INTRODUCTION

It was August 29, 2005 and as a graduate student I was sitting in my living room watching one of the most powerful forces of nature decimate the Gulf Coast areas of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. As a native of the Gulf Coast, these forces have always fascinated me. But there was something unique about this particular event. It was the nightmare that my older brother and our friends used to talk about in school. We were hit by Frederic (1979), Elena (1985), Erin and Opal (1995) and finally, my parents suffered through the massive Hurricane Ivan in 2004, just under a year from Katrina's arrival in 2005. Within all of our Hurricane experiences, we would always ask, imaginatively, what if there was a Hurricane so strong that it caused the waters of Pensacola Beach to flood the city? The question led to a quick response. "I do not want to fathom what that would be like."

Katrina was the realization of that question and as I sat there, eyes glued to the television, the hypothetical "what if" from our early years had become a reality when the levees broke and the waters of the Mississippi River flooded the greater New Orleans area. In Mississippi, many houses, boats, and barges were all washed inland. It was the scene that we never wanted to comprehend. The scene grew more disheartening as many sat on rooftops, crying out for a "refuge" and there was none to be found. In times such as these, religion is considered significant as it helps people make it through such trying times. During this time, I was at odds with the Black Church on intellectual concerns on objectivism and relativism concerning doctrine and structures of power that exploit human relationships. The words from an elderly woman in the superdome sent me over

the edge. Out of her anguish and despair, she cried out: "Lord, Ohh Lord, why have you forsaken us?" I had had enough. If the Black Church is God's presence on earth for the least advantaged, where was it in that moment, for a people in search of exile and refuge?

One month later, my father died. What I knew of the Black Church, I learned primarily from him. The Black Church, at one point was taken-for-granted, but the experiences within the span of two months, in which that institution was at the center, called into question all of my taken-for-granted and deeply sedimented understandings of the Black Church. This dissertation is born out of the anguish of these moments.

Before moving into the analysis, it is important to spell out what I mean by "the Black Church." In this study, the Black Church is deployed in reference to what Max Weber terms an *ideal type*, or abstract, analytical construct that has its basis in experience. For Weber, types may not be strictly identical with what one observes in experience. However, through them, one may estimate or "get close" to that which is observed. Hence, I am not referring to any one particular Church. However, the ideal type captures social processes and characteristics internal to all Black churches (those "black owned and controlled" and those a part of white denominations whose primary constituency is African American). Hence, I am referring to empirical realities. They are all communities of language, interpretation, memory and understanding and belief and action. The Black Church as an ideal type, does not explain Black churches. Rather, it provides a point of entry for observation, leading to thick description and hermeneutical reflection on the common elements and dimensions that constitute the Black Church. The Black Church, then, is deployed along similar lines as other ideal types such as, the State, the Nation, the Race, the Family, and the Black Community to name a few.

The Black Church has been the subject of critical research across the humanities and the social sciences for now a century. Historians, social scientists and theologians have all focused on the Black Church and its function for black life in America. The contributors of these research projects include: W.E.B DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), beginning one of the first sociological studies on the Black Church. The most far reaching study of the Black Church is Carter G. Woodson's, *The History of the Negro Church* (1921), and "The Negro Church: An All-Comprehending Institution" (1939). This study is extended by E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Church in America* (1963), and C. Eric Lincoln's and Lawrence Mamiya's *The Black Church in African American Experience* (1990), which is to this date the most extensive study of the Black Church.

Moreover, many studies focused on the subjective aspects of the Black Church as in Benjamin E. May's *The Negro's God as Reflected in His Literature* (1938), Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited (1949),* Joseph R. Washington's *The Politics of God (1970),* James H. Cone's *God of the Oppressed (1975)*, and his volume *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going? (1984),* Peter J. Paris's *The Social Teachings of the Black Churches* (1985), and Kelly Brown Douglas' *The Black Christ* (1994) among others. Still today, no study has been more comprehensive than that of Lincoln and Mamiya. Most recently, there has been interest in the study of the study of the Black Church in the volume, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, by Stacey Floyd Thomas et al. and the forthcoming volume by Alton Pollard.

This project on the Black Church falls within an ongoing conversation in the humanities and social sciences on the Black Church. Hence, in that sense, it does not explore new terrain. However, the questions that fund this project lead me down a "distinct" path in the study of the Black Church. The questions that foreground this work in reference to the Black Church are concerned with its meanings, significances, and relevances for African Americans living in the 21st century. Hence, the leading question is hermeneutical. The project *is hermeneutical* and requires a hermeneutical methodology. It falls within the realm of *interpretive sociology*. By interpretive sociology, I mean the attempt of a social interpreter to provide first person accounts of individuals and groups understandings of their actions and beliefs. In other words, in relationship to this study, how do Black Church members grasp and understand the Black Church? How do Black Church members understand and grasp the language of the Black Church, its interpretations of symbols, its central narratives, and beliefs? How do Black Church members give meaning to the Black Church as they live in and with that institution? Hence, to answer these types of questions, I have chosen to take a hermeneutic, phenomenological approach to the study of the Black Church.

My methodological assumption is that the approach that one takes toward a project should be harmonious with the questions that fund it. In other words, ones approach is held in a dialectical relationship with the questions and interests that one has in a particular project. Hence, my choice of phenomenology for studying the Black Church is no mere whim or preference. Rather, phenomenology is harmonious with the deep interests and questions I have concerning the Black Church.

My interests and concerns are on the deep meaning structures, meaning conditions, significances and relevances of the Black Church in the lived experience of African Americans as they live life with and in the Black Church. In other words, I am attempting to make interpretive sense of the phenomenon, namely, the Black Church, in order to call forth its significances and relevances in particular situations and relations that the Black Church has with black people.

To get there, I focus on textual reflections from previous works on the Black Church in the humanities and social sciences listed above. However, I also reflect on textual reflections from the Preaching and Prayer Traditions of the Black Church as accounts of "living" within the Church. In this way, the project avoids mere abstract theorizing. Phenomenology is a critical reflection on our experiences of the world. Through such reflection, one may attain thick descriptions of specific experiences, on the one hand, and the meanings of expressions and symbols that constitute experiences, on the other. This latter mode of descriptive analysis requires an interpretive sociology and hermeneutics.

Phenomenology is the study of the "distinctiveness" of an object of experience or the distinctiveness of experience. Through phenomenological reflection, one seeks to disclose what is essential to an experience or an object of experience. To say it another way, one seeks to reveal that which is irreplaceable, that which is significant in the taken-for-granted. It seeks to uncover that which an experience, or object of experience cannot "be" without. Phenomenology takes the world of everyday lived experience or experience as we live it, as its point of departure. It is a turn to a phenomenon that grabs

our *attention* and commits us to *knowing* and *understanding* some “thing” that we are concerned about. Hence, phenomenology is the critical reflection on lived experience.[1]

Two traditions of phenomenology are grounded in this work. The tradition of “pure” or transcendental phenomenology that follows Edmond Husserl’s rigorous phenomenological work and argues for descriptions of phenomena predicated upon “intentionality” or intuitive grasping of a phenomenon. In this project, the work of Robert S. Sokolowski is representative of this tradition. The second tradition is that of social phenomenology that follows Alfred Schutz’s appropriation of Husserl’s phenomenological program for the study of the social world and the social sciences. Schutz was concerned with the deep meaning structures, relevances and significances of objects in the social world such as institutions and communities. The distinction between the two traditions is that, whereas Husserl was concerned with transcendental intentionality’s for the purpose of conducting a rigorous science, Schutz, was concerned with the stratification of the taken-for-granted understandings emerging in the everyday experiences and life world of peoples.

The questions put forth to the Black Church and the categories deployed in analyzing it are designed to elicit deep structures, contexts, and conditions that do not simply make possible the Black Church as an institution capable of being studied, but rather, the Black Church as a proper subject of a range of hermeneutical and historical understandings. This line of inquiry is what makes this project “distinct.” Several works in Black Church Studies have provided seminal insights of the study of the Black Church as an *institution,* on the one hand, such as Woodson’s All Comprehensive Community,

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[1] Robert S. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177-184.

Paris' Surrogate World, and Lincoln and Mamiya's Sacred Cosmos. On the other hand, newly published works provide insights on the study of the Black Church as a *tradition*. Scholars who take up this latter line of inquiry include Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen C. Ray Jr., and Nancy Lynne Westfield, in their recently published volume, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (2007) and Dale Andrews in *Practical Theology for Black Churches*.

