



Slavery and Civil War

Christianity and Slavery:

The Gospel began to spread powerfully: *“Somehow, an illiterate, oral people were able to grasp the kernel of truth of the Christian faith, that Jesus died to set all humans free, and to pass that belief down to the following generations to build further on and develop. Theirs was a paradoxical, “in spite of” faith that gave them the strength and courage to preserve in the face of horrible odds.”* – Diana Haynes, *Forges in the Fiery Furnace*

Use of Scriptures in Slavery:

Slave masters taught: God appointed their position as slaves, and they should stay in their place.

Curse of Ham: *“²⁰ Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹ He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside... ²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”* - Genesis 9:20-25

Slaves favorite Scriptures: Genesis 1&2; Exodus; Passages about God’s care for the poor; Jesus’ befriending the poor and rejected

African American Spirituals:

“There is a balm in Gilead...to make the wounded whole...there is a balm in Gilead...to heal the sin-sick soul.”

Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home...Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see (Coming for to carry me home)...A band of angels coming after me (Coming for to carry me home)

If you get there before I do, (Coming for to carry me home)...Tell all my friends I'm coming too (Coming for to carry me home)

The brightest day that I can say, (Coming for to carry me home)...When Jesus washed my sins away (Coming for to carry me home)

I'm sometimes up and sometimes down (Coming for to carry me home)...But still my soul feels heavenly bound (Coming for to carry me home)

Forming the Black Church

1814 - Richard Allen leaves Wesleyan Methodist Church and starts African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Persecution: These denominations were the targets of overt racism, hostility, and violence.

- 1822 – Slave revolt in Charleston, SC that was put down. White men stormed “Emanuel A.M.E. Church” in Charleston and burned it to the ground.

- June 17, 2015 (almost 200 years later) – Emanuel A.M.E. Church (Same church). Dylann Roof shot and killed 9 people during Bible study. Roof said, “Blacks were taking over the world” and “someone needed to do something about it for the white race.”

Civil War - Crisis over slavery



- Divided over the Bible: *“No common meaning could be discovered in the Bible which almost everyone in the United States professed to honor and which was, without a rival, the most widely read text of any kind in the whole country.”* – Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*
- Denominational Splits over stances on Slavery/Integration

Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)



Hope of Reconstruction:

- “Forty Acres and a mule” to each freed person or family.
- Congress passed 13th (Abolished Slavery), 14th (Citizenship) and 15th (Right to Vote) amendments.
- Federal troops were sent to the South to implement these new changes and protect African-Americans.
- Black Schools opened at every level. African Americans learn to read and write in mass numbers.
- Black Church could organize and begin to stand on its own two feet.

Failure of Reconstruction:

- Ku Klux Klan formed in 1865 to resist Reconstruction. At least 2,000 lynchings in these 12 years alone.
- President Andrew Johnson reinstated property to Confederate States if they swore allegiance
- African Americans forced into sharecropping as a replacement for slavery
- President Rutherford B. Hayes removed all federal troops from the South in 1876
- Violence and mass lynchings become the norm

Black Church in Reconstruction:



- With emancipation, Black Church able to organize, purchase land, and build church buildings.
- Church also used for schools, social events, political gatherings, and to meet needs in the community
- Church became the center of black community, with pastor seen as a leader in entire community.
- In the midst of persecution, Black Church was a community of refuge and a source of hope.
- *“The church was the only place where they could safely and freely express their sorrow and their joy, their unvanquished hope in a God greater not only than themselves but also than those who oppress them. It was usually a small, whitewashed wooden structure tucked away in the woods to which they flocked on Sunday and, if possible, other days of the week as well to hear about and rejoice in a “wonderworking God” whose hand they believe was still over, around, and on them, blessing and guiding them on their way.” – Diana Haynes, Forges in the Fiery Furnace*

Jim Crow Era and Civil Rights Movement



Segregation: Plessy v Ferguson (1896) – Separate but Equal

- Laws passed prohibiting races from: Working together in same room, using same entrances, stairways, water fountains, toilets, work tools, etc. There were segregated trains cars and taxis. Many court rooms had a “Black Bible” for African Americans to be sworn in on.
- African Americans weren’t allowed in public institution like the Theatre, amusement parks, and playgrounds.
- Marriage between Blacks and Whites was made illegal



- African Americans: Must say “Yes sir/No sir” to a white person; Step off sidewalk if white person approached; Couldn’t speak to a white person unless spoken to; couldn’t initiate a handshake.
- While driving, if African American reached intersection first, he had to let white go ahead of him. It was also illegal to pass white motorist.
- There were curfews for African Americans in most cities.

