing would be the pastors, ministers,

bishops, overseers, and any other in-charge person who has assumed the caretaker position of leader over a congregation. Cone says that these leaders do not understand or even recognize their complicity in the oppression of their members by being silent while remaining connected to a debilitating social structure (2006). Cone expresses this idea boldly here:

> I unfortunately still see today that most white and black churches alike have lost their way, enslaved to their own bureaucracies—with the clergy and staff attending endless meetings and professional theologians reading learned papers to each other, seemingly for the exclusive purpose of advancing their professional careers…. African American ministers and theologians should know better than lose themselves in their own professional advancement, as their people, especially the youth, are being destroyed by drugs, street gangs, and AIDS (Cone, 2006, p. ix).

Authoritarianism and free-market fundamentalism make way for the spoils of ambition. It is difficult to attain the higher rungs of the hierarchy when critical questions from the followers get in the way. Hierarchies are horizontal separations on a vertical axis; human systems that have hegemonic groups at the top and negative reference groups at the bottom (Howard, 2006). Those who are silenced in the black church are called laity, members, the congregation, or they are those at the lower rungs of the power structure.

Voices are silenced when a group is discriminated against in order to "preserve race identity, the purity of blood, and prevent an amalgamation" (Alexander, 2005). Silencing occurs when hierarchies that have been established in years gone by continue to be maintained. Voices are silenced in order to keep the haves having (at the upper rungs of the hierarchy) and the have-nots working to maintain the economic spoils of the haves

(below the upper rungs). West explains that those at the top of the social hierarchy achieve de-voicing by

> …increasing monitoring of viewpoints, disrespecting of those with whom one disagrees, and foreclosing of the common ground upon which we can listen and learn. The major culprit here is not "political correctness," a term used by those who tend to trivialize the scars of others and minimize the suffering of victims while highlighting their own wounds. Rather the challenge is mustering the courage to scrutinize all forms of dogmatic policing of dialogue and to shatter all authoritarian strategies of silencing voices (West, 2004, p. 7).

James Cone looks at the microcosmic black church and describes the manner in which de-voicing has occurred. He links problems of black power and black theology to the manner in which Christianity was delivered to African Americans during slavery. " I wanted to speak on behalf of the voiceless black masses in the name of Jesus whose gospel I believed had been greatly distorted by the preaching and theology of white churches" (Cone, 2006). He speaks further about the need that African Americans have had to maintain white, Euro-American values at the expense of their own heritage "through uncritical imitation of the white denominations from which they separated" (Cone, 2006). The historical account reviewed in the first chapter of this dissertation demonstrates the hierarchical construct of the relationship between blacks and whites during slavery as the black church was developed. It was these relationships—the monitoring of not only the opportunities to speak, but the monitoring of the use of the body—that set the stage for silencing (Collins, 2005).

Black middle-class women have had to navigate a unique kind of silencing because of a preconceived social culture that stereotyped them as sexually immoral.

Women in the black church continue today to fight the image of the oversexed, unclean

Jezebel.   Over the years, middle-class black women in the church and in the Women's

Club Movement worked hard to create an image of the respectable woman. They tried to

counterbalance the images of women dancing in the "juke joints" and night clubs which

drove much of the image of the deviant black woman (Collins, 2005). In 2008, there are

still competing images of the black woman that can be distinguished one from the other

based on church versus street. Stereotypical images of church women include the

following: long skirts, high cut blouses, doilies, scarves across the neck, scarves across

the lap, and the signifying hat, of course. She is an usher, a choir member, a missionary,

and if wholesome enough, a member of the alter guild or mother's board. The

stereotypical street woman can be described in the direct opposite manner: short skirts,

low-cut blouses, colorful make-up unbecoming of a missionary:

> Those who embraced a politics of respectability aimed to provide dignity for
> working-class African American women migrants who led hard lives, yet the
> actual programs targeted toward working-class women clearly advised them to
> emulate the respectability of middle-class female role models. Despite being
> embedded in racially segregated communities, the politics of respectability
> basically aimed for White approval (Collins, 2005, p. 72).

Today, church women are still aiming at these stereotypical images in pursuit of the

"politics of respectability" (Collins, 2005). Women are still held to specific standards in

the church that have more to do with social acceptance than salvation. Those who have

not been able to or who have refused to reform are often delineated as "other." They

speak of an inability to find space and place in what seems to be a foreign place that

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otherwise should feel like home based on Christian belief. These women are alienated, silenced, and often absent after finding no home in the black church.

These same women have expressed the need to voice their beliefs regarding their social predicaments in the church and community. They need to speak out about their roles in the church as well as in the world. C. Eric Lincoln states that all seven of the main black denominations are known for their predominantly male leadership (1990). Both the AME and AME Zion denominations now boast female bishops elected to the episcopacy within the last 10 years, Vashti McKinsey in 2000 and Dr. Mildred "Bonnie" Hines in July of 2008. Well into the 21st century, most leadership positions for women in these churches have continued to be nurturing roles. However, Lincoln states that the church could have barely survived without the membership and involvement of the female membership who number approximately 85% of the church body (1990).

Appiah explores the effects of these experiences since he asserts that one's identity is shaped by encounters from birth to death. "The language of identity reminds us to what extent we are, in Charles Taylor's formulation, 'dialogically' constituted. Beginning in infancy, it is in dialogue with other people's understanding of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity" (Appiah, 2005). Therefore, how the pastor, the deacons, and the leaders communicate with the members affects the development of the identity. Silenced voices, silenced personalities, silenced people are still not free to develop in the manner in which they could develop because they have been affected negatively through authoritarianism and silencing. Orlando Patterson addresses black family relationships in Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New

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Racism. He concludes that marriages and family relationships have been in crisis for many years and that this crisis is a result of the atrocities of slavery. He then states that the family crisis rooted in slavery is "the main means by which the group ends up victimizing itself" (Collins, 2005). Internalizing images of slave conditions renders invisible the cultural norms that come with being black or "of African descent." Knowing that the dominant culture has the privileged voice has rendered many congregants voiceless in churches led by black ministers.

Images of the slave master who distinguishes the differences in cultural practices and labels the African slave non-human are ever-present (Collins, 2005). Other images are the manner in which a slave had to purchase his freedom, gain permission to speak to an audience, and risk loss of life for attempting to save a family from a full life of bondage that rendered a black person silent (Woodson, 1985). It is that need to become something that one is not that causes the confusion that sends a "child of God" away from her home, the black church. It is horrific that the silencing of blacks by people in authority started during slavery and continues to seep into the social behaviors of African American church leaders today.

The Injustices of Voice

Ferguson analyzes how black children are conditioned to assimilate to the dominant cultural values which have the effect of leaving behind the traits that have come to be known as evidence of "blackness" (2004). According to Ferguson,

the essential features for maintaining white hegemony is the elevation of the physical and cultural attributes of whiteness: the dominant group becomes the standard against which 'individuals' are measured...To invest in the dominant group's way of life with the stamp of 'ideal' or 'norm' means that the subordinate group's family patterns, language, relational styles are constituted as deviant, pathological, deficient, and inferior (Ferguson, 2004, p. 202).

Therefore, the children learn that their dialect is deviant, their skin is too dark, their hair is too kinky, and everything that they do is not only different but less than norm. Their rhythm is acknowledged but not normal, their physical ability abnormally good for "certain" sports used as entertainment, their intellect low, sexual prowess high but all is normal for the race. Their minds are not intellectually strong but their bodies can be useful for entertainment. Such stereotypes have been perpetuated by the dominant American culture across the years.

How has the internalized oppression been passed down through time? What does it look like in the black church? First, it is the continuation of the idea that slavery is sanctioned by the Bible (Cone, 2006). In church dogma, the slave mentality is communicated through beliefs about suffering and hope after death. The hope is that suffering will be alleviated after death, and the black church leadership continues to dehumanize the membership using the idea that hope only follows death (Cone, 2006). This dehumanization has been an ongoing process since the Post-Civil War period. Black people began building their own churches as they either rebelled and left the white church or were expelled from the white church. With the advent of Jim Crow laws, black people thought they were free but were being treated like they were slaves (Cone, 2006). Freire theorizes that black people suffer a duality:

> The oppressed suffer from the duality which establishes itself in the innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized (Freire, 1993, p. 48).

The ability to maintain a state of balance and identity in such a context is debilitating and dehumanizing. Cone states that the oppressed is trained to believe that the values of the oppressor are those to be desired (2006). Black ministers became the messengers of the dominant society serving as a mediator between the white dominant society and the black community (Cone, 2006). Creativity, fervor, and the charismatic fire of the Pre-Civil War Era that caused Nat Turner to lead an insurgence began to wane. Cone demonstrated the duality of being a strong black leader and the fact that a solid determination against segregation and discrimination would have been dangerous for blacks at the time. "They would have been lynched and their churches burned" (Cone, 2006). However, he recognized that the most devastating result of this dilemma is that the leaders convinced themselves that it was acceptable to support and defend obedience to oppression while teaching that Heaven would be the eternal reward (Cone, 2006).

> The conflict lies in the choice of being wholly themselves or being divided.; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of action through the action of oppressors; between speaking out and being silent, castrated in the power to create and recreate, in the power to transform the world (Freire, 1993, p. 48).

It is interesting to note that during this Post-Civil War era black church leaders were also receiving compensation, donations, and loans from the dominant society who in turn required that blacks stay in their places (Cone, 2006). Black ministers worked hard to keep peace in the black community while receiving donations to build their churches—a conflict of interest to say the least. Therefore, even in its state of independence, there was always some form of underlying control over black people in their churches. Changes were not made until the Civil Rights era when blacks began to acknowledge and to use Black Power while refuting the silent controls of the past. Many ministers publicly owned up to their complicity in racism and to admit that they had played a role in continuing the oppression of black people into the 20th century. The Civil Rights Movement allowed black people the opportunity to voice their objections to discrimination and oppression through religious leaders such as Martin Luther King. Cone and others documented the role of the black church in suppressing its members. "They have for the most part, strayed away from their calling, seeking instead to pattern their life after white models" (Cone 2006).

> The black church, though spatially located in the community of the oppressed, has not responded to the needs of its people. It has …drained the community, seeking to be more and more like the white church. Its ministers have condemned the helpless and have mimicked the values of whites (Cone, 2006, p. 114).

Even though there was a period of time during the Civil Rights Era in which black ministers came together to condemn discriminatory practices, they have since returned to their complacent and complicit ways. There are new concerns regarding political and ideological changes in the black churches that have become dependent upon

government initiatives (Lincoln, C. & Mamiya, L., 1990). There are concerns with churches that continue to get lost in the politics of holding conferences, conventions, missionary meetings, and fundraisers just as they did in the 1800's (Cone, 1986). Many are still concerned with the image of the denomination (Niebuhr, 1929) instead of the workings of goodwill in the community. There has been emphasis placed on "what we do" versus "what they do" as if all of the denominations are not trying to reach the same goals. Sometimes the concern seems to surround issues within the sanctuary or the denomination instead of issues of community. One suggestion is that the church should tithe to the surrounding community just as the membership is required to tithe to the church. This action would demonstrate the same commitment to community that is required of members to the church. Most members do not respond in this manner; instead, they return ritualistically to rote services with no thought of the condition of the surrounding community. West recognizes this problem:

> The major problem is…that many have given up even being heard. We are losing the very value of dialogue—especially respectful communication—in the name of the sheer force of naked power. This is the classic triumph of authoritarianism over the kind of questioning, compassion, and hope requisite for any democratic experience (West, 2004, p. 152).

How is this condition perpetuated? Cone demonstrates the difficulty in being a moral dissenter. He shows that it is hard to make decisions that positively affect others when one lives in a country that favors the patriotic over the prophetic (2006). It is demonstrated in the complacency of the full church body when the surrounding neighborhood is suffering in poverty, the membership is one check away from

homelessness, and yet the leadership continues in an upward mobile ascent into an upper-middle to upper-class lifestyle. The defining factor is in the high possibility that people will murmur, but collectively everyone is silent.

In 2008, there is an active discussion concerning the models of ministry that have developed over the last 20-30 years. The discussion is about the prophetic versus what is perceived to be a Neo-Pentecostal movement that has attracted large numbers of followers to individual ministries. The mega-church model has many members but is characterized as a prosperity model that ignores or glosses over the perils of black people in America while demonstrating the middle class members' wealth or potential for wealth to their faith (Smith, 2006). These churches also have the influence of the dominant society by virtue of the fact that they too receive "conflict of interest" funding. Politics has even sanctioned this movement and funded it, as is apparent in President Bush's executive order:

> President Bush signed an executive order in 2001 creating the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to help funnel millions of government dollars to religious groups providing social services in the communities. Black mega-churches have been a major target of that outreach (Smith, 2006, p.).

The point intended is that the Republican Party targeted large mega-congregations by offering financial support in hopes that the returned favor would be their votes. Research shows, however, that the congregations did not seem to be influenced by these "offerings" because Bush in the year of 2000 still did not garner the black vote (Smith, 2006). It is not the number of votes that is important in this discussion. It is the fact that people continue to be offered the donations, loans, and offerings, just as they did in the Post-Civil War Era, and we fail to recognize or verbalize the potential to be caught up in the conflicting relationship. It is clearer than ever that "one must know history so that it will not be repeated." The leadership of the black church continues to become entangled in an obvious web of internalized oppression while many surrounding communities

continue to suffer in poverty and distress. Cone condemns the black church for its inability to address this situation:

> It is hard to know whether to laugh or weep as the churches make bargains with the principalities and powers: prayers on public occasions, tax exemptions, shying away from vital issues, exhortations to private goodness, promotions of gutless 'spirituality,' institutional self-glorification—they are all knotted together in a monstrous tangle that spells death to black humanity (Cone, 2006, p. 115).

Without the voice of both the leaders, the followers, and those negatively affected on the outside of the church, this perpetuation of oppression by the dominant will continue to seep into the operations of those who believe that black people are no longer dominated. The black community will continue to move and live in social structures that repeat the history of the haves oppressing the have-nots even within our own churches.

With these disturbing trends in minds, it is imperative to investigate what the leaders of today's black church have to say about the history of ministerial leadership, their leadership style and purpose, issues of voice, oppression and social justice. Both male and female black ministers will offer their perspectives on the effects of leadership in the black church. These ministers will be given the opportunity to support their ideas Biblically, historically, and experientially.

CHAPTER III

THE SERMONIC MESSAGE: WORDS FROM THE

LEADERSHIP AND EXAMPLES FROM THE WORD

> An intellectual is somebody who trades in ideas by transgressing discursive frontiers, because he or she sees the need to do that…; [intellectuals] are creative thinkers, explorers in the realm of ideas who are able to push to the limits and beyond, following ideas in whatever direction they might take (hooks & West, 1991, p. 152).

This chapter provides a space for the ministers, the black Christian leaders, to present discourse regarding their messages, their methods, and their beliefs. Recognizing that the pressures and responsibilities of the vocation—historical, spiritual, denominational, personal, political and more—are important to the understanding of leadership styles and values, it is necessary to listen to what the pastors and ministers of today's black churches have to say about church leadership and the possible evolution of their own styles. There could be a connection between their styles and the voicelessness, oppression, and social justice issues of those who may be listeners and followers. According to Cornel West,

> the rewards and respectability of the American empire that tempt Christians of all colors cannot be overlooked. The free-market fundamentalism that makes an idol of money and a fetish of wealth seduces too many Christians…when the major example of prophetic Christianity—the black church tradition—succumbs to this temptation and seduction, the very future of American democracy is in peril. The crisis of Christian identity in America is central to democracy matters (West, 2004, p. 158-159.