These trajectories in Black Church Studies however, do not take up the Black Church as a proper subject grasped within a range of historical and hermeneutical understanding. That is, how the Black Church is intentionally grasped within the consciousness of Black Church members. Rather, they take up this range of understanding in terms of effects. Alfred Schutz's account of "in-order motives" and "because motives" is helpful in spelling out what is meant here. For Schutz, the "in-order motive" is the telos or end for taking a particular course of action. The "because motive" is the historical circumstances that shape the actor, functioning as a frame of reference for why an actor acts as he or she does. Together, these are the subjective and objective meanings of ongoing action. However, according to Schutz, the actor is only completely aware or attentional to the "in-order" motives. One may only become aware of "because motives" when one reflects back on oneself and one's actions as a subject of inquiry.

This distinction between "in-order" and "because" motives is highly significant in Black Church Studies when the range of understandings of the Black Church is taken up in terms of its effects in works such as *Soul Theology: The Heart of Black American Culture* by Nicholas-Cooper Lewter and Henry H. Mitchell and *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* by Dale

P. Andrews. In these texts, the meaning and significance of the Black Church is captured within the framework of coping devices. Hence, the "in-order motivation" of Black Church members is reduced to coping in light of the "because motivation" of slavery and Jim Crow. The "in order" motivation of the Black Church is to function as a coping device. The task of this project is to display that the Black Church is more than a mere coping device in its meaning structures. Therefore, *Can These Bones Live* is a hermeneutical and interpretive project that seeks to disclose deep structures of meaning, which for many in the social sciences have been taken-for-granted, forgotten and deeply sedimented such that these historic meanings are called into question by contemporary crises.

What makes this project distinct within the field of Black Church Studies is a mining of the Black Church at the level of symbolic constructions. Within Black Church Studies, the "realms of meanings" housed within these symbolic constructions are often collapsed into a single, sometimes unilateral undertaking of the significance of the Black Church. For instance, if one reads the Black Church strictly from the perspective of its prophetic witness, one is also likely to gloss over the meaning and significance of the Black Church as a priestly community. Such studies are bereft with dialectical quandaries in which one aspect of the Black Church is foreground to the exclusion of the other. Such is the case in Paris' *Social Teachings of the Black Churches*, where the ethics of the Black Church is not mere "abstract social principles, but, sociopolitical quests for liberation and freedom."[2] On the one hand, a certain kind of reductivism, and genuine over determination of the prophetic aspect of the Black Church diminishes its priestly and

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[2] Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), xiv.

pastoral significance. On the other, a purely pastoral type, may over determine the Black Church, as is displayed in the Civil Rights era, where black churches were the last among institutions to get on the band wagon of social transformation. Black Churches entered into the fray out of social pressure from other institutions. However, they remained pastoral or priestly at their core, in which personal needs and crises were the locust of ministry.[3]

Theorists also reduce the meaning and significance of the Black Church to whether it can be an institution of liberation for the poor. Hence, the Black Church stands within a subject position relative to society as a mediating institution for the alleviation of social crises. Paris has captured this well in his notion of the Black Church as a surrogate world, in which the Black Church attempts to function as a resource of freedom and human fulfillment. Under this paradigm, Black Church preaching becomes primarily social crises preaching.

While there is something right about all of these descriptions, there is also something overly determined about them when they are not situated within a framework to mediate the differences between them. Hence, we need a phenomenology of the Black Church that provides limiting conditions by which our various descriptions, images, appropriations and articulations of the Black Church are checked by extravagances, over determinations, and reductivisms, which all call into question the overall relevance and significance of the Black Church in African American religious experience. The following project seeks to foreground such a phenomenology of the Black Church.

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[3] For a full discussion see, Aldoph L. Reed, *The Jessie Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 44-60.

In Chapter 1, I spell out a hermeneutical phenomenological framework for reading the Black Church. I bring together two disparate figures within two traditions of phenomenology. They include Robert S. Sokolowski from the Husserlian tradition of phenomenology and James M. Gustafson from the Schutzian tradition of phenomenology and interpretive sociology. Sokolowski provides a depth grammar for the discourse on the Black Church. Gustafson provides contours for grasping the Church as a Natural and Human Community. In Gustafson's account, the Church is Church via its conscious intentional life. Hence, Sokolowski provides a depth grammar that functions as the condition for the possibility of ecclesial intentionality, while Gustafson spells out the structures, or thematizations of the Church for grasping it in its specificity.

Beyond this introductory chapter, this dissertation contains four chapters. Chapter 2 "The Black Church: A Comprehensive Community," remains at the general level of intentionality for the purpose of grasping and spelling out the intricacies of categorial statements about the Black Church within its profiles as an "All-Comprehending Institution" (Carter G. Woodson) a "Surrogate World," (Peter J. Paris) and a "Sacred Cosmos" (C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya). In this chapter, I deploy Sokolowski's phenomenology on these three *meta-narratives* of the Black Church.

In Chapters 3 and 4, "The Theory of Social Symbolic Interactionism and the Refuge Image of the Black Church," and "The Theory of Social Symbolic Interactionism and The Black Church as Exilic Community," I pursue two basic aspects, manifestations, marks, under which this general profile of the Black Church (Comprehensive Community) comes into substantial actualization. They are the Black Church as Refuge and as Exilic Community. Internal to these meanings is its identity as a Comprehensive

Community. So these images are two marks of a single identity. Refuge and exile are not oppositional toward one another. They both belong to a single description. In these two chapters, I begin by parsing out the theory of social symbolic interaction with respect to Gustafson's themes: Community of Language; Community of Interpretation; Community of Memory and Understanding; and Community of Belief and Action. I then turn to theorists who fall within each respective image. For the Refuge image, I turn to thinkers such as E. Franklin Frazier, Gayraud S. Wilmore and Dale P. Andrews. For the Exilic image, I turn to Albert J. Raboteau, Cheryl J. Sanders and Delores S. Williams.

The conclusion "Can These Bones Live? The Significance of This Study," is a "return" from the rigors of phenomenology to the natural attitude, in which I attempt to recover, reflectively, the internal logic of the Black Church, which in a deep sense, is the condition for the possibility of the experience of the Black Church as a Refuge and Exilic Community.

CHAPTER I

PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE CHURCH IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE

As I read the literature on the Black Church, three descriptions emerge as most constitutive: the Black Church as a Comprehensive Community/Surrogate World, the Black Church as Refuge and as an Exilic Community. As I indicated in the introduction, several contemporary crises of African American life causes me to call into question the validity and truth value of these descriptions with respect to that institution. Therefore, I begin this study on images of the Black Church by laying out the methodological orientation and hermeneutical strategy by which I will analyze the Black Church in terms of its presences and absence, identity and differences of appearance, and whole and part. For this schematic manner of reading, I am indebted to the phenomenological philosophy of Robert Sokolowski.

Sokolowski is a significant interpreter and translator of Husserl's phenomenological concepts in relation to modernity and science. I will employ his descriptive framework to interpret James M. Gustafson's phenomenology of the Church, before using both theorists' framework for analyzing the Black Church, its contemporary relevance and its symbolic meaning. Gustafson is one of the more notable ethicist and theologian of the twentieth century. His *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (1961) is essential to this project as it is one of the few phenomenological interpretations of the Church to appear in twentieth century modern scholarship.

Phenomenological Terms and Interpretive Keys for General Phenomena

The turn to phenomenology is employed as a hermeneutical reading strategy to open the Black Church up to the widest possible ranges of meaning and understanding in order to test the adequacy and power of its images in the production of their symbolic meaning and value in our contemporary grasping of that community and institution. Phenomenology is a critical discipline that seeks to resolve the relationship between subject and object. It seeks to analyze and examine the relationship between the world and the world as experienced by a subject. Phenomenology takes consciousness/mental phenomena as a site of meaning in a world of objects to which consciousness is related through the activity of "intending." Such a perspective has been chosen for several reasons. Perhaps the most basic one is an attempt to get beyond romanticized readings of the Black Church in contemporary black scholarship. Thus, this is an argument against what William James refers to as "over-belief" in romantic constructions of the Black Church, in which its aspects (Refuge and Exilic Community) are taken as the being and reality of the object itself. The following exploration situates these readings (Refuge and Exilic Community) of the Black Church as aspects or manifolds within a larger whole.