Violence and Lynchings:

- All African American’s (in the South) lived with the reality that they could be lynched any day.
- From 1889-1929 in the South an African American was hanged or burned alive every 4 days.
- People were lynched for things like: “boastful remarks”; “trying to act like a white person”; not saying “sir” to a white person; looking at white woman wrong way; insulting to a white person.
- Lynchings were a community event, often announced in the newspaper beforehand. Thousands would gather to watch black men and women be tortured and eventually killed.
- Politicians campaigned on platform of lynching: “*If it is necessary every Negro in the state will be lynched; it will be done to maintain white supremacy.*” - James Vardaman, Governor of Mississippi (1904–1908), US Senator (1913–1919)

Black Church in Jim Crow



- Black Church had to adapt to Jim Crow: “Storefront Churches”
- In the midst of horrible opposition and violence, the Black Church was a safe haven that was able to create an intimate community, shape morality, and bring comfort in suffering.
- “*Since slavery, the black church has served as a primary place for moral and social formation in the black community. The black church provided a refuge from suffering and a place to hear the hope of God’s plan to redeem all things because of what was finalized at the cross.*” - Anthony Bradley

Great Migration (1915-1970)



- 6-7 million African Americans left the South and moved North and West
 - Chicago Black Population pre-migration: 1.8%...post: 35%
 - Detroit Black Population pre-migration: 1.4%...post: 44%
- This is the largest single ethnic migration not caused by famine, disease, or war.
- The Black Church spreads North and West in greater numbers.

James Crow



- Racism not a “deep south” problem.
- Those who went on “Great Migration” were met with incredible resistance.
- Racial zoning laws; Neighborhoods “covenants” not to sell to African Americans; Federal Housing Administration supporting neighborhoods sold to white families; Redlining; “White Flight,” etc.
- Violence increased as the migration increased

The Black Church and Civil Rights



- Black Church was the catalyst for the stirring of the people towards action in Civil Rights Movement
- Persecution: Many churches were burnt down or bombed after big meetings
- Rosa Parks member of AME Church
- Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. – Baptist Minister

- *“We must never forget this as a nation: there are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God’s keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God.” - Martin Luther King Jr.*
- The Black Church was non-violent. God was their defender and liberator.

Theological Movements in the Black Church in the 20th Century:

Liberal Theology:

- In some cases social concern leads away from orthodox belief to liberal theology.
- Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. denied:
 - *Virgin Birth – “the evidence for the tenability of this doctrine is too shallow to convince any objective thinker.”*
 - *Resurrection – “the external evidence for the authenticity of this doctrine is found wanting.”*
 - *“Others doctrines such as a supernatural plan of salvation, the Trinity, the substitutionary theory of the atonement, and the second coming of Christ are all quite prominent in fundamentalist thinking. Such are the views of the fundamentalist and they reveal that he is opposed to theological adaptation to social and cultural change. He sees a progressive scientific age as a retrogressive spiritual age. Amid change all around he is willing to preserve certain ancient ideas even though they are contrary to science.” - Martin Luther King Jr.*
- Moving away from the essentials of Christian faith towards (only) social action
- Examples Today: Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, Ralph Warnock, John Lewis – all Baptist Ministers

Liberation Theology

- Belief that what we’re being rescued from is not sin but rather political and social injustice
- James Cone - ordained minister in African Methodist Episcopal Church and the “Father of Liberation Theology”
 - Jesus is primarily a liberator of the poor and oppressed against evil oppressors (which he defines as white society)
 - *“The God of the biblical faith and black religion is best known as the Liberator of the oppressed from bondage.” – James Cone*
 - *“Black theology refuses to accept a God who is not identified totally with the goals of the black community. If God is not for us and against white people, then he is a murderer, and we had better kill him.” – James Cone*
 - *“Black theology will accept only the love of God which participates in the destruction of the white enemy.” – James Cone*
 - Combining Christian theology with Marxism
 - *“Why not think of a completely new society and begin to devise ways to realize it on earth?...Together black religion and Marxist philosophy may show us the way to build a completely new society. With that combination, we may be able to realize in the society the freedom of which we sing and pray for in the black church.” – James Cone*
- [Liberation theology] *“set the Black Church in a huge direction and course to changes the Gospel to apply to political issues and not issues of personal sin and redemption.” – Anthony Bradley*
- Problems with Liberation Theology:
 - *“But the deepest flaws in black liberation theology are theological, not political. Jesus did advocate a special concern for the rights and welfare of the poor and helpless. But he specifically rejected a faith defined by social and political struggle, much to the disappointment of his more zealous followers. The early church, in its wrenching decision to include gentiles as equals, explicitly rejected a community defined by ethnicity. No Christian theology that asserts “Jesus is not for all” can be biblical.” – Michael Gerson*
 - *“When the Gospel becomes too much about political issues, we can lose the fact that we need to come to the Lord for forgiveness, grace, and mercy... We miss the fact that we’re being liberated*