Both male and female black church leaders were interviewed in an attempt to document possible themes and or trends in both thinking and action (See Appendix A, Methodology). The responses reflect the ideals, the Biblical perspective, as well as the typical trends, if not practices, of the people represented. These leaders have spoken about their personal leadership styles, their attitudes towards critical questioning, their understanding and application of social justice, within a backdrop of classism and sexism. Finally, they reflect upon how their methods and teaching styles may affect the individual members of the church, the community, and the nation. The interjection of Biblical text will create a discourse between the theologians, the scripture, and the hypotheses of this dissertation project that asks whether the leadership in the black church is complicit in the perpetuation of dominance and oppression.

Participant Descriptions

Who are these leaders, these passionate lovers of the impossible who may or may not confuse themselves into a higher position than that of their calling (Caputo, 2001)? Who influences them and why? In-depth interviews were conducted with five randomly chosen ministers in leadership positions in the black church to discuss issues deemed significant to the hypothesis of this qualitative study. Women were included as well as men in an effort not only to recognize that both are capable leaders in the black church but also to recognize the possible similarities and differences due to gender influences. Each ministerial leader will be recognized by pseudonym to assure anonymity agreed

upon at the time of each interview. The following paragraphs outline demographic

information presented by each participant.

Pastor Israel (you have struggled with God) is pastor of a "medium size"

Baptist church whose membership totals about 800 but attendance count is approximately

600-700 per Sunday morning service. He describes himself as an overseer, secularly a

CEO, and then states that he understands that he is essentially the undershepherd,

Biblically speaking. He is a full-time minister with office space, a secretary, and daily

office hours. Pastor Israel listed his duties as preaching two services on Sunday,

conducting weekly Bible studies, performing weddings, funerals, and baby dedications,

visiting the sick, counseling, and management. Pastor Israel has a Bachelor of Arts

degree in Theology, a Master of Arts in Theology, a Master of Divinity in Professional

Training in the Ministry, and a Doctorate of Ministry. He is currently completing the

Ph.D. in Theology. He periodically adjuncts at his local university and describes the two

positions as equal—teaching.

> *1 Peter 5: 1-5 King James Version*
> *1 The elders, which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of ready mind; 3 Neither of being lords but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

Minister Deborah (a bee) is a local preacher in an African Methodist Episcopal

Zion Church whose membership is approximately 600. She categorizes the church as

"large." Her responsibilities include assisting the pastor, visiting the sick, teaching,

orienting new members, looking for missing members, evangelism, intercessory prayer, and preaching. Minister Deborah has a Bachelor of Theology degree. She continues her ministerial studies within the denomination where she is considered a "second year conference studies" minister, which means that she is involved in a four tier program of preparation to become an ordained elder within the denomination that leads to the qualifications of pastor. Within the four years she has the opportunity to become an ordained deacon (first ordination-inability to consecrate the communion elements) and then the highest ordination of elder. She is retired from state employment and is now contracted to work in administration with her city's school system.

> *John 21:15*
> *15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, thou knowest that I love thee He saith unto him, feed my lambs.*

Pastor Sarah (discerned by means of the Holy Spirit) is co- pastor of a "very small" Wesleyan congregation which has approximately 15 members. Her responsibilities include administration, pastoral care, counseling, preaching and teaching. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, and Certificate in Clinical Pastoral Education for Institutional Chaplaincy, and a Master of Divinity. Pastor Sarah works as a chaplain in a general hospital located in her home town. At the hospital, her responsibilities include pastoral care and counseling as well as planning and leading various worship services for the sick and their families. She also sits on the ethics committee at that particular hospital.

> *Luke 22:25-27*
> *25 And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are call benefactors. 26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. 27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.*

Pastor Aaron (the teacher) is pastor of a "small" Wesleyan congregation with approximately 20 members. His responsibilities include presentation of the gospel, nourishing the believers, and presenting Christ to the non-believers. He has a bachelor's degree in counseling and a master's degree in theology. He also works as a counselor for those who have been involved in substance abuse. Those responsibilities include helping to reduce, eradicate, or change addictive behavior in individuals.

> *John 13:14*
> *If I then, you Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*

Pastor Amos (burden-bearer) is a pastor of almost 17 years of a Missionary Baptist congregation of approximately 900 members, with 700-800 of them being active on a weekly basis. He categorizes this church as a medium size church. Pastor Amos stated that he is in a management role where he is involved in vision casting, teaching, evaluation and human resources. He has a strong background in business administration and leads his denomination with a sense of "practicality." He sees his function as a "catch all" that includes material and spiritual components. The expectations from the church's standpoint included conducting worship, conducting Christian Education, moderating church business meetings, participating in all meetings, serving as a resource to all

auxiliaries and boards of the church, performing baptisms, weddings, funerals, and teaching leadership and stewardship principles. He has earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration, a Master of Divinity with an emphasis in Christian Education, and he is currently returning to school to complete the Master of Arts in Theology.

> *2 Timothy 2:24*
> *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; 25 In meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*

****

Four major themes that emerged from the interviews with the five participants are influence, identity, relationship with others, and social justice. The power of influence has the ability to produce carryover of personality traits, ideas, traditions, and performances to others. Those who are seen as people "to be like" have the innocent possibility of having their character reproduced, variably, by those who believe that they are extraordinary. Those reproductions are deviations from the original because of the influence of different contexts and environments, and people which meet daily to produce the present situations. The participants were asked to identify great black Christian church leaders. Many stated that these people provided the models for their leadership style. While reviewing the information, I asked myself how the influences of these identified personalities operate in the context of a 21st century community.

In addition, the participants were asked to explain their philosophy of leadership. The themes ranged from "servant leader" to "Corporate Executive Officer" (as seen by

the followers).   Participants were well aware of issues of power, management, responsibility, and hierarchy. Many spoke of what they believe leadership should include and what leadership actually looks like in their churches and denominations, both present and past.

It was also important to investigate how these leaders, who view themselves as servant leaders or even CEOs, view their relationships with those considered "Others." If one is, in fact, a leader concerned with the lives and souls of others, then how does one think of and interact with "Others?" How does s/he respond to the needs of "others?" Response to this question determines the value and operation of social justice in the black church. Each participant was given the opportunity to explain their definition of social justice and the work of social justice in their perspective churches. Statements of social justice in writing are embedded deeply in spiritual affirmations if found at all. In this sample of five black church leaders, the written statement was not necessarily the catalyst for action. It was the belief and example set forth by the leader that determined the amount of activism that would be performed by the church membership.

Given these issues of influence, identity, relationships with "Others," and social justice activity, it is natural to wonder what kind of legacy our black church leaders are leaving for the 21st century. Does the manner in which one views himself or herself affect how one responds to others? And if so, how does it affect the manner in which we teach people to respond to the needs of others?   Is the legacy left behind one of morality and social justice or one of perpetuated dominance and oppression? This chapter presents

the findings from each participant regarding the themes of influence, identity, relationships, and social justice.

Influential People-Influential Power

I have had the privilege of knowing some people who have left an indelible mark on my life. Some, I aspire to be like. Others have taught me character traits that I am thankful to have retained in some augmented form; I know for a fact that those attributes serve to inspire my actions on a daily basis. One of the things that I have learned from this study is that there are people who have powerful influences on each of us. I recognize that people who have the ability to affect a change in me in this manner are powerful people. They are so respected or abhorred that I either choose to maintain their legacies or vow to never take on their mannerisms. In chapter one, the discussion centered on power and how power is used by the dominant to determine the rules. Lisa Delpit stated that those who have the least power are the ones who are most aware of the existence of power (Delpit, 1995). Studies have acknowledged that anyone who has need can choose to take advantage of those less fortunate in order to advance their own agenda (Cone, 1986). A few assumptions are being made at this point as I question whether or not black church leadership knowingly or unknowingly maintains a culture of dominance, demeans the spoken concerns of the congregation and the community, keeping them in a state of apprehension and finally a state of silence. I am acknowledging that the position of "black church leader" in general carries a great deal of power and authority. I am assuming that those who aspire to be a Christian in the black church believe that the

minister is a guiding force.   Because of these assumptions, I asked five church leaders a

variety of questions that will hopefully shed light upon whom and what influences their

beliefs and their aspirations. The initial question will demonstrate how people in similar

positions influence the styles of those who admire them. I asked the question: "Who

would you refer to as a great black Christian church leader and why?" Answers included

persons such as Dr. Elliot J. Mason, Sr., Apostle Otis Lockett, Bishop T.D. Jakes, Bishop

G. E. Patterson, Dr. Charles Ward, and Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays.

Pastor Israel calls Dr. Elliot J. Mason, Sr. his mentor and explains his choice in

this quote:

> He's my mentor but as a pastor, his commitment and integrity is really
> profound; he is a pastor 24 hours a day. He is also a prayer warrior and
> has counseled and ministered to some of the most dynamic leaders across
> the nation today… but doesn't want his name to be known per se…he is
> the person living who has had the most influence on my understanding of
> what ministry is and what it means to be a Christian pastor. I have met a
> lot of pastors. He is always a Christian as a pastor.

Pastor Israel wanted me to know that his mentor coordinates a prayer ministry called the

World Renewal Ministries. I could tell that this ministry set an example for him because

he shared a story about a conversation that he had with Dr. Mason. He asked Dr. Mason

what was most important to ministry. Dr. Mason told him that he needed to have a strong

prayer life. He asked him again, "Really what is it that you think I will need most?" Dr.

Mason responded again, "prayer." The participant was looking for something more

concrete as an answer and was surprised that Dr. Mason continued to offer him the

answer of "prayer." He stated that he has since come to understand why Dr. Mason was adamant in his more spiritual answer.

Pastor Israel admired the "integrity" of his mentor making a specific distinction between what it is to be a "Christian pastor" versus a "pastor." As a follower, a member, a participant under the leadership of a pastor, my expectation associated with this identity (Appiah, 2005) is that pastors and or ministers in any Christian church should be "Christian pastors," committed to a sincere and honest ministry. While others did not question or admit that there may be pastors who are not "Christians or Christian-like," they did question or applaud integrity and honesty when speaking of great church leaders.

Minister Deborah referred to Apostle Otis Locket who pastors Evangel Fellowship in Greensboro, North Carolina as her role model.

> The reason I consider him to be a great pastor is because that's exactly what he did …. He helped me in the area of complete spiritual growth. … He is a man of integrity. Second of all, this man lives exactly what he teaches…. He teaches accountability but he showed us accountability first. He does not believe that because he is the pastor, he does not have to explain himself or his moves to his congregation. This is a man who saw a new church that had financial hardships and he chose to not take a salary…. He felt that if God had called him there to help the church that he could not first "rob" the church and then make the church make up for it. I saw some things in this man that I had never seen in a pastor before. He believed that the pastor of a church… should do everything that was needed for the sheep. If the sheep had to be out in the rain, so did the shepherd. He did not believe that the shepherd should be in a nice brick house or building, warm and in great shelter, while the sheep were out in the cold. So he really did show us.

Minister Deborah again mentions integrity in her description of a great black church leader. She felt that his ability to perform the same duties that he required of his members was admirable. She used the word "rob" when referring to a person who was accepting a

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"salary" from a struggling congregation. This is a strong statement considering anyone who works expects to be and should be paid. How does one consider the nature of the job, the reality of life, the possibility of the spiritual impossible (Caputo, 2001), the invisibility of faith when discussing this issue? Before chastising the participant or congratulating the "great black church leader," consider the concepts and the context. The context is the black church. The concepts are both secular and spiritual. From the secular to the spiritual, one must consider finances, integrity, sacrifice, and faith when critically dissecting this simply stated opinion regarding salary. Perhaps one should look at the underlying theme of performing in a manner that produced good for the whole instead of good for one. Whether seen as "refusal to rob" or "working for the good of the whole," it is again a statement of integrity. Participants have all required some form of honesty and integrity in the "great black church leader."

Pastor Aaron named the late Presiding Bishop Gilbert Earl Patterson of the Church of God In Christ (COGIC) as his "great black Christian leader." He pastored the nation's largest Pentecostal denomination with an active membership of 6000 in the year 2000 at his own Temple of Deliverance in Memphis, Tennessee. Bishop Patterson was founder of COGIC Charities which collected over a million dollars for victims of disasters, including Hurricane Katrina (Heves, 2007). Although Bishop Patterson has a well-known and well-documented history through his Bountiful Blessings television ministry, Pastor Aaron found some very simple reasons for naming him as a great black Christian church leader.

He commands with his presence your attention and he has a great gift not only of preaching… but he preaches in a way to get anybody at any economic level to understand.

When prompted to speak more about Bishop Patterson, Pastor Aaron stated that he felt the Spirit of God could be seen in Bishop Patterson which he felt was an indication of Patterson's calling. Pastor Aaron, a minister himself, found Bishop Patterson to be engaging due to the presentation of the man himself. It was also important to this participant that Bishop Patterson was able to speak to people from different income levels. People who visit Patterson's church are usually lower income, homeless, and possibly substance abusers who do not always feel welcomed or understood by other churches. These people do not always understand what is being said when visiting some of the more organized religious establishments.

Pastor Sarah answered the question regarding great black Christian leadership by naming T. D. Jakes who has been compared to Billy Graham (Biema, 2001). His titles include pastor, evangelist, life coach, and author. His leadership is peppered with both positive and negative images and descriptions from America's Best Preacher (Biema, 2001) to velcro minister, a phrase referring to his psychologically based teachings which sometimes stray from orthodox tradition (Fisher, 1997). She explains her choice:

The first person that comes to mind would be T. D. Jakes because of his international notoriety. But all I know about him is what I have seen on TV and I have read some of his teachings which seemed to be very balanced. His teaching touches all—not just the religious and spiritual but the practical side of life—just his ability to take the scripture and make it applicable to everyday life.

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Both Pastor Sarah and Pastor Aaron work in areas of critical need. Pastor Aaron works with substance abusers and the poor and homeless. Pastor Sarah works in the hospital setting where people are many times critically ill. She may need to speak not only to the sick but to the caregivers of the sick. They are both of the Wesleyan denomination and view themselves as servant leaders. As servant leaders, they both are concerned that a "great black church leader" should be able to speak to people from all walks of life. They both admire leaders who speak of "real issues" in a manner that "real people" can understand.

Pastor Amos talks about his parents as his chosen great black Christian leaders. His father's worship style influenced him because he was one of the church leaders who knew how to "line" hymns, a musical form with roots that run back through slavery. The participant said that his father had the ability to line hymns and sing hymns that sparked a "fire" in others in the tradition of communal worship. He also named his mother as a great black Christian leader saying that she was a Christian educator in the church as well as the community. She was from a family of "academicians" in contrast to his father who did not learn to read until he was in his 40s.

> I see them as two of the most predominant leaders in my life or in the church as it relates to my religious orientation, not just because of bias but because of the impact that I saw them make in the community.