Phenomenology is concerned with appearances. Sokowlowski argues for the priority of phenomenology for philosophy and for understanding how complex realities are present to us. He emphasizes intentionality and world belief.[4] For him, the task of phenomenology is to reflect on various intentionalities such as memory, perception, and picturing. Through reflection of various intentionalities, the philosopher is able to make an ontological distinction between an object and the appearance of an object. In

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[4] Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8-16.

Sokolowski's estimation, phenomenological reflection places the philosopher in a position to focus on the "subjective side of consciousness". However, the philosopher also "focuses on the objects that are given to us…"[5] Through this type of reflection, the philosopher is better able to describe and make claims about the world.

All objects are grasped intentionally, and it is through intentionality, then, that human beings come to have a meaning relationship toward objects. Sokolowski comments: "The term most closely associated with phenomenology is "intentionality."[6] The core doctrine in phenomenology is the teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have is intentional: it is essentially "consciousness of" or an "experience of something or other. All our awareness is directed towards objects."[7]

In intentionality, we "intend" within the "natural attitude," that is, the mental stance that a person takes to the daily world in which people come to have expectations and acquire beliefs and practical skills. It is the unconsciousness of these expectations, beliefs, skills, and language use that constitute the taken for granted.[8] The natural attitude is readily apparent in the lives of members of Black churches. Members of these communities and institutions operate with what Alfred Schutz refers to as a particular "cognitive style."[9] According to Schutz, a specific *epoche*, or what he refers to as the suspension of belief concerning the reality and being of experienced objects, is operative within cognitive style. The *epoche* operative within Black churches is the suspension of disbelief or doubt concerning the being and reality of symbols such as God, Jesus Christ,

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[5] Sokolowski, 50.
[6] Ibid., 8.
[7] Ibid., 8
[8] Ibid., 42.
[9] Alfred Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970), 253-254.

the resurrection and final judgment, the Devil and a host of other symbols and theological constructions. Of course each particular community and Black Christian is diverse in their grasp of these entities or what Gustafson refers to as the "intensity and extensity" of grasping a symbol or commitment to symbols and actions. The point here is that, the natural attitude, is the stance that governs how Church members grasp these entities. Within such an attitude a specific *epoche* is operative, or one could say under girds it – suspension of doubt. Phenomenology is a suspension or bracketing of the natural attitude and specific *epoche* operative within it. It is reflection on the intentional structures operative within such an attitude, including the specific *epoche* underlying it.

Phenomenology reflects on the ways in which objects are grasped within the unconscious realm of the taken for granted. It is concerned with grasping, judging, confirmation and disconfirmation of activities carried out within the natural attitude. Therefore, phenomenology is a deliberate act of reflection on the various intentional modes in the natural attitude. It turns us back toward things themselves, so that one may get beyond the layers and presuppositions built up around objects in the natural attitude. Within this "reduction" one can be creative in the way he/she experiences and thinks about things and gain insight into new possibilities. Not only are objects seen in a new light and open to new possibilities, but ones own consciousness is reclaimed from the presuppositions imposed upon it by others. Such a method is suitable for the present study on the Black Church. As an object of perception, the Black Church is surrounded by multiple layers of meaning. Within the natural attitude it is grasped in light of assumptions about the Black Church imposed on consciousness by others such as it being grasped metaphorically as "the womb of black culture." This study turns to the thing,

namely, the Black Church itself and tests the cogency of the assumptions surrounding it in relationship to contemporary social crises in African American life.

There are three interrelated and interdependent structures present in the phenomenological analysis that I will deploy in my reading of the Black Church and its images. They are the relation of (a) parts and wholes, (b) identity and differences of appearance or manifold, and (c) presence and absence. These three structures are immanent in our human ability to make judgments about objects of perception or of any intended object. Ultimately, when judgments are made about the objects of perception, we are in fact always saying something about an x. It is rare that we simply say the word "book" without making judgments about the book, whether it is good, informative, bad, misleading, or badly written. An extended example may assist in clarifying how these three structures are present in our linguistic judgment about objects present to us.[10]

From my bedroom widow, I look at a tree. At first, I examine the tree through raw animal perception. I then register the elements that constitute the tree, namely, its sides, aspects and profiles. Sides, aspects and profiles are key terms in Sokolowski's phenomenology. This trio makes up the crux of the perception of all objects. Sides constitute all objects, none of which can all be grasped at once. Aspects are constitutive of all objects as they are simply the way sides can be given. Profiles are the momentary and manifold ways in which an object gives itself. For instance, many sides constitute the human head but none can be viewed all at once. These sides are given in a multiplicity, round, flat, musculature, ect. Finally, each face has its own profile, hairy, smooth, bumpy or pimply. As with our tree, I notice its height, length and the coloring of

[10] Ibid., 22-41.

its limbs. I take notice of the leaves, their shape, color and dimensions, and the hard pod shaped objects that fall from it. I take in the roughness and smoothness of its surface. All of this is continuous animal perception of the tree.

Continuing in the mode of perception, let's say a rough circular patch at the top of the tree catches my attention as I highlight and register this part of the tree. While highlighting this aspect, I continue to experience the same tree through its many modalities. All I have done thus far is highlighted and registered a part of the tree. Upon grasping the circular patch at the top a further shift in intentionality takes place. Here is where the three structures come into play. The circular patch is taken up as a part within a whole. As I register the whole, the tree, and this part and the relationship between the two, I move from perception to a judgment. The words I use in "registering" this object show off the remaining structures of identity in manifold and presence and absence. I say: "This tree is a home." The syntax of my judgment points to one of the manifolds of appearance of the tree. In this instance, it appears to me a home. In another instance, it may appear as shade and a resting area from the blistering sun. In yet another instance, the appearance of the tree can be an indicating sign of seasonal changes, winter, spring, summer, and fall.

I also speak about the tree within the structure of presence and absence. As the tree is a part of immediate raw perception, I can make any of the above statements concerning it. This is the process of registration. The tree is perceptually present and I make statements about it. Likewise, I can make statements about the tree in its

perceptual absence. This is the process of reporting.[11] Both registration and reporting are a part of presence and absence. When we register and report about an object of experience, we are presenting a state of affairs. We articulate a part of the world. Our registering and recording can also become objects of perception. That is to say, when our statements about objects that are perceptually present or absent are taken up by another the same process occurs.

When another person grasps our statements, intentionality moves to a deeper and more complex level. Our statements are grasped passively at first and then move to a deeper level of complexity. I will refer back to the example of the tree. My registration and reporting is an articulation and presentation of the tree as presenced. I articulate the tree as a home. Now, suppose a relative is visiting and notices the same tree. I tell him, "that tree is a home." As my articulation of the tree is grasped, my relative responds: "What"? "A home?" My judgment that "this tree is a home" is suspect. My judgment is bracketed or held in suspension under the form: "According to you this tree is a home." The same object is a part of our immediate gaze, namely, the tree. Where the distinction lies is in the tree as home. I articulate a state of affairs of the tree being a home. On the other hand, my relative brackets the "a home." He slips into a "propositional attitude" and into "propositional reflection." Propositional attitude and propositional reflection shift from the object to the statement(s) proposed about the object.[12] Now as he continues in the mode of perception, he notices the same aspect that I noticed, namely, the circular bush at the top of the tree. He then declares: "Oh! I see what you mean." He thus takes

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[11] Robert Sokolowski, *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being* (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 7.
[12] Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 99-102.

the brackets off "this tree is a home," and accepts my articulation and presentation of the tree as a home as a part of the world. The three structures of (a) parts and whole; (b) identity in manifold; (c) presence and absence are evident in our move from perception to syntax to judgment. Everything described previously is done in what Sokolowski refers to as the "categorial" domain. This project is deeply grounded in the categorial domain. In it, I look at how the Black Church is grasped in consciousness. Second, I look at *judgments* made about the Black Church. Thus, the project focuses on moving from perception to judgment, both of which constitute the process of categorality. What are the conditions for the possibility of the Black Church as comprehensive community, refuge and exile?