from the oppression of sin and the devil and we're being freed to really love God and love our neighbors in the way God created us to do in the first place.” – Anthony Bradley

- Examples Today: Jeremiah Wright (President Barak Obama’s former Pastor)

Reconciliation Theology

- *“Christians are called to be agents of reconciliation. We have been able to love and forgive...The assertion that all are ‘one in Christ Jesus’ must henceforth mean that all slave-master, servant-boss, inferior-superior frames of reference between blacks and whites have been abolished.” – J. Deotis Roberts*

Black Church Today



Black Church Denominations:

- The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME): 3.5 million members
- The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ): 1.2 million members
- The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME): 800,000 members
- The Church of God in Christ (COGIC): 5.5 million members
- Baptist - The National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA); The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC); and The Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) all have 13.5 million members
- Presbyterian Church (USA): 65,000 Black Presbyterians

Post-Civil Rights Era: Battle Over Role and Identity of Black Church

Is the Black Church about Individual advancement (now that there is freedom)?

- Prosperity Gospel: God wants you to be rich. Wealth is a sign of God’s favor
 - J.D. Jakes – Net Worth 18 million; Creflo Dollar – Net Worth 27 million
 - *“Sadly, the prosperity gospel has taken the already individualistic, consumeristic American understanding of what it means to follow Christ to a new destructive level...Its theologically poisonous tentacles have found their way into many black churches, and it is now a major force in the black expression of Christianity in America, Latin America, and Africa.” – Anthony Bradley*

Is the Black Church about continuing the fight for social progress?

- (Speaking to white evangelicals) *“We wanted you to be our greatest allies in the struggle against injustice...We wanted yall to talk about the public school to prison pipeline...Shame on you!” – Charlie Dates*

Is the Black Church meant to integrate with the rest of Evangelicalism and work towards reconciliation?

Postmodernism and the Black Church:

Redefining Terms:

- Justice – Social Justice or Biblical Justice?

- Racism – Prejudice + Power
 - Jamar Tisby – “Racism is defined as Prejudice + Power”
 - Eric Mason – “*Anybody can be prejudice. Only a few people can be racist. Racism is the application of your power to enforce your prejudice on people. That means whites have to stop calling black people racist.*” (prejudice + power)
- Oppression; Victim; “Whiteness”; White supremacy have all been redefined

Cancel/Outrage/Guilt Culture

Looking to secular voices to answer Biblical problems: BLM; CRT; intersectionality, etc.

- Ibrahim X. Kendi
 - “*Antiracist fundamentally reject Savior theology. That [Savior theology] goes right in line with racist ideas and racist theology...That type of theology breeds bigotry.*”
 - “*The only remedy of past discrimination is present discrimination.*”

Judging by the color of skin, not the Content of Character

Identity Politics:

- “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” - Galatians 3:28
- “⁵¹*Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵²For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.*” – Luke 12:51-53

Experience over truth: Can’t interpret the Bible or speak into certain issues unless you’re the right ethnicity

Where do we go from here? Look to the Scriptures:

- Every ethnicity is made in Image of God: So hate and fight racism with the Gospel
- All Christians are co-heir of with Christ: So hate and fight inequality with the Gospel
- All one in Christ: So celebrate the unity in diversity brought about by the Gospel
- Love our neighbor: So advocate for biblical justice
- Stand for truth: So fight against ideas that point away from God and His Gospel
- Look to future with Hope – Revelation 7:9-10 – “⁹*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*”
- “*The only hope is the Kingdom of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ who is universal and not culture bound, but at the same time fulfills the longing of all cultures.*” - Dr. Carl Elis