The description of his parents seemed to bring both the Christian experience as well as the educational experience together for an example of how a prophetic ministry actually

works for the good of the whole community. Pastor Amos then spoke of the late Charles

W. Ward who pastored First Baptist Church in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina.

> He was ordained by Martin Luther King, Sr. He was the personal driver for Dr.
> Benjamin Elijah Mays when he was a student at Morehouse College. He was
> taught theology by Howard Thurmond. So he is my "real spiritual father" in terms
> of putting me on the road in which I have traveled…those would be the three
> people who helped form my credo on theology…Dr. Mays was president of the
> Atlanta University system as well as mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He
> brought the academic rigor, the spiritual fervor, as well as the human touch. I saw
> this as being so predominant in his life…how it shaped the character of Charles
> W. Ward, which in turn involved the civil rights movement for the rights of all
> people, not just black people but all people.

Due to this influence, Pastor Amos's ministry involves working with and for all people.

He states that his involvement with "movers and shakers" in the church has involved the

political as well as the economic "piece." Pastor Amos believes that the framework of

civil rights helps to shape and frame how he "does" management in the church. He

concluded his answer by stating that, "Leadership style should have academic rigor, it

should have spiritual fervor, and it should have economic empowerment."

While Pastor Amos enjoys working with all people as did Pastor Sarah and Pastor

Aaron, he has defined a leader as one who is academically rigorous, a mover or shaker,

and one who maintains within all of that some "spiritual fervor." None of the previous

participants mentioned education as a major role player in whether or not their leaders

were influential. They were not concerned with whether or not their chosen leaders were

political movers or shakers as much as whether or not they could work with their

followers. None mentioned politics or economics as a requisite for the ability to be a

"great black church leader," even though politics and economics are an integral part of the context of the black church.

A few themes emerge from this one question regarding great black Christian church leadership. People chosen as mentors and role-models have varying leadership models. These models ranged from parents, to pastors, to civil rights activists, and educators. Therefore, great black Christian church leaders who have been identified as mentors may be other than pastor. It is also important to note that the attributes of the leaders' mentors may be indicative of the expectations of followers. These attributes include commitment, integrity, and consistency.

All of the participants named people who have proven the ability to affect change in the community, present a "Christian-like" identity at all times, an ability to communicate and empower at all economic levels, and the ability to demonstrate and invoke spiritual fervor. Christian leaders interviewed for this research held in esteem those who not only were able to present the "Christian journey," but they too walked the "Christian journey."

> Once labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effects. In particular, these ideas shape the ways people conceive of themselves and their projects. So the labels operate to mold what we may call identification, the process through which individuals shape their projects—including their plans for their own lives and their conceptions of the good life—by reference to available labels, available identities (Appiah, 2005, p. 66).

A Chosen Philosophy: Chosen Identity?

Each participant was asked questions that required them to explain their leadership philosophy, why this philosophy was chosen, and how it manifested itself in the daily church leadership role. James Cone in <u>My Soul Looks Back</u> emphasizes the importance of one's leadership philosophy as he demonstrates in the following passage:

> Theology is the critical side of faith and without it faith loses its distinctive identity. Preaching is the proclamation of the faith and without it faith can not be genuinely celebrated. Preaching and theology are indispensable for the life and work of the church…. Theology provides a critical test for the church so as to determine whether its life and work are consistent with the person and work of Jesus Christ. If a church has no theologians, then it cannot be genuinely self-critical and thereby seek to overcome its shortcomings and weaknesses … (Cone, 1986, pp. 69-70).

Theology should lead to self-examination and help to determine whether or not leadership in the black church is complicit in perpetuating dominance and oppression. Participating in forms of dominant and oppressive behavior contradicts the "person and work of Jesus Christ" (Cone, 1986). The leadership style of any leader is affected both positively and negatively by those they choose as mentors. There is also an assumption that people will imitate to some degree those they hold in high regard that have held similar positions. "It follows that what I can do intentionally depends on what concepts I have available to me; and among the concepts that may shape my action is the concept of a certain kind of person and the behavior appropriate to a person of that kind" (Appiah, 2005).

The black church leaders interviewed for this study admit that they emulate specific figures in the ministry and they explain why they respect these figures. It is clear

that these outstanding figures affect the leadership behaviors of the interviewees. The participant's leadership philosophy, the leadership model promoted and practiced by their denomination, and their commentary regarding the similarities and differences in their styles compared to the denomination's promoted and practiced style. The denomination's promoted and/or practiced style is not always a written standard found in disciplines or documents. It is the recognized social behavior within the culture. Appiah writes that "kinds of persons are brought into being by the creation of labels for them. So numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labeling them" (Appiah, 2005). The first interviewee, Pastor Israel, compares himself secularly to a chief executive officer but describes himself spiritually as an "undershepherd" in the following excerpt:

> Leadership is primarily from the perspective of influence…; there are power dynamics in management styles but I think the most profound is the sense of influence. How that works itself out daily is that you become the pastor in the process of time. And then you influence persons in the life of the church towards Christian discipleship and alignment with the vision of the church. In terms of church management issues…. I really don't see the pastor as a dictator but rather as a person of influence which has more power than a dictator. And I think it unfolds in a period of time with bonding with people, praying through issues and confronting…. You have to be responsible for the management of the church which comes with time.... In the traditional church model, it takes time to become the pastor.... The CEO is helpful in description but in terms of essence, it is not the biblical term. The CEO model is not in the Bible. We are undershepherds…. We are enablers that enable the body of Christ to function and to utilize spiritual gifts and to fulfill the mandates of our Savior in terms of building the Kingdom. The CEO model works for churches that are business and entertainment. I am still committed to the traditional model in which the body comes to be fed, the undershepherd feeds them so that they are enabled to go out and transform the world.

Pastor Israel continued to talk about the significance of terminology, specifically that of "undershepherd." He acknowledged semantically the confusion that could be caused by those who interchange freely the terms "shepherd" and "undershepherd." A viable concern is that people who believe that the pastor of a church is the ultimate shepherd sometimes lose the ability to critically question procedures and activities that are important to the life and viability of the church, as well as each individual member. Typical examples include that of individuals who find themselves "caught up" in activities that they find contradictory to the spiritual beliefs of Christianity. Pastor Israel reflected that we all have the ability and the freedom to make choices. He then returned to a simple scripture that is quoted frequently at church but perhaps has become hackneyed with recitation. This scripture clearly identifies in the 23rd Psalm "the shepherd."

Psalm 23:1
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Pastor Israel recognized that the misuse of terminology such as CEO can be detrimental to a follower's understanding of how she or he should behave in response to confusing rhetoric. During this conversation, we both recognized the fact that misuse of terminology can be used as a means of manipulation towards desired goals. We both agreed that when people do not fully understand information that is needed to navigate a system, the system can be used to the detriment of the people.

Questions arise about how people may be interacting with a person whose followers call him CEO even though he acknowledges that he is an undershepherd. How

do leaders interact with others when they realize that parishioners view him, in a sense, as CEO even though he knows he is the "undershepherd." With determination to make clear the distinction, Pastor Israel again pointed to scripture that demonstrated his philosophy of the Shepherd versus the undershepherd:

> *St. John 10:14-16*
> *14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*
> *15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, which are not of his fold; them also, I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.*

Pastor Israel chose this philosophy based on his relationship with his mentor, Dr. Elliot J. Mason, Sr. who taught from a general evangelical movement that used the Bible as a guide. The Pastor's seminary studies helped him to broaden this perspective which he reports has not been shaken by popular culture. He has respect for those with a more contemporary philosophy (ambition, success), but Pastor Israel chooses to maintain his need to catch and share the spirit of Christ, the spirit of evangelism, and to maintain integrity in ministry.

> *Acts 20:17 & 28*
> *17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church*
> *28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over that which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Pastor Israel was then questioned about what was promoted and practiced by the denominational leadership. He stated that even if the denomination did promote a specific style, he was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal church. His father and

grandfather were both pastors, but his personal journey to the commitment to Christianity

did not involve a commitment to denominationalism. He stated that he has always been

more concerned with fellowship and association rather than denomination. He has been

in relationship with several denominations because his concern is more for evangelical

doctrine than denomination and

> …people, who believed in being saved and transformation, people who believed in the power of the Holy Spirit…; however, I wasn't born and raised in the Baptist church. I came to the Baptist church primarily because of Martin Luther King and because of the freedom. I didn't want a Bishop to determine who I was going to be. I didn't per se relate to Presbyterian or Holiness culture; therefore, the Baptist church was the most relative denomination for me. Most of the leaders that I respected (Catherine Kuhlman and Martin Luther King, Jr.) were in the Baptist church and this is the direction in which I gravitated.

He did return to the original question and stated that leadership style of the Baptist

Church does support a style that acknowledges and appreciates tradition as well as a

behavior of assertiveness. Baptist ministers have to be assertive to gain entrance into a

church as a pastor. He appreciates the fact that one must work for what she or he gets.

There is no promise that anyone will be called to a different church (unless he or she is

well connected to movers and shakers in the denomination). Therefore, a new pastor and

even an old pastor would have to be assertive in order to find a place as pastor in the

Baptist denomination. The downside is that there is no bridge from the church leaders to

young people preparing for ministries and leadership roles especially those who are not

connected to the denomination. Although the absence of an organized path for a career in

ministry is unfortunate, Pastor Israel stated that he has been fortunate in his endeavors,

but he realizes the pain of graduating with a degree specifically geared towards ministry and having no inroad into a position as a pastor.

In ministry as in other careers, those aspiring to be church leaders need some defined process in which to enter into the career. The anxiety increases when people invest mentally (and spiritually) in a career option to find no job on the other side of the degree. Such anxiety may promote negative competition as well as power dynamics that could essentially incite hegemony and hierarchy in the church. James Cone wrote, "He who is not capable of a powerful self-affirmation in spite of the anxiety of non-being is forced into a weak reduced self-affirmation" (1989). Although other participants did not specifically mention the title "CEO," they did speak in management terms but emphasized temperance in management. Pastor Amos used the term temperance to mean self-control and restraint in decision making. Minister Deborah explained her version of management without using the term at all. She responded to the question regarding her philosophy of leadership by stating the following:

> My philosophy of leadership is described as one who is willing to be the person that holds things together. Not one who is condescending or one who is really what you may call "in control". But it is one who maintains the peace and the balance of whatever the goal or the vision for that particular organization in the church is. I think that leadership in the church has gotten out of hand whereas it has become more of a dictatorship rather than that of leadership. Because leadership means that you are one of the greatest followers in that particular group and that you know how to assess things and bring it forth so that everybody is 'OK' with the decision making even if the decision is against what one particular member would have chosen. A good leader could possibly make people feel somewhat comfortable with decisions …. Leadership is a calling…; voting can sometimes become a popularity poll as opposed to someone that is really called and anointed to lead. Our leadership in the church is different from leadership in the world. In the world it is based on ability and skill, knowledge, education…; in

the church it should be someone who has humbled themselves before the Lord and knows how to be humble before the people.

In response to the question of why she chose this particular model for her style, she explained that she felt that she was "called." It is not necessarily her choosing. Ministry was not what she had planned for her life. She felt that God had to "humble" her to get her to understand that she had to put her focus on what He wanted in her life. The word "humble" is sometimes associated with those who serve others. To be humble is to be low in rank, importance, or condition. This is in great contrast to a perception of CEO. Minister Deborah states that none of us recognize what our futures entail; therefore she chooses to depend on God's knowledge to save her in the end. She believes that He has given her the discernment to understand that she is working within her calling. "Nothing more, nothing less," she stated.

She was then asked whether or not the denomination promotes a specific leadership philosophy or style and what she sees practiced by the denomination's pastors most frequently. Her response included these remarks:

> I believe in what my denomination started out to be. I believe that when John Wesley set up the idea of Methodism, it was so that the people could grow strong spiritually. That was his basic and only idea he had for Methodism. It was not about preachers, pastors, bishops, or any structural matters of that type. His main thing was that people were moving through their faith without receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He decided then that we could not move forward until we could attain the stirring of the Holy Spirit…. It was about spiritual growth and it was about us recognizing and doing what Jesus called us to do which is to affect one another with his Spirit.

In an effort to remain focused on the original question, Minister Deborah was asked whether these spiritual goals had been ignored or forgotten. What does she see practiced by the pastors more frequently?

> I think we have come to the place where we use the word "Zion, or AME Zion" as a fraternity or a sorority as opposed to a faith that was born out of desperation to receive more of God…. I see the practice of pride and competition in preaching, competition for certain churches, competition for membership numbers, competition for the affection of the presiding elder or bishop…. We have come to a place where we want to be noticed for our abilities to be great orators, have larger churches, to be called upon by the bishop. We want everybody to come to us as opposed to working with the people in the congregations who want to be introduced to and taught about Christ, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are not being able to use them [gifts] in our churches because we are stuck on protocol and worrying about what people will say. Pride and competition have become the stepping stones.

Minister Deborah stated that she disagrees totally with these practices. She stated that the denomination is losing membership when people start to read for themselves and find out for themselves the truth about Christianity and salvation. "Their eyes are opened to the deceit that they see in leadership and management; they leave the denomination." Minister Deborah stated: "I believe that if we don't turn around or turn back to God we will receive the same message that God sent to his people in 2 Chronicles 7:14."

> *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

Minister Deborah demonstrated a different identity model when speaking of leadership in the church. She sees the pastors and leaders as humble. The humbleness she associates with being a Christian leader does not include attributes of competitiveness

and pride. Pastor Sarah contrasted her leadership model against that which she learned as a child. Minister Deborah spoke of hierarchy and people knowing and understanding their places in a vertical system of power. After speaking about these types of models, Minister Deborah concluded that people do come to a point in which they begin to read and study for themselves. At this point, instead of speaking up, they leave the denomination and sometimes the church. This is a point of silence—a place where people have chosen to quit instead of question.

Pastor Aaron stated that his philosophy on leadership in the church is to meet people where they are and to bring them as far as they are willing to go. He stated that he works within the boundaries of "servitude." He uses simple analogies and examples that people can relate to in order to relay the "message of the gospel." He chose this philosophy believing that people can choose their manner of behavior when given alternative ways of thinking about situations. He believes in offering a choice and offering the opportunity to make choices.

Pastor Aaron expressed that we are all called to serve as persons of the people. He actively participates in activities with his congregation. He states that he is included within the group and not necessarily above the group as a leader is sometimes seen. He wants to be able to lead the people by counseling, teaching and preaching. He sees the servitude model being supported and promoted by his denomination and he is in total agreement with this philosophy. He believes that this model helps maintain the status of "glorification" for God and not glorification for church leaders and/or pastors.

Pastor Aaron spoke about his beliefs for about an hour and thirty minutes. He answered his questions with language that almost anyone could understand. He used analogies to everyday activities to describe people's ability and authority to make choices. His simplicity and clarity were appealing when compared to the complicated metaphors used by many ministers, their references to theological verbiage, and their prayers spoken in what we as followers "believe" to be Hebrew. Although people develop multiple levels of education, understanding, and expression, all should be able to understand the messages as well the messenger that we believe has been sent by God. Pastor Aaron's ability to communicate with the people he serves enables him to reach people in the community who are considered "others."

Psalm 133:1
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

Pastor Sarah stated that her leadership philosophy is based on the concept of servant leadership which is supported by her denomination. She went further to state that the denomination supports the fact that as a servant of God, she is in place to help the people.