The Church in General: A Phenomenological Grasping

Before moving into a phenomenological grasping of the Black Church in particular, I think it is appropriate to employ this descriptive framework to the Church in general. Therefore, the next task in this chapter is to provide a phenomenological reading of James M. Gustafson's social phenomenology of the Church in general. The text that best spells out his phenomenology of the Church is *Treasure In Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community*. The phenomenological thrust of this work comes through at the beginning of the text where a distinction is made between two profiles for grasping the Church as both community and institution. The profiles discussed here are the theological and the sociological. It is through the co-joining of these profiles that the Church is grasped and opened to its widest ranges of meaning, both as community and institution. Here is Gustafson:

> . . . the essay seeks to show by implication how confinement of the discussion to traditional doctrinal terms inherently oversimplifies and distorts the Church – that which the theologian seeks to understand…But as a member of the Christian community I find that the exclusive use of principles from social science and philosophy does not satisfactorily interpret life in the Church. The social processes do not fully explain the meaning of Christian life in the Church. Thus, a sociological oversimplification is as inadequate as a theological one.[13]

The benefit of phenomenology as a mode of reflection in a work such as *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* is to break through and get beyond the simplistic and dualistic graspings of the Church as either a divine and hence holy community, set apart and unique from the rest of the world (theological grasping), and the Church as simply one entity among others in which it loses its distinctive religious significance and meaning (sociological grasping). Phenomenology also assists the interpreter in moving beyond a description of the Church that would set at odds, the Church as a community and the Church as institution. Again, the primary task is to open the Church to its widest ranges of meaning and understanding. In order to get there, Gustafson draws distinctions between two profiles (theological and sociological), which alone, obscure the meaning and significance of the Church.

Several statements may be uttered concerning the Church, but in order to move to a deep level of complexity and open it to its widest ranges of meaning, statements concerning the Church must be made in the categorial domain.[14] No other judgment moves us along this path as does Gustafson's judgment that "The Church as a natural and human community." The statement immediately places us into the categorial domain. In this statement, the Church is articulated and presented as a part of the world, as a natural

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[13] James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), ix.
[14] Sokolowski., 88-111.

and human community. The task of phenomenology is to examine the Church as presenced within such a language construction. However, just what is presenced in our categorial judgment: Church and Community? Natural and *human* are not presenced. They are structures or modalities that constitute the being and presentability of Church and Community. They are deeply sedimented, intentional structures that are taken-for-granted, so much so, that they are often forgotten, particularly in a theological grasping of the Church.

Beginning perceptively, in Gustafson's judgment, the object of intentionality is "Community," in which "Church" is a type. Returning to the structure of parts and wholes, it is community that is a whole with Church being a part. Within this structure, Gustafson's judgment does something specific and important for phenomenological analysis. It places the Church as a non-independent part. That is to say, the Church is grasped and perceived against a background, namely, community. According to Gustafson, community refers to "a body of persons who share some measure of common life and a common loyalty."[15] Within Gustason's understanding of community, a taken-for-granted aspect of human experience discloses itself. That is, there are necessary conditions by which community exists, namely, human social relationships constituted by human social acts. With this in mind, it is necessary to draw a distinction concerning the type of relationship being foregrounded here. Max Weber draws a distinction between communal (community) and associative (society) relationships. Both are structures of social relationships. The former structure is grounded in affectivities and how they band people together and cause them to act in specific ways toward one another. The latter

[15] Gustafson, 1.

(associative) is grounded in human goods, interest and ends. It is not the case that these two structures are radically incommensurable. To say it another way, it is not the case that where one is present the other must be absent. Rather, it is community that extends the relationship beyond simple utility. To be more specific, community is a structure of human relationships governed by common affectivities or emotional ties. It has the sense of belonging together. Thus, community is also structured around affectivities, such as **love, devotion, and friendship,** which govern the behavior of individuals toward one another.[16]

Within the Black Church, such affections are on display as members become "family" to one another. Many members refer to each other as "brother" and "sister," or even "brother-man" and "sister-girl". Riggins Earl refers to these as *Dark Salutations* that "allows for open-ended creativity to take place between the greeter and the greeted."[17] Affections and bonds between members are strengthened within these salutary greetings and within fellowship via Church communal meals and recreation.

Continuing in this structure, community can be separated out as a part within another whole, namely, human relationships. What is articulated here is a deep layering of a whole and its parts. Church is a part or type of the whole, namely, community. Community, in turn, is a part of another whole, that is, human social relationships. As the Church (part) is registered as being a part of the whole (community), it is opened to its widest range of meaning when articulated as natural and human.

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[16] Max Weber, *Economy and Society* vol. 1 (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 40-56.
[17] Riggins Earl, *Dark Salutations: Ritual, God, and Greetings in the African American Community* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), xiv.

Whether human or non-human, all communities are natural. There is a prejudice here for a biological and philosophical grasping of the human being. The human being is a type of animal and like other animals it has certain needs. On this point Gustafson sides with Mary Midgley. He writes:

> Mary Midgley, in her *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*, develops a viewpoint on biological and philosophical grounds that is in many respects similar to mine. "What finally (you may ask)," she writes, "does distinguish man from the animals?" The question needs rephrasing, she says: "Unless we take man to be a machine or an angel, it should read 'distinguishes man among the animals…" In apt turns of phrase and with intellectual poignancy she over and over shows how interpretation of man in continuity with nature enables us to take into account the contributions of sociobiology, behaviorism, and other views that many humanists, including theologians often find distasteful. "Why should not our excellence involve our whole nature?" "Our dignity arises within nature, not against it." To acknowledge our kinship with other species is not to say we are identical with them." [18]

When speaking specifically within the domain of the human, all "animals" and their relationships and communities share the basic structure of being both natural and human. Natural and human are types or determinant modalities constitutive of all human communities. These are not to be equivocated, but rather are distinctions within phenomena. These distinctions may be analyzed under the phenomenological structures of (a) parts and wholes; (b) identity in many manifestations; and (c) presence and absence. Before moving into an analysis of the Church under these categories, I want to turn to an example by Husserl and return to my example of the tree outside the window for the sake of clarification.

Husserl's description of perceiving a table in *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* will assist in the endeavor to make distinction within phenomena based

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[18] James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, vol. 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 282.

on these general structural patterns of grasping. Husserl describes a unified table. He then talks about a shift in perspective as he moves around the table. He talks about closing his eyes and the table as no longer being a part of immediate raw perception, but as he opens his eyes, the unified table that he perceived prior to closing his eyes is before him. It is not a new table. Rather, it is the same table perceived previously. Husserl makes a distinction between the table and the perception of the table. It is the perception of the table and not the table itself that is in a state of flux. Thus, a material object can be perceived from this angle and then it can be taken apart and put back together again. It can be a part of an immediate perception as well as a part of memory. It is not simply the table that is at stake in Husserl's description, but the type of descriptive analysis that is applicable to all objects.[19]

Earlier, I evoked a tree outside of my bedroom window. I spelled out the "objective and subjective dimensions"of the tree. Objective and Subjective dimensions are terms Sokolowski uses when dealing with objects.[20] In the classical sense they are the correlates of physical and mental phenomena, objective being physical and subjective being mental. There is the tree in all of its sides, colors, shapes, all of its parts. Then, there is my activity of perceiving the tree. I analyzed the tree in relation to the three form structures mentioned above – parts and wholes; identity in manifestations; presence and absence. I peeled back the layers of the tree by looking at it in terms of sides, aspects and profiles, one of the profiles being the "tree as a home." I came to the conclusion that the tree (as a whole) is constituted by its various parts, sides, branches, leaves, roots. The

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[19] The point here is to spell out the logic of identity in manifolds in Husserl. For an extended discussion see, Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 86-110.
[20] Sokolowski, 17.

tree is also given in a manifold of presentations. For instance, in one setting it is a home, in another a resting area. Finally, the identity of the tree is given in the blend of presence and absence. As the tree becomes a part of perception it is never fully perceived. There are sides that are present to us and sides that are absent. The circular bush was absent from my relative; thus, he did not grasp the tree in one of its manifestations, namely, a home. I had to reveal the absent to him. As we perceive the tree through my bedroom window, the other side of the tree is absent from our view. We may go outside and capture that side, but the side from the window recedes from view. There are sides that are present to us and sides that are absent. The absent sides are co-intended. Ultimately, however, the blend still gives us the identity of the object, namely a tree.

Now, a similar type of analysis is available when turning to the Church as a natural and human community. Community is the basic structure constitutive of the Church. It is the whole on which the parts depend, the identity given across a manifold of appearances (Church happens to be one appearance or manifestation), and the identity given in a blend of presence and absence with respect to our perception of the material object of the Church. Thus, the symbol "human" signifies the whole of our understanding of every distinction made among communities. Families, nations, governments, fraternities, churches, sororities are all distinct communities, but they are all signified and grasped as human, albeit, taken for granted as such. They are all human communities under distinction. Thus, human community signifies a whole in which these are distinct parts. And if the Church is human, it is subject to the methods of analysis that are used when discussing government, nations and other distinct human communities, says Gustafson.

> The Church can be defined as a human community with an historical continuity identifiable by certain beliefs, ways of work, rites, loyalties, outlooks and feelings. Whatever else the Church is to the systematic theologian and Biblical exegete, it is a people with a history. It is a social entity with temporal and spatial dimensions. It is human, and shares many characteristics of other human communities such as nations, trade unions, and professions. As a human community it is subject to various modes of study and interpretation.[21]

The quote is important as it situates Gustafson within Sokolowski's phenomenological framework. That is, not only do interpreters describe objects, (in the quote above Gustafson uses "as") but the interpreter also makes claims (categorial intentions) about the being of objects (later in the same quote Gustafson uses "is"). Second, the quote reveals an absence and that is Gustafson's emphasis on the historical method. The impetus here is that all historical happenings are wedded. Thus, the present Church is knit with the Church of the past. They are interconnected as one institution and one community. To use Gustafson's words, they are continuous. There is thus a correlation between the present and the past in which the past conditions the present. Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to this as "effective history" or the history of effects.[22] Therefore, the present Church cannot be understood properly without understanding its historical counterpart. This is, in a sense, their continuity. Indeed, the Church is a human community, and as such, it is a historical community. It is a people governed by the processes of sociality and time.

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[21] James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 3.
[22] See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 300.

All human communities are constituted by specific and determinant experiences.[23] By the term experience(s), I mean the transactions that human beings make on a daily basis in their surrounding environments. This definition stems back into the work of John Dewey's *Experience and Nature* and comes through Gustafson's work. In Dewey's estimation, experience is "how men act, and are acted upon."[24] Gustafson writes:

> Human experience is prior to reflection. We reflect on human experience itself, and on objects perceived, interpreted, and known through our experiences of them and through the experiences of others… Experience is social; it is a process of interaction between persons and natural events, and between persons and historical events… Experience is not only socially generated; it is socially tested. And it is the experience of others, of "things" objective to human persons.[25]

Therefore, experience is always perceived "as" the experience of some object by some interpreter. It is the encounter of subject and object.

Earlier I mentioned that phenomenology is concerned with our descriptions as well as our assertions about objects. Here that point is critical. The primary concern is with our descriptions of objects of experience. It is our descriptions that give way to the object appearing "as such" or objects experienced "as such." On Gustafson's account, the experiences of the Church "as human" include politics, common language, interpretation, memory and understanding, and belief and action. The experiences (parts) are dependent upon one another as they make up a unity (whole). They all entail one another. Wherever a community is found, such as a family, nation, government, fraternity or sorority, and even a Church, all of these parts are present and constitute the

[23] Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective Vol* 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 115.
[24] Dewey, John. *Experience and Nature*. (New York: New York, W.W. Norton & Company), 8.
[25] Gustafson, 115.

whole, namely human community. For instance, in families, parents exercise authority by legislating policies that govern family conduct. Power is distributed and decisions must be made. These types of activities are a part of the political nature of the family and are determinant for its cohesion and survival. That the family is political entails that it is also a community of common language, interpretation, memory and understanding and belief and action. The policies that the family constructs in its political activity must be codified in a language that is common to the family or else those in the family who are not familiar cannot be held accountable. Actions by family members are interpreted and understood to be in line with or in violation of its policies. Children place certain actions into their memory banks as a reminder to stray away from particular activities. Predecessors of the family are entailed in its memory and its heritage without which the passing on of family rituals and values would be impossible. Action is taken when there is a violation of family policies. To confine these processes to the family alone is an oversimplification. They are operative in all human communities.

Even within the Black Church, leadership authority is exercised in the institution and legislation of policies for Church members. For instance, certain language constructions such as profanity are disbarred from the grounds of the Black Church. Activities such as gambling are forbidden within the Church as well as on Church grounds. In sum, in light of the structure of a whole and its parts, parts are distinguished as dependent and nondependent. The dependent parts (moments) of human community consist of the activities that constitute it as human, while the nondependent part (pieces) of human community rests on the form it takes, i.e., Church, family, nation or government. To put it another way, human community is a profile. Its experiences

(parts) of the political, common language, interpretation, memory and understanding, and belief and action are aspects of the profile.

Moving to the structure of identity in manifold, human community as an identity is distinct from all of its manifestations. The point here is that community appears in a manifold of ways. It may appear to the perceiver as a family, nation, government, gang, retirement home, or Church. However, community is both non-reducible to its individual manifestations and is non-equivocal to the sum of all of its appearances. Community is of a different order from its appearances. The point here is to clarify identity and its manifestations. Let's turn to a series of examples to clarify this distinction. The 9/11 tragedy in the United States discloses itself under manifold descriptions. The event was experienced one way by those who were directly involved. Cornelius Bowie, a Pentagon worker, who was in the Pentagon and had left the site where the aircraft slammed into the building just five minutes prior to the event. He describes the 9/11 experience as one of fear and helplessness.

> I was there in the office of the Admiral to set up a server but I left some of the equipment in my wing of the building. I had to return to my wing to pick up the equipment. As I got to my desk people were watching the towers fall in disbelief. Suddenly, we all heard a loud boom and the lights went out. The emergency lights came on and people were yelling, "get out!!" "Get out!!" As we started to move, many of us began to fear that we would not make it out. But we did make it out. However, the scene outside was not what we expected: No clear blue skies. We saw the aircraft where it slammed into the building. We also saw limbs and bodies on fire. Some of them were people we talked with on a daily basis. Some were friends. There was nothing we could do to help them. We had to keep moving. It was a terrible experience that I will never forget.

9/11 was experienced in another way by those who were connected to people who were directly involved. Arlene Flemming, an airline customer service and sales agent describes her 9/11 experience as one of panic. Here husband was traveling to

Washington D.C for midmorning meeting. She turned on the morning news and caught the headlines. She said: "I began to flip out. I counted in my head the minutes between his arrival, his taxi ride, and his meeting not far from the Pentagon. I tried calling his cell phone over and over with no response, and I remained in a state of panic until I heard from him." Finally, the event was captured for the big screen in 2006 with "World Trade Center", and it was experienced in another distinct way from the prior two groupings. Some were disappointed in the film and felt that it did not capture the emotion of the event. Others resonated with the film as it brought back memories of that day, garnering a sense of humility and togetherness. Noting that the agents who forecast it intended the event in another way could extend this analysis even further. Still, the one event was an act of terrorism that disclosed itself under manifold descriptions. The identity of the event is given within and through all of its appearances.

If we turn to Christian baptism as another example, it was presented and experienced in one way in the Gospels by their respective writers as a part of the memory of an initiation.[26] It is presented again in the early letters as a spiritual experience required for the apostles to begin the work of the Kingdom.[27] Paul presents and articulates it as a transformation of mind, habits and values.[28] We read about all of these presentations and articulations through Scripture as the rite is presented to Christians as being symbolic of dying to a certain way of life and rising anew. Baptism is presented

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[26] Here I have in mind the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist as reported by Matthew (Matthew 3:13-4:1). The sequence of events has Jesus being baptized by John and then led into the wilderness by the Spirit and shortly after the ministry begins.
[27] A similar sequence occurs here with respect to spiritual baptism of the disciples (Acts 2:1-2:4).
[28] Romans 6:1-15. Paul talks about dying with Christ in baptism and being raised to new life.

again as purification through the history of the Church and contemporary practices based on its form. Hence, within the Black Church, the event of baptism is also grasped within the framework of historical understanding. Baptism is taken up within a manifold of appearances. In all of these presentations and articulations, we have one identity, namely, Christian baptism.