Hebrew 3:1-2, 5
1 Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Christ Jesus, 2 Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. 5 And Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.

The Wesleyan church teaches that the leadership is there to help others do whatever it is that God called them to do. This concept removes the separation of minister from lay people within their denomination. Servant leadership, she explained, means that there is nothing that you would ask someone else to do that you yourself would not be willing to perform. She stated the following:

> I think this style works well with my personality and my philosophy of life, which was developed because of my faith. I believe that God has called all of us to help each other and there is no separation. When God looks at me in whatever position I am in, he sees us all as His children. We all have specific callings and specific gifts and we have to put those things together to foster Christ. In this denomination this is what I see practiced most.

Pastor Sarah further explained a vast contrast to her denominational upbringing with that of servant leadership. The church of her childhood upbringing is a predominantly African American denomination and the difference in the philosophy of leadership can be clearly seen. Her childhood denomination, she stated, has levels of leadership from the lower rung of laity to the level of Bishop. There are specific restrictions, requirements, and duties operating at each level. There is also an overt expectation of authority and power represented at each level. Each group knows its place, its expectations, its limitations, and the possible consequences of "bucking the system." Cone wrote of his experience in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME):

> The power and authority of the bishops was nearly absolute and often arbitrary. I could not place my personhood at the disposal of AME bishops. I had observed the public humiliation of many ministers when they attempted to make a bishop accountable to human decency and respect…To be sure, not all AME bishops were inhumane and arbitrary in the exercise of their episcopal power. But the problem of the lack of accountability of episcopal power was pervasive enough

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for me to conclude that there was no way that I could be a critical theologian and also be controlled by AME bishops (Cone, 2005, p.70-71).

Like the leadership that Pastor Amos described, she works with the people, setting examples, offering opportunities that open the doors for inclusion and empowerment. She no longer chooses to be a part of a hierarchy of power when she can work with and for her followers.

Pastor Amos spoke freely and candidly contrasting the philosophy of other ministers against his by looking at the indirect dilution of the opportunity to promote empowerment and liberation of the people.

> There are contemporary movements of religion or Christianity that black persons have aligned themselves with—many of which are white organizations. They have started to preach their gospel and join their political affiliations and parties in order to get all of the perks that go along with it. This basically means that they benefit. The result in some denominations is a black pastor who lives large, drives expensive cars, and commands all of the attention be centered on him or her. And everything seems to be about how they can get money as opposed to empowering and liberating the people. I believe that in many black churches, there are persons who have prostituted their own people to get whatever they can get from them. God will have to deal with them about this…. There are other clergy that say nothing about it because they find themselves disadvantaged and they wish they could be in the position that others are in…so they say nothing. I don't mind saying something about it. I have chosen to live as the common man does because the Bible says, "Let your moderation be known among all…. (Philippians 4:5).

Temperance is an important attribute for a Christian. This attribute is described as the ability to refrain from anything that would hamper the successful service to and for God.

> *1 Corinthians 9:25-27*
> *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I*

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therefore so run, not as uncertainty; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway.

Pastor Amos stated that leadership in the black church is supposed to be evangelizing the world to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:19
Go yea therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

He questioned why we do not use our resources to evangelize the world as opposed to "building buildings as monuments to ourselves." In this question and answer session, he explained that his church's new edifice was built because his membership outgrew the original sanctuary. However, the new building does not include office or suite space for the pastor. "It is all educational space which is used for learning and worship activities." He continues to use the office space in the old building for his administrative duties. When asked if this was a sacrifice in order for his church to have what it needs, Pastor Amos responded in this manner:

> This is not a sacrifice. It is not a sacrifice! It is doing what is right. A sacrifice is to give up something at a cost of losing something. So it's not sacrifice—its doing what is right. If the purpose and the job of the church is to empower and equip believers, to evangelize the work of Jesus Christ, then it is not about having a 1000 square foot office in a building for the purposes of herding people in, fleecing them, and sending them back out. The mission and vision of the church is to bring people into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, allowing for the Holy Spirit to be at work in their lives that He might be Lord of their lives, equip them that they might share the gospel that they might bring others in to do the same. I think this is very simple…. If this was the case, our domestic lives would be better, but when there is a polarity between the haves and have-nots, someone is always profiting on the backs of someone else.

Pastor Amos works within the servant-leadership model. He spoke of the analogy of

Jesus who was willing to wash the feet of his disciples as a servant would. Pastor stated

that Jesus was willing to be a leader who would wash the dirt and dung from the feet of

his followers. He stated that many pastors do not want to wash feet as servants; they want

to be celebrities. He expressed that this attitude is demonstrated when fellowships allow

leaders to emerge to the position of leader when they are not willing to serve, yet they

want to tell others how to serve. He continued that this is how the black church and

Christianity have become diluted and have lost their effectiveness. Pastor Amos states

that this is why many people have discontinued their commitment to our churches. He

believes that many places of worship have become a "den of thieves (Mark 11: 15-17,

Matthew 21:12 and John 2:14). He goes further to state that the Bible speaks of

management and equity and yet this element of the philosophical model frequently fades

in the web of organizational and economic issues.

> *Deuteronomy 15:7-8*
> *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: 8 But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.*

> *Proverbs 22:16, 22, 23*
> *He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want. 22 Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted at the gate: 23 For the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*

Luke 4:18
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach
the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to
preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind,
and to set at liberty them that are bruised.

Pastor Amos says that the leadership style of the denomination is basically the style that

is promoted by the preachers. His "perception" is that the church is run like a "republic."

He defined this to mean that a person is elected to lead but must consider the opinions of

the people when making decisions. Most congregations in his denomination believe that

they should have some voice and some influence in the goings on of the churches. Pastor

Amos then compares this idea with the Biblical model of "theocracy."

> God gives leadership and he has persons to follow his leadership and everyone
> follows God. And I use the apostle Paul who says 'follow me as I follow Christ'
> (1 Corinthians 11:1). Which means that if I am presenting all of those things that
> Christ would have for you, as recorded in Biblical texts, you should follow my
> leadership.

The members of Pastor Amos's church expect him to offer leadership and guidance.

Moreover, they have the opportunity to say that he is or is not offering them the

leadership and guidance they need. If he is not offering the leadership and guidance

expected, they then put processes in place to assure his understanding of their needs. He

states that this offers a system of balance whereas leadership has a responsibility to the

people and the people have a responsibility to the leadership. Pastor Amos quotes one of

his friends who often says to him, "Biblical results come from Biblical principles.

Biblical principles bring about Biblical results."   He states that the use of Biblical

principles can be seen when a church grows spiritually, numerically, and relationally.

Pastor Amos explains that if the church is at a plateau or declining, it is probably not functioning within Biblical principles. He believes that anything that God is a part of will grow. With this in mind, he believes that one should be able to witness some form(s) of growth and maturity in a church whose leadership is basing its operations and decisions upon Biblical principles.

Pastor Amos believes that the denomination would like for the ministers to have overall authority in word, power, and deed, over all operations of the church. However, he believes that if the preacher is not working within Biblical principles, then he or she is not performing duties with dignity. He quotes a line from the Negro National Anthem to illustrate his point that the leader who is not inspired to lead with Biblical principles will become "drunk with the wine of this world [and] we forget thee." Intoxicated with one's self, the leader is not performing duties with integrity. Pastor Amos continues with this statement:

> As I perceive it, the black church is finding itself in an awkward dilemma. We are turning out of seminary some dynamic people but we have more self- imposed bishops, apostles, and evangelists who call themselves with no preparation or understanding of the text which misguides people. There are some people who will blindly follow a fool…We have so many people in our world today who are so sold out and in the pockets of other people that they can't preach the gospel with integrity.

Pastor Amos compares some leaders and followers to inner court prophets who are described in the Bible. The inner court prophets, according to Pastor Amos, knew that if they were guilty of making statements contrary to the king's beliefs, they would be beheaded. He added that there are many leaders today who do not want to change the

status quo in order to maintain their opportunities for social, political, and financial advancement. Their style and philosophy follow the established hierarchy as he describes in this passage:

> I believe that our denominations do teach pastor supremacy as well as other leadership supremacy thoughts that help to create this perpetual cycle of mental slavery. Bob Marley sang a song that said something like 'emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None can free us but our minds…we've got ta fulfill de book…' If we continue to perpetuate foolishness from the pulpit, or the advisory groups to the pastor (deacons, stewards, trustees, etc.) we will keep getting the same foolishness. Young people are not remaining in the church because they see the hypocrisy of their parents. When they can see authentic Christianity displayed and depicted, it will make a difference.

The participants have all described some form of hierarchy as contrary to their beliefs in what leadership entails. Yet, Pastor Israel concluded that a leader could be educated but would need to be quite assertive or would need to "know someone" in authority in order to break into the field of pastoring after completing school. Minister Deborah and Pastor Sarah spoke of the denominations of their childhood as hierarchical, power driven, and competitive. In reality, there are the "in" groups versus those who are "out." Such realities erode one's ability to reduce the problems created when there is a distinction between the "haves" and "have nots."

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Responses from the five participants who answered questions regarding their leadership styles, how it is manifested in their daily church work, and leadership styles of the denomination reveal some complex findings. Generally, each person has the responsibility, as a black church leader, to recognize the practices of his or her

denomination but to decide if that practice is acceptable in light of his or her personal and spiritual beliefs. The participants have given examples of their need to determine their own philosophies and what must be done to work within those philosophies knowing that there may be differences in the practices of the denomination. It is also noted that the participants were indeed aware of the social pressures of authoritarianism, consumerism, and power. They continue to perform their service despite their individual positions within this multifaceted system of leadership in the black church. It must be hard to practice one's faith as a leader in such a web of contradictions.

Specifically, each person is able to identify his or her leadership philosophy citing words such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) secularly, overseer, undershepherd, and servant leader. The connotations for each have a vast power differential in relationship to management across a range. Definitions of each have a level of hierarchy that is not equal in power or influence to the others. Appiah stated the following about the identity that one acknowledges as his own.

> Identification as an L…means thinking of yourself as an L in ways that make a difference: perhaps thinking of yourself as an L shapes your feelings…perhaps it shapes your actions, so that you sometimes do something as an L…Often then, being an L carries ethical and moral weight… (Appiah, 2005, p. 68).

This means that the identity concept that one accepts regulates the manner in which one deals with others. It determines whether you are with others, for others, above others, or below others (Bauman, 1995). How one identifies him or herself as leader will determine how one morally and ethically deals with others. If thinking of oneself as a CEO, overseer, undershepherd, or a servant leader is one's identification, then what are the

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ethical and moral weights believed to be associated with those identifications? Bauman

says in "Forms of Togetherness,"

> If ethics is about drawing the boundary of good while sitting on this side of the
> border, then morality as imagined in the ethically administered world must be
> about the distinction between good (what you must do) and evil (what you must
> not do) and about staying put on the side of goodness (Bauman, 1995, p. 60).

In the next section of this chapter, it is important to investigate how these

participants work with others, how they operate within the church, and how they relate to

the community that surrounds the church. Are church leaders with all of these identity

differentials able to work for social justice? One who identifies as a Christian must have

an urge to "…strive for fairness and equity, equality of rights to protection, opportunities,

commitments, and social benefit for all people" (Alexander, 2005). Since we have a habit

of talking about others as if we should not talk about "all people," I will take the time to

address the issue of "other." Bauman states the following:

> The being-for, I propose, means an *emotional* engagement with the Other before
> it is committed (and before it can be, conceivably, committed) to a specific course
> of action regarding the Other…. The Other turns into the Self's responsibility,
> and this is where morality begins as the possibility of choice between good and
> evil (Bauman, 1995, p. 62).

The next section of Chapter 3 will ask the participants to present their opinions regarding

issues of women, homosexuals, and the poor in the church. The question, "What is the

place of_____ in the church" is an effort to determine the disposition of these leaders

as it relates to persons other than males and leaders. Further, there is the question of

"place." What is "place?" Does this word "place" function to sift, separate, discriminate, oppress and or dominate those who follow black church leaders?

Place, Manner, Practice

In an effort to determine what these black church leaders thought about class and gender issues within the church, they responded to a series of basic questions regarding the rights of women, homosexuals, and poor people in the church. The following commentary will create spaces for the discussion of how these interviewed church leaders relate to those who follow them in the church and in the community. Do they report behaviors and dispositions conducive to "being-for" Others? Is the effort favorable to that of one who practices in a mode of social justice? Do our church leaders operate in a fashion that promotes the advancement and the well-being of the vulnerable in the church and outside of the church? Are they prepared to critique the social structure and social institutions in which they work (Alexander, 2005, p.4)?

"Being-for" instead of "being-with" the other travels through some critical steps that are advanced by emotional engagement. Bauman writes that emotion closes the door to "indifference." Emotion transports the Other from a place of preconceived notions to a place of possibilities and opportunities. Lastly, emotion removes the Other from

> …routine and normatively engendered monotony, and transmits him into a world where no universal rules apply, while those which do apply are overtly and blatantly non-universal, specific, born and shaped in self-containment of the face-to-face protected by the outside influence by the wall of sentiment (Bauman, 1995, p. 62).

Pastor Israel was questioned about the place of women in the church. He responded by drawing a distinction between his denomination and that of the Southern Baptists of whom he had just read were experiencing a decrease in membership. He believes that this decrease could partly be caused by controversial decisions upheld by the denomination. One decision stated that women should be housewives, submit to their husbands, have babies, cook meals, and stay out of professions and ministry. He stated that this issue was reaffirmed a few years back, but that he had been liberated from this type of thinking early.

> My great-grandmother was a pastor. So I grew up with that mentality. After I became saved, one of my indirect mentors was Katherine Kulman. I was then introduced to a passage in Joel that says that the spirit of God will be poured out upon all flesh, young and old, male and female.

The scripture reads: "*And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughter shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, Joel 2:28.*"

> I've never had a problem with women in ministry. There was a time when I struggled with women as pastors. But basically, I believe that a woman's role in the church is the same as any man. If God's calling is upon your life then you must find a place where God can use you best.

Pastor Israel stated that his current church had already been introduced to female clergy as well as deacons by the time he became pastor. He stated that he affirms this work that

was already completed before his time. When asked about homosexuals in the church, he responded:

> They have always been a part of the church. Their role remains the same…. I cannot promote the lifestyle…; the presence of gays in the church is nothing new. I see them in the same way that I see anyone else in the church. They are open to various positions in the church…; they are not discriminated against…. I don't get into their personal business if they are providing leadership…and of course, the music ministry has been dominated by them for years in the black church…. I must be honest in saying that I don't validate the lifestyle but I don't fight it either…. There is no difference in people who are gay versus people who are whoremongers in the church…in a sense…because everyone that is gay is not out being promiscuous but I don't see any difference…. I don't believe that the gay lifestyle is a Biblically validated lifestyle….

I struggled to transcribe this passage recognizing that the participant's response is controversial to say the least. In an effort to be non-judgmental and in an effort to recognize the participant's struggle to answer clearly, I asked the question again, what is the role? Is there a stereotypical role? Is that role only that of musician, singer, musical artist? What would the gay person who is in a leadership position of the church think of his or her comparison to "whoremongers in the church?" Pastor Amos stated that homosexuality is "sexual immorality" in the same few breaths that he stated "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Is this seen as being-with or being-for? Where is the emotion that removes the constraints and stereotypes leaving room for the movement into a place "where no universal rules apply, while those which do apply are overtly and blatantly non-universal, specific, born and shaped in self-containment of the face-to-face protected by the outside influence by the wall of sentiment" (Bauman, 1995)?