The event of baptism itself is registered and reported in the structure of identity in manifold. In the event of baptism, there are at the very least three parties. There is a religious authority figure, a pastor, reverend, bishop or priest who performs the baptism. There is also a candidate who is the object of the event of baptism. Finally, there are witnesses who come to the experience with a set of understandings in an attempt to interpret what is going on. Descriptions arise from a stock of knowledge and looking at the activity. The religious authority figure has a description of the event (committing a soul to God and a new way of living). The candidate also has a description (giving over his/her life to God and a new way of living). The witnesses also have a description (welcoming and celebrating that another soul has come home). These are all descriptions of empirical acts that fall under an assertional mode of language. The event of baptism appears thusly. There are parts in relation to a whole here as well. Committing, giving, welcoming and celebrating are parts of a whole event, that is, the Christian Rite of Baptism typifiying a new way of living. This particular rite is distinct and symbolic. Its distinction lies in its symbolic expression of death and cleansing.

As with the experience of 9/11 and the event of baptism, as a human community, the Black Church and its parts constitute various manifolds of appearance. It is an identity that appears within governments, nations, families, academic institutions,

neighborhood watch gatherings, and churches. In the modality of categorial intending, the Church as natural and human community signifies a non-reducibility of the Church to a singular aspect or manifestation. It is repeatable within and across various manifestations. What is experienced in all of these moments of distinction is the Church as a natural and human community. Identity in manifold is a necessary framework that serves as a corrective for distinguishing the identity of a material object from its appearances, in this case the Church. As a natural and human community, the Church shares common activities with other natural and human communities, as Gustafson proposes.

Presence and absence have a great deal to do with the activities of registering and reporting. That is, we can talk about a thing as it is a part of an immediate perception as well as talk about it when it is not in view. It also has to do with an object and its correlates. History is also a type of absence that is always intended even if unconsciously. Hans-Georg Gadamer gets at this through the concept of "effective history" (*wirkungeschiete*) as highlighted previously. The present stream of consciousness is situated against a background, namely history. Although absent, history is effective upon present consciousness. Understanding Communion, biblical authority, and Jesus as Son of God, within the Black Church is exemplary of this point. The present understanding of the significance of the event takes place in light of that which is absent, namely, the historical event of the Passover and Last Supper of Christ with his disciples, all of which is taken up within memory. Understanding the nature of the authority of the biblical text within the Black Church is best captured in the concept of effective history. The locus of authority is not within the text itself but resides in the Black Church and the

history of effects of its interpretation and understanding of the text. Within the Black Church, a figure like Jesus is grasped through presence and absence. It is the absence of the "Father" that allows the incarnation to occur. The divine became flesh in the man Jesus and receded into absence in the ascension. Therefore, human beings have a way of grasping objects through a range of presences and absences.

As he is describing the Church, Gustafson uses internal and external as correlates to presence and absence. He says:

> The Church is marked by an inwardness, a common quality of life and commitment to certain truths. It is marked by an outwardness, signs and symbols, books and rites, by which persons of general cultural knowledge can designate it. It is both external and internal; it is outwardly institutional, and inwardly communal. The double character of its life is necessary; the most intimate sense of unity depends upon the outward expressions given to the past life and events remembered in the community.[29]

The outwardness of the Church in signs and symbols, books and rites is equivalent to its presence. This is its institutionalization. The inwardness of the Church resides in its common quality of life and commitment to certain truths. Its inwardness is a part of the taken for granted. It is a part of its absence. According to Gustafson, it is presence and absence that is necessary for the unity of the life of the Church.

The Church can be grasped in its temporal, spatial and historical dimensions**,** says Gustafson.[30] In grasping the Church in this way, the internal life of the Church, which is hidden from immediate perception, is brought to a higher level of awareness. The political functions of the Church, its use of a common language among its members, its activity in interpreting events, its turn to memory and understanding in light of its own

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[29] James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 12-13.
[30] Ibid., 13.

practices, and its activity of believing and acting are all highlighted and presenced. The transcendental structure of presence and absence points to the "natural" in the judgment that the Church is a natural and human community. The Church is a natural community that functions to meet basic biological and psychological needs. Human beings are a distinct kind of animal, and like all animals, they have basic needs that must be attended to for their survival.

It is the meeting of natural needs that characterizes the Church as human. This is not a move to equivocate the terms natural and human. However, it is a move to give priority to the natural needs of all animals, including the human animal. That natural needs are fulfilled is the condition for the possibility of grasping an entity as human. When the Church fails to meet natural needs, it betrays its being as a natural and human community. Gustafson says:

> The naturalness of the Christian community may be so obvious that it is ignored. The theologians have been so interested in finding the differentiating and unique elements in the Church that they have generally overlooked the qualities and patterns of its life that are continuous with other societies. Given their focus of attention, it is often tacitly assumed that the natural basis of the Church is unimportant. Or it appears to be assumed that the religious significance of the natural elements in the Church's life is so unique as to transform them into something discontinuous with other human groups. In the development of a social interpretation of the Church, however, one notes the importance of the natural aspects of the Church: the meeting of individual and social needs. These are ingredients in the life of the Church without which it could not exist. The Church is in one dimension a natural community, and can be understood in the light of the same principles used to interpret other natural communities – the family, non-Christian primitive religions, the nation, or the trade union. The processes of its life are not unique, as further specification shows.[31]

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[31] Ibid., 28.

According to Gustafson, the naturalness of the Church is its capacity to meet individual and social needs. This aspect of the Church is a part of our grasping it within the natural attitude. It is so fundamentally taken for granted that it is all too often glossed over and forgotten by the theologian. Yet, the biblical text is replete with examples of the naturalness constitutive of the Church. The author of First Peter encourages believers to love and be hospitable to one another. These two aspects, love and hospitality, constitute the naturalness of the Church as a meeting of both individual and social needs. The early Church often gathered offerings and collections to meet the natural and social needs of other "saints." [32]

The history of the Black Church is a witness to the naturalness of that community and institution. Not only did Black churches transmit religion, they were also harbors of education, political, and economic activity. Carter G. Woodson reports that a manual labor college began out of the basement of a Black church. This college went on to become a part of Wilberforce University. Black Churches also functioned to teach African Americans skills such as "sewing, knitting, and embroidery." I take up Woodson more in depth in the following chapter. H. Richard Niebuhr believed that the Black Church was also a force in building self-esteem and self-respect for African Americans. He saw the divide in the Church among denominational lines a travesty. But within that travesty, the color line was more significant than doctrinal differences. For, the color line represented the assimilation of the Christian Church to a caste system.

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[32] See *1 Corinthians* 16: 1-4; 2 *Corinthians* 9:1-15.

It was the sin and hypocrisy of the white Church that gave rise to the Negro Church. Niebuhr is worth quoting at length on this point:

> Their unquestioned assumption of superior privileges, their unconscious wounding of Negro self-respect, their complacent acceptance of the morality of the world as fitting for the church, have once more divided the body of Christ along the lines of social class. The white man's sense of superiority has come to expression in the assignment of Negroes to special places in the houses of worship, in refusals to admit him to equal privilege at the communion table, in the denial of ordination or the right to participate in government of the church and in the multitudinous affronts which special privilege unwittingly commits.[33]

For Niebhur, the division was inevitable. He describes the departure of African Americans from white churches into their own churches as an act of self-assertion and uplift. These are all individual and social needs. Self assertion, self esteem, equality, and a feeling of belonging are all encompassed under the category, natural. As I show in chapter three, the meeting of these needs give rise to a particular image of the Black Church, namely, Refuge. On Gustafson's account, in the Church, "men receive recognition; they have a sense of belonging; they may be assured of ultimate rightness and goodness of things."[34] Thus, the Black Church has functioned as a natural community meeting the needs of African Americans in a society in which inequality and white supremacy were the norm. As will be displayed in the following chapters, the Black Church provided for blacks status and recognition, a sense of belonging, senses of the rightness and wrongness of moral action, and a sense of being a part of an "ultimate other."

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[33] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1987), 260.
[34] Gustafson, 21.

The naturalness of the Church also resides in the “qualities” and “patterns” that it shares with other natural communities, which too are often glossed over by the theologian, in Gustafson’s estimation.[35] The Church is a community that shares in the processes of institutionalization and socialization. These are processes that no human community can escape if it is to survive. As mentioned, the Church institutionalizes itself through its texts, symbols, and signs. It socializes its members into its life through the transmission of values, beliefs and patterns of life. The stability and internal unity of the Church is dependent on these processes. The very identity of the Church, as Church, is dependent upon these processes. The Church shares these processes with other communities as a way of identity formation. However, it is these same processes through which the Church distinguishes itself as Church. The Church is distinguished from other institutions and communities not by the processes and patterns, but by what it emphasizes within these structures. As the following chapters will show, the Church emphasizes something specific with respect to internal socialization. However, without both processes, the Church, as well as any other community or institution would cease to exist.

This priority given to the natural characterization of the Church discloses a modality of the Church that is absent as one reads Gustafson, namely, the modality of embodiment. The Church is a natural community constituted by bodies. These bodies are experienced as “I” or “my.” In other words, the emphasis here is on human subjectivity and self-awareness. As I sit and type this sentence, I experience my body

[35] Ibid., ix.

carrying out certain activities. I experience myself performing the act of thinking through and constructing a chapter. As I move from sentence to sentence, I experience my potential to think things through and work constructions out. The body I experience is experienced as "mine." Embodiment and embodied selves add a wider range of meaning to Gustafson's phenomenology of the Church. Indeed, it is a natural community of embodied individuals. Thus, it is natural prior to it being human. Ultimately, however, both are taken for granted. The Church is subject to distortion when the natural needs of its members are neglected in favor of other activities. Thus, co-present in all descriptions of the Church must be a grasping of it as a natural and human community.

Not only does the transcendental structure of presence and absence reveal to us embodiment, but it also highlights the limits of Gustafson's phenomenological reduction of the Church. This is not to say that Gustafson is at fault here. Rather, objects hold in reserve many modalities. Gustafson deals with the Church as a whole. However, among his typifying structure are the absence of race, gender, and sexuality, specificities that are co-present in the natural and human embodiment of the Church. To get closer to a comprehensive analysis of the Church, these specificities must be explored. In this dissertation, I take up the Church through the modality of race consciousness.

Summary

This dissertation engages in a description of the Church under one of its profiles, namely, a racial profile symbolized by "The Black Church". What has been forecast in this chapter is a framework for grasping the Church. The primary claim behind all the descriptive analysis is that consciousness is presentational. That is, objects are present to

us and we grasped them as objects. They are not mere private, mental constructs grounded in multiple impressions upon the brain. Consciousness grasps objects and presents them. Phenomenology is the framework in which different forms of presentation are taken up and described. I have introduced vocabulary that will be key to the following analysis of The Black Church. I have also introduced a phenomenological framework (parts and wholes, identity in manifold, and presence and absence) for grasping the object under analysis, namely Black Church.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK CHURCH: A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY

I begin this analysis of the Black Church with what may seem to be a brief detour. This detour is a limited account of the manifolds in the languages deployed in grasping the Black Church. I want to look at two modes of grasping in the languages used in discussing the Black Church, namely, analogy and metaphor.

Language and Analogy

These two modes of linguistic grasping have a rich history in both theology and philosophy. Theologically speaking, St. Thomas Aquinas turned to analogy as the middle way between univocality and equivocality concerning statements about God. Thomas argues:

> Therefore it must be said that these names are said of God and creatures in an *analogous* sense, that is, according to proportion… And in this way some things are said of God and creatures analogically, and not in a purely equivocal nor in a purely univocal sense. For we can name God only from creatures. Hence, whatever is said of God and creatures is said according as there is some relation of the creature to God as to its principle and cause, wherein all the perfections of things pre-exist excellently. Now this mode of community is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same; yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but the name which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing: e.g., healthy, applied to urine, signifies the sign of animal health; but applied to medicine, it signifies the cause of the same health.[36]

[36] St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Q. 13, Art. 5 in *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas: The Summa Theologica; The Summa Contra Gentiles* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1948), 107-108.

Human language about God cannot be univocal because of God's radical otherness. In other words, there is no referent through which human language can reach to get at the otherness of God. Furthermore, human language about God must not be equivocal. That is, if God has been revealed to human beings through revelation and other manifolds, and knowledge of God is disclosed, then human beings must be able to speak intelligibly in their statements about God. Thomas concludes that neither way of speaking, in the univocal or equivocal sense captures God's being.

Thomas' solution is that human beings speak analogically. For Thomas, analogy is a second order type language that frees from 1) over-speaking and 2) speaking unintelligibly. As he sees it, all of our statements about God are analogical. For example, statements uttered in Black churches such, as "God is good all the time," "and all the time, God is good," and "God loves a cheerful giver," are for Aquinas, analogical. They cannot be equivocal, as God is so radically other that our statements contain no referent to get at God in God's otherness. Yet, we do not reduce our statements to mere babbling or nonsense, if knowledge of God has been disclosed.

The two modes of intending or two moments, which are dependent upon the other, and hidden within analogical statements, are proportionality and attribution. The moment of proportionality denotes a mutual relationship between two proportions. Thus, a comparison is made along the likeness between two entities. However, the likeness is not an equivocal likeness. Suppose two statements are made through analogical intending. Let's take "God is loving," and "Charles is loving." In both statements, love is appropriate to each. However, it is appropriate on different planes. One is infinite, while the other is finite.

Several objections may be raised concerning this type of speaking and thinking, such as feasibility of the knowledge of God, including God's properties, as well as the character of the relationship between the two proportions. In the previous example for instance, a relation is assumed between "God" and "Charles." We may stretch this relation to the biblical notion of *imago dei*, namely, human beings in the image of God and hence in this case, Charles as a presentation of that image. Aquinas anticipates these objections by turning to the analogy of attribution. In attribution a "primary analogate" is attributed certain properties. Other entities receive these attributes in a secondary sense through their relation to the prime analogate. The phenomenological grasping here is a whole and its parts, in which the parts are dependent upon the whole for legitimation. Thus, human beings are in the likeness of God in an analogous sense, in which a real relation is presumed between two distinct proportions. Analogy then, deals with comparison, likeness, resemblance and affinity. It is a way of speaking between the univocal and the equivocal. In analogy, there is always a primary analogate that is referential to the object described.

Linguistic expressions, however, come in many shades. One may speak analogically when uttering the words, "human beings are created in the image and likeness of God." Second, for our purposes here, one may speak metaphorically, in statements such as, "You are the light of the world,' or "you are the salt of the earth." The parables of Jesus are all metaphorical. They are metaphors in the form of a story. The Bible is replete with metaphors, especially within its apocalyptic literature. In Revelation, the writer to the Church at Laodicea speaks prophetically for the voice of Christ and utters, "I know thy works, whether you are hot or cold. I wish you were one

or the other. But since you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth!" (Rev, 3: 15-16) These metaphors do two things well. First, they address specific situations. Second, they present to consciousness image(s) and image patterns.

Language and Metaphor

In philosophy and theology, metaphor is a linguistic speech act used when a speaker desires to compare two things, usually placing one object in place of another and suggesting a likeness. Again, the Bible is replete with such examples. "The Kingdom of God is like …" and "This generation is like…" Both expressions denote a desire to compare and suggest likeness.

Like analogy, metaphors are constituted by moments. They are comparisons, interactions and speech acts. The first moment, comparison is constituted as simile. Simile is a type of metaphor involving comparison: thus, "Explaining this to him "is like" getting teeth pulled." The second moment is an interaction between the entity that the speaker wishes to articulate, such as "The Kingdom of God," and an entity that is registered and recorded metaphorically, hence "is like a man who sowed good seed in his field." The third moment emphasizes the context in which metaphors are used as well as the inflection of voice in their deployment. Kingdom of God, for instance, has been the focal point and the cause for *celebration* in many historical and contemporary sermons. The classic debate concerning metaphor, however, turns on the issue of cognitive meaning in speech acts. Thomas attempts to solve issues of language by turning to analogy to deal with epistemological problems in our speech acts.

French Phenomenologist and hermeneutical philosopher, Paul Ricoeur gets at the cognitive meaning of metaphor by describing it as having the power to 're-describe' the way things are. He writes:

> The most fundamental support of this transition from semantics to hermeneutics is to be found in the connection in all discourse between sense, which is its internal organization, and reference, which is its power to refer to a reality outside of language. Accordingly, metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while persevering and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the heuristic power wielded by fiction.[37]

Ricoeur sees metaphor as existing along a structure in which a move is made from mere 'figure of speech,' to 'semantics,' to hermeneutics. In other words, metaphors are not mere words. They are statements, but they are more. In the end, the power of metaphor is hermeneutical, its ability to interpret and re-describe experience and open understanding.