What did this participant say about the meaning of "place?" Pastor Israel stated that he "administers" to people and they are all considered people. He believes that it is improper to use the word "place" because it creates distinctions between people which he believes is not good. "Anyone who joins is welcomed to join because they are all children of God." It is noted however that there are "places" according to his responses stereotypically where homosexuals in the church can be found. Even though the term "place" is known to create separations, it is still recognized and utilized for certain groups of people.

Minister Deborah who is a female minister responded to questions regarding "the place" of women and homosexuals in the church by stating the following:

> The place of a woman in the church is anywhere that God places her. The reason that I say that is because when I search my Bible, I see women everywhere in the church, even the head. I understand that the Bible was written by men of God that were inspired by the Holy Spirit…I understand also that God never separates our spirituality from our personality. At the times of the writing, women did not have a rightful place in their homes, the community, or society. That is the reason that Jesus was scorned for allowing women to do certain things. For instance, Jesus had a conversation at Joshua's well with a woman of a different religion, another race, and another nationality (John 4:7-27). He was scorned by his followers for just talking to her. Jesus doesn't care about gender because the Bible says that God made man and woman from his own image and in his likeness and gave them dominion (Genesis 1:28)." Even though Paul wanted women to remain quiet in the church, he referred those who needed to learn more about the church to the women of the church (1 Timothy 2:11-12, I Corinthians 14: 29-35, II Timothy 1: 5, Titus 2:3-4). In the 4th Chapter of Judges, the people were doing what they thought was right in their own eyes and God could not find a man to lead the people, so he chose Deborah. She was a judge, a prophetess, the mother of the nation of Israel. And she was the wife of Lapidoth. The place of the man in the church is the same as the woman… wherever God places him…he is the head of the household as long as he is working within the will of God…when he steps out of God's will and way, God will raise up a person to lead his people in the way that they should go. Man's place in the church depends on man's heart in God.

Pastor Deborah continued her response on the place of homosexuals in the

following passage:

> I believe that the place of a homosexual in the church is at a place of learning. I believe that the flesh becomes weak towards lust and desire which plays heavily on the heart. The Bible teaches us that the heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:18, Ecclesiastes 9:3). Many things that we take to heart and that we are emotional about, we have to be careful of that. We have to look at God's word and find examples regarding our relationships. It was always one man and one woman. Even when men were able to take on more than one woman, the consequences of those relationships were not good. When speaking about the Bible, you have to look at the continuous history of what has happened. In every area where there are examples of homosexuality, you will see that God considered it an abomination, and he wiped it out. It was more than Sodom and Gomorrah when God punished homosexuality…so where do I see them in the church? I don't see them as leaders, until they have been cleansed, until they have repented, and until there is a conversion.... If they don't confess that they have given their lives to Christ, and continue to seek after the regeneration and conversion, we can't even accept them and give them the right-hand of fellowship as members in full connection.

This participant does not accept homosexuals in the church without evidence of

conversion and regeneration. However, she assumes that one can know who is and is not

gay, who is and is not experiencing conversion. I told her that I had met people and

communicated closely with people who in general conversation revealed that they were

gay and if they had not, I would have never known. It is hardly possible or feasible to

request information about one's sexual orientation in order to hold conversations with

them. Further, "Is it our responsibility as Christian leaders to reject people when they are

seeking a relationship with God?" Pastor Deborah was then asked: "how do you know

when and when not to give the right-hand of fellowship?" She responded in this way:

Let's say the person tells you that he or she is saved and has given their lives to Christ, I can't say, 'no you're not.' I can't do that, I have to receive that because once that comes out of their mouths, they are accountable to the Lord and not to us. So we can't be judgmental. I would say that if you know that a person is actively practicing …let me say this…there is no big sin, little sin. If you know that a person is in a leadership position in the church and is living unmarried with his or her lover in the same dwelling, they need to be sat down.

She then explained that what is in motion is something called the Achan Principle, (Joshua 7: 1-26) which basically means that if a person is disobedient to God, the consequences are great. The disobedience of one person affects the whole group. She stated that she believes that much of the troubles that the church is facing today are due to the Achan Principle. People are allowed to come into the church and have leadership positions in key places in ministry, and we don't understand why things are happening. Those are the strongholds in the church. I then asked what her thoughts were about the poor and homeless in the church.

There should not [poverty] be in the church! …it is the church's responsibility whether the person is a member or not…it is our outreach ministry. That person's life should not be the same.

She then responded to the question of "place" in the church. Is there such a thing as place in the church? She replied:

…not anymore…historically all the trustees were men and women are women are now on boards that used to be all male. There was a time when ushers were only men but these things have changed. When it comes to the preparation of food… we now see just as many men in the kitchen as women. However, there aren't equal opportunities for women as pastors. The higher the membership numbers are, the more you see men. The smaller, mid-size churches are reserved for the women. There is no female bishop as of yet in this denomination [at the time of the interview].

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Again, I compare the statements regarding homosexuals in the church and the philosophy of the Achan principle to the concept of being emotionally engaged with the Other to the point of opening the doors for possibilities. Is this a true engagement in working for the Other, or is this a space in which people wonder if they are truly welcomed into the fellowship? If it is true that there is no little sin or big sin, then who has the right or authority to determine who receives or does not receive the right-hand of fellowship? Are the poor people the only group that deserves to receive unbiased treatment? Last but not least, if there is change in "place" in the church, does that not extend to various subgroups of people other than women and the poor?

> The sole requisite is that the Other is cast as a target for emotion. What must happen in the first instance, before sympathy or compassion may have their chance, is what Martin Buber described as *the resistance to objectification*…being tied to the Other by emotion means, on the other hand, that I am responsible for her/him, and most of all for what my action or inaction may do to her/him (Bauman, 1995, p.63).

Pastor Aaron stated that his denomination allows women to hold substantial positions in the church structure in the areas of preaching and teaching because female leadership is viewed as Biblically based. He then named some of the Biblical female greats. Each Biblical example can be used to justify why women should be utilized in the church. Additionally, he stated that men are supposed to be the head of the church as in the family also. He further stated that this is not a position held above the woman. The man should see himself as equal to the woman. "It is important that you don't think of yourself as above others."

He acknowledged that all sinners have a place in the church. He stated that we do not condone homosexuals but we see them as ones who need to be saved also. He believes that the church should be there to help change the lifestyle.

Pastor Aaron stated that the core of his church is a group of poor people who have been drug dealers, homeless people, and prostitutes. He believes that these are the people that Jesus would have drawn into fellowship.

His answer to the question of place was based on order. He stated that God is not a person of disorder. Therefore, between the leadership of God and the pastor, a determination of place can be made for people in the church. He says that he meets with his congregation to get to know them. They determine together what their strengths are and where their strengths can be used in the church.

Pastor Sarah placed all people in the category of "sinners" and decided that all needed to be saved. Again, when asked about the place of homosexuals in the church, the conversation changed to whether or not one condones the lifestyle. It is interesting that leaders cannot explain how homosexuals can participate in the church just as any other person without trying to make sure that the listener understands their view of the person's sexuality.

Pastor Sarah was excited to state that her denomination is realizing that women have been the foundation of the church and that they do have the abilities and the gifts to lead. The Wesleyans have just elected their first General Superintendent, which is a role similar to the Bishop in the Methodist Church.

Women in this denomination have always had leadership roles in Christian education area and counseling and not necessarily church leadership. I think that those areas [counseling and education] were the areas in which they were granted leadership roles. Women were not generally given positions as large church pastors or positions at conference levels. You can be called an evangelist but people have worked hard to get women in leadership positions in the general church. Biblically speaking a man's role is in leadership, but we must recognize that it comes under Christ. From scripture, it says that the man is supposed to be the head of the household but in churches it should be the same. But I believe that a man is called in leadership but they need to realize their gifts as well as the gifts of women.

Pastor Sarah was then asked about the scripture that says the man is head of the house, and God is head of him. However, he is to treat his wife as he treats himself which is the manner in which he treats God. Would that not make man treat woman like he would treat himself. The Biblical reference follows as illustration of this opinion:

> *Ephesians 5: 25-29*
> *25 "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; 27That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies, He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*

On the issue of the place of homosexuals in the church, Pastor Sarah responded in this passage:

Gays and lesbians are all children of God. Like all of us, we are standing in the need of God's mercy and grace. I believe that any sexual activity outside of marriage is a sin. The place for homosexuals in the church is to come as children of God like all of God's children who are born in sin…. The church is a perfect place for the poor and homeless. It is a place where people can receive hope that helps them get on their feet. The church is the place where people are supposed to

be able to find the help that they need. Lots of times, we look down on those people but by the grace of God, go me. Most of us are living from paycheck to paycheck…it is part of being a Christian and part of being a church that we offer that love and assistance to those that are less fortunate.

She spoke of gays and lesbians as part of the whole group of people who need God. She like Pastor Israel and Minister Deborah, however, finds the need to present her opinion regarding the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality. When questioned about whether or not the personal belief system regarding someone else's culture will allow a person to develop unaffected relationships (Appiah, 2004), Pastor Sarah presented her stance on what "place" means in the church.

> I believe that God has given us different personalities and gifts and different insights. There are positions that some perform better than others. However, there are instances of people placing certain people because they believe those positions should be filled by women or men. It is the person's mindset. Sometimes it comes from leadership or tradition. Therefore, people don't look at individual gifts…sometimes we have ourselves in a standstill by having people to do activities that they are not gifted to perform.

The Biblical passage illustrates her message:

> *Corinthians 12:4-7*
> *4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

Pastor Amos also commented on the role of women in church leadership when he said, "There are female preachers both licensed and ordained in our church. There are not female deacons because we view the deaconess in the same light as the deacons."

He supported his views regarding what women could and could not do in the church from the Biblical reference in Romans 10: 11-12:

> *11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. 12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.*

Pastor Amos continued to explain that

> I believe that God can use whomever he wants in the church. God can save anyone. I cannot support the homosexual lifestyle in the church based on scripture. However, they are a soul just as anyone else… God calls all of us in the midst of our flaws… All of us have committed some sin. But I do believe that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved… There is such a thing as 'place.' Place is anywhere God would have you to be.

Pastor Amos expressed some provocative statements regarding homosexuality in the church. After he spoke of people having equal access to God based on quoted scripture, he referred to homosexuality as "sexual immorality." He believes that the church has become too soft in its function and will not call things as they are. He elaborated that "if I thought this was "alright" then homosexuals should start their own "colony" and have their own children." He made other disturbing statements that contradict his Biblical scriptural reference to "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord..." These statements also contradict the act of "being-for." What type of "togetherness" is there when one believes that she or he has been unconditionally accepted but then learns that the acceptance is conditional and limited?

> Such another way of relating is *being-for*; it breaks decisively that endemic separation, which under the condition of being-with remains baseline from which

every encounter is but a temporary departure and to which partners return (or are pushed back) after every episode of encounter…being-for is a leap from isolation to unity…to an *alloy* whose precious qualities depend fully on the preservation of its ingredients' alterity and identity (Bauman, 1995, p.51).

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I spoke earlier of the complexities that these leaders are facing in their call for ministry. Given the definition of *being-for* as well as the knowledge that one can be *together with others* but not necessarily engaged with others, then how can leadership perform social justice inside of the church or outside of the church and at the same time maintain a mindset of separation. If supporting the actions of your ministry is based on scripture that read "whosoever," then what is the definition of "whosoever?" If the unfounded difference between Jew and Greek supports the notion of women operating in the same manner as men in the church, then how and why does homosexuality get separated? The key question of this research study arises here: is it possible that the leadership in the black church is complicit in the perpetuation of dominance and oppression.

> As philosophers, theologians are keen observers of the alternative interpretations of the meaning of life. They know that the gospel cannot be taken for granted, cannot be accepted without the continued test of life in struggle. The philosophic side of the theological task keeps one intellectually honest and open to other perspectives. It guards against dogmatism and provides the groundwork for dialogue with other faiths (Cone, 1997, p.8)

On Social Justice

Each participant was asked to define social justice in their own words. They were asked if their churches had statements or policies reflecting in words their beliefs

and actions for social justice. Realizing that a written statement sometimes is just that, a written statement, they were asked about the practices of their churches towards social justice. And finally, they were questioned about whether or not their beliefs and actions affect those who follow them.

Pastor Israel said that there are no policies, mission statements, or declarations in his church that directly address social justice. He added that

> It [social justice] is reflected in our vision and in some of our projects that we have in terms of ministry. It is a constant exposure for the people in terms of issues that are relevant. This church has historically been a voting church. There are many people who work at the polls. Politicians come here all the time in terms of issues. We have a new ministry that is based on Tavis Smiley's program that was outlined in his book The Covenant with Black America. This provides even more opportunities with voter education, interfacing with politicians, and exposure to the issues that matter in our society, and empowering people in the community and in our culture. The church has political work as a heritage. Many of our people are involved in city and social issues, commissions, and movements. We kind of continue to endorse that.

He was then asked if his leadership style had an effect on the way other people make political, economic, and social decisions and if he were a model for those who followed him. Can leadership adversely affect those who are followers? And lastly, is it important to critically analyze one's own leadership style? Pastor Israel responded fully:

> …you never want to use your position of influence and power to control the minds of people. That is so dangerous. I present things as options even though they may know where I am…people have the freedom of choice and that is a tremendous freedom that should not be tampered with….

When asked how leadership style could adversely affect followers, Pastor Israel alluded to issues of leadership in popular culture. He raised questions regarding singers and

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entertainers who present images of gang-life and street life. These were the leadership

models that adversely affected others. He believes that the church has an obligation to

provide alternative images. Given the opportunity to speak on self-assessment of

leadership style, he said the following:

> I see this as a constant looking back from where I started out 12 years ago. You continue to look back and review the culture of the church, the city in which you are located, the people you work with and you make adjustments. You have to decide what you can and can't do. Pastors are not gifted in all areas and cannot handle all activities….

Pastor Israel continued to speak about the fine tuning of management skills as it relates to

pastoring. He did not address issues of philosophy in dealing with others in the church

(women, homosexuals, and poor people). His focus remained on managerial and

operational style.

Minister Deborah responded to the same questions with the following answers:

> My definition of social justice depends on the community that you live in and the cultural situation that you are in. Because social justice can be low key and on the other in it can be volatile. I think we need to know the history of a situation before we buck up until we can come up with a way in order to have an effective resolve. We want to kick and scream but we have no ideas and no suggestions.

When she was asked to consider the Rudolf Alexander definition of social justice and to

focus her response on social justice and the church, she added this comment:

> …we still have to look at the history and look at the problem… then the church's responsibility is to teach transitional concepts that help people get to better places in their lives…the church needs to be involved in making good decisions to help others.

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Minister Deborah could not name documents or church statements that directly address social justice, but she did describe a monthly activity in which her church seeks to help the homeless. The problem with that activity is that eating, bathing, and dressing are normal daily activities in the lives of most people. How dignified can a person feel walking away from an activity that provides a single meal, a change of clothes, and some hotel size toiletries to last about three days. This function is certainly important when you have nothing, but what happens when you look at your gifts and realize that they will not last the full week much less a month. Minister Deborah seemed to realize that more needed to be done and suggested that perhaps the church could partner with another group to provide food, clothing, and toiletries on a more regular basis. She admitted that the church needs to be more realistic about their activity and if there are not enough resources then a budget should be set aside to partner with other efforts for a more sustained activity. We agreed that this ministry could be more pointed and more focused within a partnership model. She believes that she practices social justice outside of her church affiliation. "What my church is calling social justice is not equivalent to the definition of social justice."

Minister Deborah does understand that her leadership style has an effect on the people who follow her. She is addressing those who come to her Bible study. She has seen a marked change in the way they think about issues and interact with others. They have begun to read, study, and question their texts without being prompted. If people can be influenced to read and study based on your teachings and leadership, will they also take on portions of your beliefs. If this is the case, then people will also take on the

negative responses mentioned (regarding homosexuals) and pass these beliefs on to other generations.

When asked about the critical analysis of one's own leadership styles, Minister Deborah gave this response:

> Yes it is important to critically analyze one's own leadership style because of some of the things we have talked about today. We all need to look at ourselves as potential leaders because we need to realize that we make a difference (both positive and negative) in the church, the community, and individually.

Pastor Aaron stated that his definition of social justice is to be in harmony with God, man, and self. To clarify his meaning, he used an analogy of the example of a three piston engine. If one of the pistons is not functioning correctly, the engine will not run smoothly. Therefore, God, man, and self must be working in orderly fashion in order for society to run smoothly. He believes that the black church has participated in great historical activities in the area of social justice. But he is concerned that "the hunted has become the hunter…. If we get too bogged down in blackness, we begin to pass the boundaries and begin to act like them…; we act like we have the whip sometimes when we get bogged down in blackness…; be very careful that you don't become the hunter."

Pastor Aaron quoted the golden rule as his statement for social justice. He stated that in practice the doors of his church are open to all people regardless of race, class, or gender. He stated that everybody is somebody at his church. They have a clothing giveaway, a toy giveaway, and food drives. The leaders in the church make sure that the people are able to get in contact with them at all times. The church is set up like a mission. People come and go, but they know that they are welcomed.

Pastor Aaron said that his leadership style makes a difference because his membership tells him that they understand his teaching. The members have stated that they have been to many other churches and had not been able to understand the teachings. He hopes that his leadership style is a model for those who follow him. He stated that every church has a personality, every pastor has a personality, and that they are not all the same for every church. He then stated that the leadership style of pastors can adversely affect people. He realizes that his job is an awesome responsibility to people and to God. He questions his leadership style all the time. He states that he strives to tailor his style by asking God to show him how to continue to work in the context in which he is pastoring. Pastor Aaron spoke of his need to make sure that he continues to strive for what is spiritually best for his congregation and community.

Pastor Sarah explained that there is not a specific mission statement or policy regarding social justice in her church. However, because of where the church is located, she has the opportunity to help people in the community find resources such as jobs, food, health and mental health services. She believes that her followers look to the pastor for an example. "Many times it is not about what I say but how I live." For example, she spoke to her followers about registering to vote and one of the members stated that this election would be his first time voting. The member stated that he was proud to be registered. At 40 years old, this member decided that it was time to vote. This example reinforced the role of servant-leader in the society. Pastor Sarah reflected on its meaning for her:

> …this was a sign for me that what was being taught at the church was going beyond church walls…; my leadership style is a model for the people who follow. My servant leadership style allows me to walk beside of people instead of in front of them. As a leader, I am setting a non-verbal example…. Yes, leadership style can adversely affect individuals, especially styles of dominance and control. It causes confusion in lives and causes people to turn from the church. There have been many people who have been hurt emotionally and spiritually by those who have misused their power as leaders and it has done great harm in people's lives. They use this as reasons for not coming back to the church.

The Pastor expressed that it is important to review one's style in order to see where things are working and where things are not so that one can determine whether or not the work is effective.

Pastor Amos believes in budgeting for social justice in order to help others. He states that his church has created an arm in the community that is used as a model by other churches. He is happy and excited to talk about the work of his church in the community. They have their own version of 'meals on wheels' on the weekends which provides food to the elderly. The church has planted new churches as a mode of social justice.

> This church developed from a small male Bible study group that grew into a church. Out of the small Bible study group, a women's study group and a children's study group started. Because of a need in the community, a new church grew out of some Bible study meetings.

Due to the pastor's involvement in the community, these churches are involved in several community organizations like the urban league, diabetes awareness programs, and organizations that are supporting the end to homelessness in his city. He feels that the church should be operating in a social justice mode. The church itself does not have a

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policy on social justice but he did provide a copy of the general covenant of the Baptist church which says that people will contribute to an evangelical ministry and take care of the poor.

He does believe that it is important to analyze his leadership style because "what worked 10 years ago will not work today." He states that he is in constant thought regarding his methods, practices, and philosophy.

Conclusions from the Word and the Examples

This chapter has attempted to investigate the possibility that black church leaders could be complicit in the perpetuation of dominance and oppression by interviewing specific leaders on their perspectives regarding the following topics:

1. those they consider to be models of leadership (historical perspective)
2. philosophies of leadership (identity, authority, and relationship)
3. the "place" of others in the church (authority, identity and relationship)
4. the meaning of "place" (perceptions and identity).

The interviews elicited the personal perspectives of the leaders and combined them with the Biblical perspectives on the issue being analyzed. These interviews have revealed several areas of concern.

- Leadership in the black church is influenced by previously viewed leadership as well as Biblical text. Interpretation of these models influence the manner in which one interacts with the people who are considered "the following."

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Pastors Israel and Amos, who have the larger congregations, chose great black church leaders who were excellent in their contexts and times. However, there is a question of whether or not an augmented perpetuation of those models is appropriate in today's contexts. For example, Chapter I in this dissertation described a sexist view of leadership during the civil rights movement and yet leaders from this era are identified as great role models, without critical reflection of their leadership style in the context of the times. Does the 21st century black church leader continue to perpetuate the negative character traits unknowingly as she or he mimics the styles of the 1960's greats?

- When considering self-image and relationship with others, one questions the manner of interaction between leader and people when there are a variety of self-images that span from servant-leader to manager/CEO. Given the differences in identity characteristics, there will be differences in the manner that people are treated based upon the Biblical models versus the business models. Servant-leaders and under shepherds operate in a manner of service and protection. Managers and CEOs stereotypically have people working for them, manage the information gathered from those work for them, and supervise those who work for them. Their goal is the upward mobility of the business and the self and not always the upward mobility of the people inside or outside of the business. From these definitions, it is easy to generalize that how one views the self will determine how one views and interacts with others. Depending upon the models presented, class differences may occur

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and determine the differences between how people interact with each other based on their position in the hierarchy.

- More importantly is the fact that these leaders have the opportunity to set examples for future leadership in their congregations and community just as their mentors did for them. The power of this position and the effect that it could have on an individual as well as the community it serves should not be taken lightly. It is the preacher who is perceived to have one of the most powerful positions in the black community. It is the preacher who historically led black people out of slavery and through the civil rights opposition. Although the movements of late have not been given the status of the Civil Rights Movement, the preacher is still seen in political leadership roles such as various positions in the NAACP and in other leading civic organizations. Their actions continue to be viewed by others as powerful enough to be followed at the least on a weekly basis. This means that their teachings and their interpretations are heard and repeated by those who sit in their congregations and return to their communities.

- The question about "place" for people was asked to not only find out how people are directed to specific activities and positions but to ascertain the reasons why. There is a history of women being relegated to caregiver positions in the church. However, there is not a history of women being politically positioned at the helm of denominations even when they have been found competent. Pastor Israel qualified his statement about the position of

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women in the church by stating that he was used to it because his grandmother was a minister. However, he mentioned previous reservations about women being pastors. When considering "place," there has been some advancement in the opportunities for women in leadership roles in the church. Several denominations have seen women move to the position of Bishop or Superintendent over the last ten years. This does not negate the fact that the number of women in core leadership roles in the church is miniscule in comparison to men. Further, what does it say about the perceived identity of women by black men if it took this many years to promote women to "the higher rungs of the hierarchy" in these denominations?

There was a sense of confusion and sometimes incidences of what seemed like "stuttering" when speaking about the place of homosexuals in the church. The comments seemed to deviate from "what their places were in the church," to whether or not their lifestyles should be accepted or condoned. I never asked anyone's opinion regarding lifestyle. I asked what their place was in the church. I am concerned that our black church leaders find it necessary to be selective of whom it is that has the right to be connected with God. If it is so that Jesus died for the remission of sin, then whether we all agree or not about what is or is not a sin, all of our behaviors have been covered and "whosoever will, let him come."

- Then I asked, "What does 'place' mean?" I am concerned that none of the participants believe that "whosoever will" would not be inclusive of all people

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regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual preference. Therefore, there are various places that skills could be utilized based on the gifts and talents we possess and not on the preconceived notions of our lifestyles. I ask, "How can a leader properly interact with a member who happens to be a homosexual if the only thing that is on his mind is their choice of sexual activity and not their personhood?"

- In response to the action required by social justice, I wanted to know if people had social justice statements in their policies, procedures, mission or vision statements. It is my opinion and my Biblical understanding that when people write down their goals, they tend to also write down plans in which to reach those goals (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

> *And the Lord answered me, and said, "Write the vision and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that readeth it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it Tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come, it will not tarry.*

There were varied responses from no written documentation to an indirect reference to a church affirmation. However, there were varying activities happening in each setting from a monthly activity to serve food, clothes, and toiletries to the poor to civic and political activities in the greater community outside of the church. There seemed to be some agreement regarding the work for those who are poor although four out of five participants were unable to identify formal policies relating to social justice for anyone. However, everyone agreed that the poor should be fed, served, and empowered in the

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church. Partnerships seemed to produce more effective work on a large scale. Those who were willing to work with others (inside and outside of the congregation) were active in effective social justice activities that touch large numbers of people. The pastors of these congregations were also active politically and socially in their greater communities. They set examples for their membership by being active themselves.

I have learned through this experience that being a black church leader is complex and complicated. There are personal, economic, political, and spiritual facets that make creating leadership styles that are appropriate to both the spiritual and social goals difficult. While some leaders have opened spaces for women and see their spiritual and political commitments to the poor, they continue to interpret scripture to pigeon-hole those with alternative lifestyles, referencing the assumed practices instead of the person. I asked if we believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the basis of our faith, and all that the blood was to cover, then why do we still selectively choose who is and is not acceptable in the church? Is it ours to judge and does it not keep us from performing the duties that we were called to perform? Does it not also perpetuate a state of oppression for certain groups of people, the same type of oppression that African Americans and women fight against on a daily basis? Does the definition of oppression change for certain people?

In chapter four, I ask the leaders of the black church to recognize their complicit behaviors, understand the effects of these behaviors on their followers, and then consider a purposeful change. John Caputo asks what can be done for others in order for them to see their impossible possibilities (Caputo, 2001). Is it likely that the church leadership

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can act in a manner that develops authentic "being-for" relationships while continuing to support the empowerment of women, the poor, and those who have alternative lifestyles? Is it possible that we can build communication of information, practice critical reflection, and act on new found understanding (West, 2004)? Could we all grow spiritually, socially, and politically, given a leadership that promotes critical thinking and a prophetic philosophy (Cone, 2005)? What if the black church again became the "linchpin of the community" in not only word but deed (Collins, 2005)? What are the leaders willing to do to reach these goals?

CHAPTER IV

ALTAR CALL: THE EXPERIENCE

*"Father I stretch my hands to thee, no other help I know. If I withdraw myself
from thee, oh whether shall I go" John Wesley, 1741*

While growing up in the black church, I have had the week-to-week experience
of listening to the sermon, reflecting on how the message influenced or integrated into
my life, and then making the trip to the altar to thank God for all that he has done. The
"trip" to the altar is not only the commitment trip but it is also used as a time in which the
members are invited to come to prayer—a time to recognize who God is, be thankful for
what God does, and to request from God help in meeting one's needs. Based on the
analogy of the altar call, this closing chapter seeks to search for ways in which black
church leaders can come to God, thank Him for who he is and what he does, and ask Him
for a transformational prophetic ministry that serves to offer an alternative and different
personality from that which has imperially controlled, manipulated, dominated, and
oppressed people. This final chapter will review the findings of the research and offer
alternative possibilities for what may seem to be a difficult change (Caputo, 2001).

Several weeks ago, the pastor of my church decided to hold a music committee
meeting. The pastor asked the Minister of Music who is primarily responsible for the
anthems and hymns performed by the Chancel Choir, the organist, and me (the pianist for
the group that sings traditional to contemporary gospel) to attend this meeting. The choir

Director for the gospel organization was not invited to the meeting. The committee concerned with membership retention as well as church growth had suggested that the meeting be held but they were not invited to the meeting. Their belief was that the pastor would fairly relay their concerns to the music committee.

It is important to note that historically the music ministry for this church has experienced some tension with the leadership regarding the value of the genres of music being sung at services. The tension relates to the traditional personality or perception of the church in the community. Therefore, any move towards contemporary music (as requested by the committee reviewing growth and retention) could possibly be viewed as a rejection of those who treasure the anthem and conventional hymns over contemporary gospel music. As the music committee meeting progressed, I found myself outnumbered in a meeting that was supposed to explore possibilities for change in the music towards a more contemporary program rather than a music program that required experience with theory or more formal musical training.

The pastor held the meeting as promised to the committee concerned with growth and retention. It was supposed to be a dialogue between all of the music committee members; however, the conversation was monopolized by the pastor and the organist who referred to themselves as "dinosaurs." The pastor prefaced the conversation with reasons why he was satisfied with the current state of the music ministry and proclaimed that his and the organist's purpose was to maintain the "hierarchy and tradition" of the denomination. The organist referred to himself as historically "Anglican" and stated that he was not interested in a more contemporary movement.

When I explained that tradition and history are continuous and new forms of tradition are made from day to day, the pastor stated that this particular denomination has "a tradition" and "a history." He stated that those who do not like these conventions are welcomed to go elsewhere. With this dismissive attitude, he came close to denouncing the importance of either retention or growth. In fact, the pastor set up the conversation to be concluded before it ever started, as he and the organist began a private conversation regarding all of the famous—and not so famous—organists and classical pieces that they enjoy. The Minister of Music and I sat quietly as they named familiar composers and musicians. Neither one could define the parameters of contemporary, traditional or gospel music. The pastor had neither completed any research or had asked for any research to be completed for comparing or contrasting music programs. The only result that the pastor was able to report was that he had a meeting, introduced the purpose, and that no plans or ideas were brought forward. No vision or mission was developed or written. The only member of the committee to express his views was the organist who surprised me with his staunch position against the possibility of change even for the purposes of growth and retention. The Minister of Music was forthright in stating that she could not define "the contemporary" per se because she was a trained classical musician and that this was not her area of expertise. None of the participants asked me, the only gospel musician in the room, to explain or define contemporary gospel. When I was able to speak, my statements regarding the continuum of gospel were met with cynical comments designed to belittle me and discount my knowledge. I was essentially silenced, and I realized that there was no real effort being made to pursue changes in the music as requested by the

committee on growth and retention. I dropped my head in disappointment and humiliation, withdrew in silence, and asked myself, "Why am I here?"

This music committee experience demonstrates how dominance and oppression is used to maintain the status quo as described in this study. Brueggemann in his book, The Prophetic Imagination, introduced the terminology "royal consciousness" as one of domesticating vision, de-energizing, and "idolatrous systems of language and rhetoric" (2001). This concept can be applied to the process that occurs in churches. In the following passage, he comments on the culture of today's church:

> The contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism that it has little power to believe or to act. This enculturation is in some way true across the spectrum of church life, both liberal and conservative…true not only of the institution of the church but also of us as persons (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 1).

Patricia Hill Collins states that the power that comes with being able to self-define and have a free mind is the place in which women thinkers believe that consciousness meets freedom. She views consciousness as evolutionary and negotiable. Each person is affected by various cultural contexts, experiences, and histories. She states that when a group comes together as an entity, the culture of that group seems to be one, but the cultural context is indeed a mixture of all of the subjugated parts. Specifically, Collins reminds the readers that cultural contexts are contributors of the concepts used in thinking and acting (Collins, 2000).

In the example of the music committee meeting, one can see that a group of people have found the imagination needed to attempt to increase the membership of the

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church and retain members thereby creating change. Brueggemann states that imagination is the ability to envision that which is beyond the ordinary and the reasonable (2001). It is the ability to envision the impossible as possible (Caputo, 2001). The imperial "royal consciousness" acted in a manner that brought under control the possibilities of change, clouded the vision for something new and different, and de-energized the group through language and rhetoric purposed to control, which is a form of dominance and oppression (Brueggemann, 2001). In the music committee meeting, church leaders exercised the power of control when they declared at the outset of the meeting that they were satisfied with the program as it was, that the order of service should remain as it was, and that the service would continue as the model for the church. These statements were designed to control the possible outcomes of the meeting as well as drive a wedge of separation between the members of the committee. Members of the committee met with anxious hope that spaces would be opened for change in the music ministry and thus contribute to the growth of the church. Committee members and I were bewildered, de-energized, and immobilized by the responses of our leaders.

Altar Call: The Reality

> *Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me. And that thou bidd'st me come to thee. Oh, Lamb of God I come, I come. Charlotte Elliot 1835*

Any religion, whether story or signal, has three identifiable components. First it tells us *where* it came from and in connection with that often tells us what is wrong with us and how we got that way…Second, religions hold up some *ideal* possibility for humankind…what it would mean to be fully saved or liberated…third a religion tells us *how* to get from our present fallen state (sick,

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alienated, lost, in captivity) to what we can be or ought to be or already are if we only knew it (Cox, 1973, p. 14).

Discussion in chapter I revealed the influence of a Constantinian Christianity that can be traced back to the Roman Empire which stood against the Christian movement which practiced fairness and humility. The threat to the empire was so great that they co-opted Christianity in order to control it (West, 2004). This control of Christian principles for the preservation of imperialist ideas continued through the "discovery," and or "civilization" of many countries including America (Spring, 2005). It was the Constantinian way that justified slavery, social injustice, and war (Niebuhr, 1929). It is the Constantinian way that keeps the powerful at the top of the hierarchy and the subjugated at the lower levels supporting the higher rungs of the ladder.   It is the Constantinian attitude of supremacy and control that allows one to state from his mouth that there is only one tradition, one history, and a hierarchical system of power. "If people don't like this system, there are other places that they can go." It is this accepted hierarchy, this authoritarianism that allows for the classism (Freire, 2000) created which would give a person the power to circumnavigate the wishes of the group in an effort to maintain tradition in the name of history—a tradition and history that is static not dynamic. These concepts were played out in the music committee meeting even though this approach may not empower the church for the future as Brueggemann indicates in the following passage:

> The church will not have power to act or believe until it recovers its tradition of faith and permits that tradition to be the printed way out of enculturation. This is not a cry for traditionalism but rather a judgment that the church has no business

more pressing than the reappropriation of its memory in its full power and authenticity (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 2).

Discussion in Chapter II created a space for asking about the ability to critically question church leaders and to investigate what causes people to become silent. Issues of free-market fundamentalism and authoritarianism were discussed as systems that promote the acquisition of wealth at the top of the hierarchy at the expense of the hard working people on the lower rungs (West, 2004). "There are two ways to silence criticism. One is the way of heavy-handed prohibition that is backed by forceful sanction…; the second way of handling criticism: to develop a natural immunity and remain totally impervious to criticism" (Brueggemann, 2001). Brueggemann suggests that churches that fail to engage in critical analysis and critical questioning continue to replicate silence in the group that follows. Lorde in 1984 states that this kind of silence immobilizes people and keeps them from acting in a manner that is democratic and socially just. The ability to speak up and support one's opinion and one's thoughts has potential to produce change and potentially transform an entity. This vertical movement of hierarchy could potentially become a horizontal formation of liberation for many instead of dominance and oppression by a few. Claudia Tate, who was critical of Ntozake Shange's characterization of black men in her choreopoem For Colored Girls Who have Considered Suicide asked: "Why did you have to tell about Beau Willie Brown?" …Shange's answer is revealing: "I refuse to be a part of this conspiracy of silence. I will not do it…" (Tate, 1983, p. 158-159; Collins, 2000). In chapter two, it was clear that participants need to alter the manner in which they communicate with each other in order

to initiate change and to end the silencing that produces injustice and prevents open spaces for transformation.

Chapter III included the interpretation and analysis of conversations held with black church leaders about their leadership methods, the origin of those styles, and the ways they interact with people in their congregation. They were asked a variety of questions that allowed them to explain their positions as leaders of the black church, their leadership styles, leaders that they view as models, and their views on the "place" of specific groups of people in the church. With each response, I attempted to find Biblical scriptures to create discourse between the black church leaders' statements and the book that is considered the essential plan for Christians. "When one considers the issues of liberation and exploitation on the ground, then the intimate contact between biblical texts of a prophet sort and matters of social justice, social interest, and social criticism seem to me to be incontrovertible" (Brueggemann, 2001).   In the findings, I looked at the historical perspective as it related to models of leadership. When pondering philosophies of leadership I thought about issues of identity, authority, and relationship. Those same issues were considered when confronting the ideas regarding the place of women, the poor, and homosexuals in the church. First and foremost, there is an element of perpetuation of knowledge, skills, behaviors, etc. These leaders stated that their great black church leaders were worthy of being called "mentors." Mentors are people who act as counselors, tutors, coaches, and educators. I question whether or not the leadership style of the 1960s, for example, actually translates to the needs of the people in the 21st century. Brueggemann stated in the preface to the revised issue of The Prophetic

<u>Imagination,</u> that there are reasons not to rely on the old models for one's own prophetic future (2001).

> The consequence of this social reality that concerns us is that the old confrontational model of 'prophet versus established power,' which was a replication of the Old Testament notion of 'profit versus king,' is increasingly difficult to bring off and without great social effect. A confrontational model assumes that the 'prophetic voice' has enough clout, either social or moral, to gain a hearing. Currently, the old 'prophetic stance' of such churches lacks much of that authority, so that the old confrontational approach is largely ineffectual posturing (Brueggemann, 2001, p. xxii).

I have learned that it is important that ministers critique not only their own leadership styles with rigor but to also critique those whom they have chosen as mentors. They should be asking questions regarding not only the leadership style but whether or not that style is effective in the context and time in which they are working.

Then I looked at how one views the identity and persona taken on as black church leader. It is recognized through the research that how one identifies him or herself will determine how he or she interacts with others (Appiah, 2005). The role of the black church leader and of the pastor specifically, is complex to say the least.

> …it is presumed that the practice of ministry is done by those who stand in conventional places of parish life and other forms of ministry derived from that model. We cling to the conviction that prophetic ministry can and must be practiced there, although many things militate against it. The ministry is first of all consumed by the daily round of busyness that cannot be ignored. In addition, the ministry most often exists in congregations that are bourgeois, if not down-right obdurate, of which there is no special openness or support for a prophetic ministry (Brueggemann, 2001, p.116).

The interviews revealed leadership styles that ranged from servant-leader to CEO. Depending upon one's self-identification, issues of power help develop and maintain hierarchal structures. Brueggemann stated that dominant cultures of all times have been "…grossly uncritical, cannot tolerate serious and fundamental criticism, and will go to great lengths to stop it" (2001). Even more poignant is the fact that religion is an expression of people's identity, inherited, or emergent (Cox, 1973). If a leader's identification determines how he interacts with his community, then he has the power to also mold, shape, miss-shape, or destroy people's inherited and emerging identities. Brueggemann reminded in his closing that "…the God of well-being and good order is not understood to be precisely the source of social oppression" (2001).

I asked about the place of specific people in the relationship of the church. I wanted to know how the respondents felt about women in the church, poor people in the church, and homosexuals in the church. On the surface, women seem to be accepted in leadership positions in the church; however, the number of women in these positions continues to be few and far between. The need to serve and provide direction to those who are poor drew immediate positive response as a critical role of the church; nevertheless, the level of the planning and programming for this type of activity was minimal and surprisingly informal across the denominations.

Yan Xu stated that the sense of place can be found in past experiences, relationships, perceptions, attitudes, and world views (1995). He looks at structure of feelings that helps to control what is believed about a person's ability to maintain a sense of organization. "A strong sense of place supports our sense of personal identity. For that

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reason, familiar features of the landscape are often fiercely defended (Xu, 1995)." When the participants were asked about the place of homosexuals in the church, their responses indicated that they did not accept this sexual preference. There was nothing in the question that asked whether or not the black church leader accepted the sexuality of the person, but the responses all turned to that interpretation of the question. The language of the statements ranged from a decent straight forward answer to what I call "hemming and hawing," to articulate a view toward homosexuals that I had not even requested. In one instance, the participant responded that homosexuals often found in the music ministry or in the choir loft. Brueggemann states: "…the royal consciousness…has created a subjective consciousness concerned only with self-satisfaction…is fed by management mentality…has robbed of the courage or power to think and alternative thought" (2001).

Lastly, in response to questions about acts of social justice, most had trouble responding to the request for written statements of social justice or mission statements that outlined goals for addressing social justice. "The pervasive sleepwalking in American Churches in regard to social justice is frightening" (Cornel West, 2004). Although each leader could speak to at least one good activity that supported a group of people of lesser socio-economic means, none had a solid written statement that directly addressed a mandate to serve the poor much less teach the less fortunate how to become self-sufficient. The ability to reach out to the poor, teach people to become self-sufficient, and to accept people just as they are (whosoever will, let him come) would require an imaginative spirit that could indeed create an alternative community completely different from that of the imperialistic model seen in many black churches today.

Altar Call: The Transformation

> *Wash O God our sons and daughters where your cleansing waters flow.*
> *Number them among your people; bless as Christ blessed long ago….*
> *Ruth Duck, performed by Oleta Adams, 1997*

The words quoted here are lyrics that have inspired me over the years. I am guided by these words as I pray for whatever issues or problems that are occurring in my life. While writing this dissertation, I have had to communicate with myself as well as God in asking whether or not this project was worth breaking the personal silence that I have held for so long. Each day of reading, writing, analyzing, and interpreting the data for this study resurrected painful experiences that had been buried, somewhat silenced, but never dead. What would I say and how would I say it in order to remain focused on the issues of leadership, dominance, and oppression, and not on the fear and pain that had so long kept me silent? As one who has heard the call for a more prophetic ministry, I must ask myself what the requirements are for those who want to develop the prophetic consciousness while decreasing the "royal consciousness" which has been inherited in some way, shape, or form by all of us (Brueggemann, 2001).

After a thorough review of the literature on church history and church leadership styles, I have learned that a long list of "do's and don'ts" will not lead to transformation of black church leaders. James Cone emphasized activities that prophetic people should engage in to support a more liberational community for those who have been discriminated against. Cone said, "It was clear to me that what was needed was a fresh start in theology; a new way of doing it that would arise out of the black struggle for

justice and in no way would be dependent upon the approval of white academics in

religion" (1990).   Scholars and students have read these scholarly works but the "royal

consciousness" still prevails. Cole and Guy-Sheftall wrote lists of things to do in their

chapter, "Where Do We Go from Here." However, men and women at the grassroots

level are still silent on the issue of sexism in the church. Women are still represented

poorly in number at the executive level leadership positions in the various denominations.

Black church leaders are still consciously "placing" homosexuals in the choir lofts and

refusing to analyze or discuss their stance on sexuality (2003). Cornel West in

Democracy Matters cried out for a demonstration of "Christian voices outraged at the

greed of corporate elites while millions of children live in poverty" (2004). And yet, most

of the participants in this study could not provide a written vision of social justice and

only one spoke of it with the vigor of a person who is seriously concerned about the

plight of humanity. As Brueggemann states here:

> …it is important to see that the prophetic texts that feature the great
> confrontations are not to be directly replicated and reenacted. Rather they are to
> be seen as materials that might fund the would-be prophetic voice, to give wisdom
> and courage, but which then invite immense imagination to know how to move
> from such texts to actual circumstance (Brueggemann, 2001, p xii).

What is it that can be done to support a transformation from the "royal

consciousness" that has been passed down from generation to generation to the point

where the church can adopt a prophetic consciousness? As noted several times in this

dissertation, the "royal consciousness" may not come entirely from those in power. Most

who participate in perpetuating the "royal consciousness" are not interested in giving up

the power or all that comes with it (Cone, 2004). I suggest the following changes to all people who are seeking an alternative to the community of "royal consciousness":

1. People must develop the imagination that it takes to envision something transformational. This is the beginning of liberation. What is imagination? Imagination allows children to see worlds far from their own. It is the activity of seeing and envisioning oneself in a different place or time. Imagination allows a person to read a novel and see herself in field of lilies while actually being trapped in an apartment by snowflakes piled across the doorway. Imagination, which is believed to be grounded deep in the unconsciousness, opens the door for envisioning that which is supernatural (Anals, 1982). It is that area in which the impossible can become possible (Caputo, 2001). Imagination gives one the capability to create an alternative to the "consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us" (Brueggemann, 2001).   Imagination gives one the ability to be critical of present circumstance, remove the legitimacy to ordering one's world which has acted to dehumanize and de-energize large groups of people (Bauman, 1995, Brueggemann, 2001). These authors have reminded me that it will take imagination to envision that which God has promised. Without imagination, one cannot embrace a liberational existence. In order to comprehend and experience liberation, there must be the workings of imagination.

> *Oh, how deep your holy wisdom! Unimagined, all your ways!*
> *Ruth Duck, performed by Oleta Adams, 1997*

2. There must be a break in "silence" by the followers that is so loud that God hears and responds to the cry. This is the request for freedom not only for us but for the

work of God. This is a step above the mere presence of imagination; it is the "use" of

imagination. If one is able to imagine that which seems impossible, then she will be able

to find the voice to speak to the possibility of an alternative existence. There is power in

the use of the voice, for once voice is added, the group will begin to offer up alternatives

that people have imagined but have never been given the permission to speak. Harvey

Cox reminds us that the ability to shatter the ceiling of forced silence is the first step

towards "dignity and resistance" (1973). This passage reinforces his idea:

> …testimony is not just talk. It is the painful reclaiming of word from their
> bondage to selling and ruling and avoiding. It is the liberation of speech for its
> primal purpose: the creation of a human universe, one where persons can know
> others, be known by them, and know themselves (Cox, 1973, pp. 122-123).

What does this break in silence sound like? It is the sound of a voice that refuses

continued domestication of vision and the right to be heard. When speaking with my

father, who is a minister, about this right to question, he, as well as another mentor

colleague told me to look at Acts 17: 10-15. The scripture speaks of a group of people

called the Bereans. They are described as nobler than the Thessalonians because they

listened to "the word" thoughtfully, but they also searched the scriptures themselves for

confirmation of the message. The Bereans did not allow the apostle Paul to think for

them. They were not afraid to inquire, dialogue, and /or decide what would be believed

versus what would not. They are described as people whose minds were not narrowed by

prejudice because they were willing to investigate the information preached by the

apostles. In some way this attitude speaks also to their ability to discern for themselves

what God wanted them to know and understand (White, 2006). This ability to question

information and to discern for one's own knowledge gives way to the freedom of God to work in a person's life in the manner He chooses. The scripture reads: "*Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me (Revelation 3:20).* Transformation from the oppressed to the prophetic will occur when people use their voices, cry out for their needs to be met, and open the door for God to reveal alternative ways of worship.

The people must critically question the leadership when calling for transformation from a state of "royal consciousness" to the prophetic. This voice is not afraid to speak against or to resist the status quo in the church. This is the voice of one who is willing to state that there is an alternative way, and it can be achieved when the shackles of the traditional order are removed not only from the people but from God himself. The church has been "assigned" so much tradition and ritual that the followers have been hushed and have become stagnant. The following statement warns of the negative consequences, when we restrict and silence voices in the church:

> If we gather around a static god of order who only guards the interests of the 'haves,' then oppression cannot be far behind. Conversely, if a God is disclosed who is free to come and go, free from and even against the regime, free to hear and even answer slave cries, free from all the proper goodness as defined by the empire, then it will bear decisively upon sociology because the freedom of God will surface in the brickyards and manifest itself as justice and compassion (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 8).

Several times in this "altar call," I have expressed the fear and the pain that I have experienced as I attempted to voice my thoughts about this subject in writing. I feared what would happen when I voiced my criticism of black church leadership when I

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denounced the perpetuation of dominance and oppression in the institution that has led

black people out of slavery and through the Civil Rights Movement. The pain came from

the memories of dominance and oppression I have seen and experienced and then

suppressed. I have spent too much time and energy holding in that which should have

been spoken into existence as well as that which should have been spoken out unto death.

Instead, my attempts to speak were confronted with the imperialistic "royal

consciousness" of those in leadership positions. I am not the only one that has not

understood that with the death of silence, there can be new beginnings. Voicing one's

objections, inquiring about alternative ways of worshipping, questioning the status quo

has been standard practice for believers since the beginning of scripture:

> *And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant…And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition (Exodus 2:23-25).*

3. One must be willing to understand that new beginnings cannot occur without

accepting the death of the old order to make way for the alternative way. This is the end

of oppression.

> … The royal consciousness leads people to numbness, especially to numbness about death. It is the task of prophetic ministry and imagination to bring people to engage their experiences of suffering to death (Brueggemann, 2001).

Seamon agrees that the end of one consciousness represents a new beginning. "…the end

is not an end. It is a new beginning. The thought of pulling up that which is to be buried

alive requires facing, studying, and disclosing those ideas, concepts, experiences that

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make you backspace when you begin to type (Cameron, 2005). It is the fear of facing the death of those ideas that keeps people silenced and in a state of paralyzed organization, believing in false protection. Change will not come from those who cannot see themselves free of dominance. It will come through the people who are willing to imagine the impossible and pursue it. The scripture reads: *"I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus 3: 7-8).*

One must understand that it takes imagination to envision that which seems impossible—that which is different. Imagination spawns the possibilities that overturn silence and the power of the dominant. It takes the energy and the voice of those who are willing to demand that which is hoped for in order to bring critical analysis to the state of dominance and oppression, even in the black church. The people must be prepared to work with the pain and the suffering that it will take to speak out for change. If we really want change, an alternative community, we must face the death of that which confines us to the old order, realizing that hiding will not free us or open the door for God to work for us. This is where an alternative community of the prophetic begins. Brueggemann states the following:

> …I believe that grief and mourning, that crying in pathos, is the ultimate form of criticism, for it announces the sure end of the whole royal arrangement" (2001). It makes way for new beginnings and alternative ways. I have asked if the leadership in the black church is complicit in the perpetuation of dominance and oppression. Through research and reading and by conducting interviews with active professionals in the church, I have interpreted that there are complex reasons for why black church leaders are experiencing conflict between their

actions and their beliefs. While there are attempts to promote a prophetic community, I have seen through personal experience, reading, and research that the creation of alternative ways is in constant battle with power, economics, social pressures, hierarchy, and—the silence of the people. In order to experience the ever-developing prophetic, we all must take part in imagining impossibilities, recovering the voice that allows for critical analysis of the "royal consciousness" and all of its confining ways, energizing the people, freeing God, and facing the death that allows for new and different beginnings (Brueggemann, 2001).

Benediction

Oh, how deep your holy wisdom! Unimagined, all your ways!
To your name be glory, honor! With our lives we worship, praise!
We your people stand before you, water washed and Spirit born.
By your grace, our lives we offer. Recreate us; God, transform! Ruth Duck,
Performed by Oleta Adams, 1997

POSTSCRIPT

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
1 To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
2 A time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silent, and a time to speak;
8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

To speak out in my world of Christianity, the black church, not only threatens to destabilize my role in my church, but speaking up also risks the spiritual reputation of my staunch, most dedicated religious family. Given the freedom of the academy and the freedom that Christian faith conveys to every believer, I have stepped out on faith and objectively investigated whether or not the leaders in the black church are complicit in the perpetuation of dominance and oppression.

Without a detailed recounting of the findings of this study, I acknowledge that this is the time and the season to question and to speak up about the decision making and other practices of the leadership, especially when those actions negatively affect the membership of the church and community. Given anonymity, five participants took the opportunity to speak out about their heartfelt beliefs. The fact that they could speak honestly only through anonymity—under "the veil"—indicates just how perilous it is for believers to question, to think critically, and to examine the practices of the church. Even those who seemed to want to give the most academic and politically correct responses

eventually told some very personal stories. I applaud them for their offerings because it takes a great deal of courage to say that you know the difference between how people should be treated versus how people are treated. They realize that the descriptions of the denominations can be recognized and that certain leadership organizations may be disturbed by their comments. However, it is these types of fears that continue to keep people in covert forms of oppression even in the church.

Where do I go from here? I return to the church that I love dearly. It is planting time, healing time and weeping time. I have no idea whether or not my critical perspective will be embraced at this time, but I do believe that I have been sent back for a reason. I have been silent for a number of years. The prophetic calling from God and the education that he afforded me have opened the gates for a new work that I believe will be blessed and will prosper. It is time for me to speak.

I call for a new prophetic, transformative ministry of promoting social justice and honesty in relationships between the authority figures and the parishioners. The black church must turn its back on the dominant and oppressive power strategies used by the larger society and attend to the business of the community by caring for the poor and treating women and gays equitably. The voice that has been policed and silenced has been restored and can now be used to offer critical perspectives on the need for a prophetic and transformative ministry in our churches. I am reminded that the public display of utter disappointment is the ultimate form of disapproval and that it marks the closing stages of the imperial system (Brueggemann, 2001). With this in mind, I move forward into prophetic transformation. I am inspired by Isaiah's words:

Isaiah 61: 1-3
1 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

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APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY

The intention of this study is to understand the diverse and complex issues that mold and shape leadership style in the black Christian church which may, in-turn, lead to behaviors of dominance and ultimately oppression. The goal of this qualitative project is to describe and interpret the observations made through research and interviews in order to determine the possibility of purposeful and unknown complicity in oppressing those who have chosen to be followers in the black Christian church. As an African-American woman who has personal history woven between many black churches as well as the denominations, I will be reviewing this information through the lens of critical theory perspectives which is concerned with "empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender" (Fay, 1987), (Creswell, 2009).

The dissertation question of whether or not the leadership in the black church is complicit in the perpetuation of dominance and oppression required several methodological procedures within the same research project. Creswell recommends that qualitative researchers choose from what he describes as five approaches to research: narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory (2009). Chapters I is a literature review that investigates the possible historical perpetuation of oppression through religion from the time of slavery. Issues of power, socially constructed power structures, and social controls were investigated across time in order to

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question whether or not there has been an initial passing down of manipulative behaviors throughout the history of leadership in the black church. Three key periods of time were reviewed: Slavery, Civil Rights, and the Present. Chapter II refers to the history to investigate issues of authority and silenced voice. While interrogating the ability and inability to critically question as well as examining issues of devoicing and/or internalized devoicing, this dissertation will ascertain the following: Does the religious leadership of the black church internalize negative feelings, connotations, and behaviors regarding critical reflection, critical thinking, and critical questioning? Is this lack of critical questioning detrimental to the forward movement of liberation and social justice for African American people? Is it Christianity itself that induces fear of questioning or the result of the delivery of organized religion in the institutionalized church? Insight into how followers function in a system of socialization, internalization, and perpetuation of ideologies that promote oppression is of key interest.

Chapter III is an ethnographic narrative of sorts which serves to describe the various leadership styles of the black church minister. Creswell states that there should be a holistic approach to qualitative research in order to explore the complexities of the issue at hand (2009). Therefore, five black church leaders will be randomly chosen from membership roster of various ministerial organizations to participate in the interview sessions. Both males and females will be interviewed to establish similarities and differences in philosophies and beliefs. Some will be formal pastors while others could be considered "ministers as leaders" in the church setting but not necessarily pastors. All interviews will be promised anonymity which will be maintained in the text of this

dissertation. Interviews will be conducted in the natural setting or context in which they work: sanctuary, church office, chapel, or even the home.

The interview instrument includes demographics such as titles, denomination, size of congregation, responsibilities of the job, education, and the possibility of outside occupations. The participants will be given up to four hours to answer the orally presented questions. Interviews for qualitative research are an effort to collect participant data that will be interpreted to either support or refute the question of complicity in dominance and oppression by black church leaders. It is understood that multiple views of this information can surface including the view of the possible readers (Creswell, 2009). Examples of the questions are listed below:

1. Who would you refer to as a great black Christian church leader and why?

2. Explain your leadership philosophy and explain how it is manifested in your daily church leadership role.

3. Does your denomination promote a specific style?

4. What is the place of women in the church and why?

5. What is "place" in the church?

6. What opportunities do your members have to ask questions regarding that which they recite?

7. Do you practice social justice in your church?

8. Is it important to critically analyze one's own leadership style and model based on the information discussed earlier?

Each interview will be recorded for the purposes of maintaining the integrity of the spoken statements. Each recording will be transcribed in an effort to achieve an accurate emic perspective—offering the opportunity for the black church leaders to offer insights from their cultural perspectives. "This can be described as the 'insider's framework' or the 'participant observer's' view…The ability to adopt the emic perspective is important if one is to capture and accurately describe the groups own understanding of reality" (Harris, 1979; Maxwell & Satake, 2006). This material is considered to be primary information due to the fact that each participant will speak of his or her own experiences and will not be expected to relay the experiences of others (Creswell, 2009).

I have taken into consideration the possible participant risks of participating in this study. Participants have the opportunity to state their personal opinions about political and spiritual matters of the church that may be in contradiction to that of their fellow church leaders as well as their denominations. Anxiety about the way other clergy or members of the faith will respond could induce fear and anxiety which could possible affect the language used to answer each question. It is my hope that the anxiety and fear of retribution or isolation would not induce the same silence in these participants that I believe has been passed down to their followers. Given the possibility of internalized ideologies, the participants may even demonstrate a total denial of their complicity in passing down dominant and oppressive behaviors. J Amos Hatch in his book Doing Qualitative Research in Educational Settings, states that people may be hesitant to talk about what they are really thinking. In order for me to encourage open conversation, I need to demonstrate the ability to establish and maintain relationships, be respectful, and

encouraging (Bogdan & Bicklen; Seidman, 1998; Hatch, 2002). Hatch further states that it is important for me to let participants know that their honest opinions are "vital to the goals of this study" (2002). Again, each participant will be given anonymity in the recording and written narrative of this project.

The information from the interviews will be transcribed from the audio-recording in order to organize the statements for further analysis. The analysis involves continued reflection regarding the themes and descriptions of all participants (Creswell, 2009). It also involved the intermingling of the information retrieved through the literature review process which will involve both historical and contemporary information relating leadership and leadership styles in the black church. Hatch states a systematic approach to data analysis should involve organization and interrogation in a manner that would allow researchers to distinguish patterns, identify themes, produce relational information, critique, interpret, and generate theories (2002). In an effort to look at critical relationships as well, Biblical perspectives will be acknowledged to create a discourse between the participants' descriptions of themselves and their behaviors and what it is that they believe as well as teach. Continued questioning of the data will be completed for the purposes of cross-referencing those themes and descriptions for the purposes of final interpretation (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Much of the leadership behaviors of these participants could possibly be supported Biblically due to the nature of this Christian based occupation. Finally, this researcher will interpret (review impressions, transcribe data, review for salient interpretations, re-read, review, and

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summarize) the information in a manner that will offer some insight into the question of complicity in dominance and oppression by black church leaders (Hatch, 2002).

While participating in this study is understandably an educational experience for the participants and future readers, I realize that it will be an educational experience for the writer as well. None of this comes without apprehension. Creswell states that the goal of qualitative research is to draw some interpretive information about people's personal stories and the manner in which these stories interconnect (2009). As a participant observer myself, I have a story and an experience that is closely related to the research that I am pursuing. The story involves family, church leaders, church families, and the spiritually familiar. This research will possibly open the door to changes in that which was once familiar. "Through participant observation, you also seek to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (Erickson, 1973; Creswell 2009). Through this writing, I will be questioning the leadership styles of those who are considered leaders of the black church. I will also be reviewing the possible effect that their styles have upon the droves of people who collectively sit under the examples that they set from Sunday to Sunday. Creswell states, "To make the familiar strange is often more difficult because you must continually question your own assumptions and perceptions, asking yourself: Why is it this way and not different?" (2009). While I am open to multiple and creative leadership styles in the black church that promote liberation, equality, and social justice for all, this is considered radical by many who are grounded in a rich tradition that freed slaves and open doors to more civil rights for all people. It does not help that I am devoted Christian who is not interested in separation, therefore, my presence in itself is

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that of one who is looking for opportunities that require a change in thinking as well as action. This is not necessarily acceptable in the religious setting where it is commonly stated that God is the same today as yesterday and will be the same tomorrow.

In order to act as researcher participant in this study, I have decided to pursue the research recognizing that there are three professional goals that interact with my personal interaction in this project:

1. to develop critical consciousness (the ability to question without fear)

2. to improve the lives of those involved (leaders as well as followers and community)

3. and to offer a space for transformation in societal structures and relationships (Maguire, 1987; Creswell, 2009).

Using the aforementioned goals as my guide, I intend to interpret lived experiences collected in the interviews, to make sense out of the social interactions and to analyze the possible motives, meanings, contexts, and situations that explain the effects of leadership styles in the black church on those who follow.