For Ricoeur, not only does metaphor signify what something is like, it also signifies what something is not or is not like. Thus, metaphor also has to do with 'being.' He says:

> From this conjunction of fiction and redescription I conclude that the 'place' of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*. The metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like.' If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally 'tensive' sense of the word 'truth.'[38]

Because they have the power to re-describe reality, metaphors are important for what they do for us epistemologically and ontologically. They enlighten and expand our stock of knowledge, and they display a new reality or what we might term an image. Thus,

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[37] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 6.
[38] Ibid., 7.

Riceour opposes the traditional understanding of metaphor as a mere colorful speech act that does not contribute to the cognitive meaning of words and the possibility of new meaning.

A concluding observation remains to be made concerning these two linguistic modes of intending. Both analogy and metaphor are forms of categorial intending. They are not simply language conventions that compare likenesses. Both speech acts are also forms of judgment that require verification. As implied in Ricoeur, metaphor is a way to get us to perceive differently by provoking new perceptions. He conceives the power of metaphor to "make truth." Upon their adequacy, metaphors allow objects to be manifest in new ways. Their verification as good or bad depends on how well they describe or re-describe an object or experience. For instance, we would not say that "Life is like a box of chocolates" is false and "life is like a can of spinach" is true. However, we would say whether or not both are good or bad in what they attempt to describe and or re-describe.

After a brief detour into these speech acts, it is now time to take up the constructive task. The detour on language was somewhat unavoidable. The various languages deployed in taking up the Black Church in North America require some account of language to be delineated, since both the Black Church as a Refuge and Exilic community must also be grasped by their adequacy as images to describe or re-describe the experience of Black Church members. Failure to spell out at least some minute account of language would muddle the current project, as there would be no framework for taking up the images of the Black Church as a Refuge and Exilic Community.

The Negro Church: an All Comprehending Institution

. Many consider Carter G. Woodson the Father of Black History. As a black historian writing in the early decades of the twentieth century, Woodson was instrumental in establishing The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. In the years following the establishment of *The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History*, Woodson established and published the scholarly publication, *The Journal of Negro History*. Woodson explored wide range of African American cultural phenomena as he attempted to provide an exhaustive account of African American experience and culture. One of the phenomena under Woodson's gaze was the Negro Church.

In 1939, Woodson published an article entitled, "The Negro Church, an All-Comprehending Institution." According to Woodson, Negroes lacked governmental support and thus their churches were placed in the role of fulfilling functions normally handled by governmental agencies. Woodson's aim, therefore, as a historian and social scientist, in this brief article is to articulate the growth of the Negro in the United States due to contributions of Black churches in the lives of Negroes.

In examining Woodson, I think it is of primary importance to first understand how he speaks about the Negro Church, that is, what mode of intending is operative in his speech about the Church. Beyond that, it is important to understand just how Woodson intends the Negro Church in its manifolds. It is also imperative to give an account the absence(s) within Woodson's intending. After gauging these issues, it is important to test Woodson's language about the Black Church for its adequacy.

Essentially, for Woodson, the Negro Church is an "all-comprehending institution" that "touches almost" every aspect of Negro life. He is worth quoting at length here:

> The Negro church touches almost every ramification of the life of the Negro. As stated elsewhere, the Negro church, in the absence of other agencies to assume such responsibilities, has had to do more than its duty in taking care of the general interests of the race. A definitive history of the Negro church, therefore, would leave practically no phase of the history of the Negro in America untouched. All efforts of the Negro in things economic, educational and political have branched out of or connected in some way with the rise and development of the Negro church.[39]

At first glance his language appears univocal. There does not appear here to be a prime analogate within which traits are distributed from one object to the next. He presents the Negro Church as "all-comprehending" as a fact. Thus, he works ontologically and empirically as he spells out the very being of the Negro Church. At first glance then, one may conclude that Woodson is not working at an analogical level. He simply points to the fact that the Black Church has been very significant in the fulfillment of goals and ends constitutive of Negro life, hence, "all-comprehending."

Metaphor, however, is not a tenable option with the language Woodson uses in discussing the Negro Church. All-Comprehending Institution is not a metaphor that 're-describes' reality. Rather, it is a literal acclimation of the way things are with respect to this institution in the lives of African Americans. Woodson does not say the Negro Church is "like" an All-Comprehending Institution. Through historical evidence he shows that the Church "is" an All-Comprehending Institution. Thus, he is speaking univocally in his analysis of the Negro Church.

But, is it possible that Woodson speaks in another way? His language presents a blend of presences and absences. While he does make an empirical and ontological claim about the Negro Church, he also works at a level of analogy. Analogy has a specific

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[39] Carter G. Woodson, "The Negro Church, an All-Comprehending Institution," *The Negro History Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (October 1939): 7.

form of predication: A is to B as C is to D. In Woodson's language concerning the Negro Church, a certain analogue presents itself. Woodson asserts:

> The Negro church touches almost every ramification of the life of the Negro. As stated elsewhere, the Negro church, in the absence of other agencies to assume such responsibilities, has had to do more than its duty in taking care of the general interests of the race. A definitive history of the Negro church, therefore, would leave practically no phase of the history of the Negro in America untouched. All efforts of the Negro in things economic, educational and political have branched out of or connected in some way with the rise and development of the Negro church.[40]

From this language emerges the analogue, the Negro Church is to the Negro, what society and government is for whites. The analogue is between the Negro Church and society/government. These institutions all have one thing in common. They are filed under the category community. One of the aspects of community is to integrate the concerns and needs of its members, hence his use of the language The Negro Church as a All-Comprehending Community." The Negro Church is an all-comprehending community because it integrates the needs and concerns of African Americans. Woodson 'attributes' aspects from society and government to the Negro Church and assigns them equal proportionality. These are its manifolds or its displays.

I now turn my attention now to these displays. The perspectives expressed in the language "comprehensive community," that of an economic institution, that of an educational institution and that of a political institution, are perspectives on one and the same institution, namely, the Negro Church. Because the Negro was without government and societal assistance, Woodson anticipates, through the historical data, these varying displays of the Negro Church. The Negro Church itself also had to anticipate its varying

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[40] Carter G. Woodson, "The Negro Church, an All-Comprehending Institution," *The Negro History Bulletin 3*, no. 1 (October 1939): 7.

displays. In other words the Negro, without assistance from governmental agencies anticipated through the Negro Church, what was about to occur. These various displays within the Negro Church were avenues through which the Negro could attain human fulfillment. Hence, the present displays (economic, educational and political institution) give rise to an absent display, namely, the Negro Church as an instrument of freedom and human fulfillment.

In Woodson's account there is only one Negro Church, the one that is all comprehending and concerned with social solidarity and human need. It is not the case that one Negro Church offers itself as an economic institution and another as an educational institution and then another as a political institution. It is one Negro Church as an all-comprehending institution in and across all of these displays. All of these displays are moments that are dependent upon one another to make up the whole. However, these moments cannot be comprehended without first grasping this hidden moment, namely, the Negro Church as a symbol and instrument of freedom.[41]

Woodson does indeed comprehend the Negro Church in this way. For Woodson, the Negro Church is a symbol and instrument of freedom in two ways. First, it was an avenue through which abolitionists could be effective with their message of anti-slavery. Although many Negro Churches feared detriment to themselves due to this message, many continued to ring the bell of the injustices of slavery[42]. Second, for Woodson, through the Negro Church, the message of freedom was manifest through media – the press. "Most of the Negro newspapers of the ante-bellum times were established with the

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[41] What I mean by freedom here is enlargement in possibilities for transcendence and human fulfillment.
[42] Woodson, 7.

support of or under the editorship of Negro churchmen."[43] Men such as Samuel E. Cornish, John B. Russwurm, Charles Bennett Ray, Phillip A. Bell, William Allen and a host of other Negro churchmen found and edited several publications through which the message of freedom and anti-slavery traveled.

Three other displays are taken up in light of the Negro Church as a symbol and instrument of freedom. They are the Negro Church as an economic institution; the Negro Church as an education institution; and the Negro Church as a political institution. The Negro Church is an economic institution because of its assistance to businesses and Negro businessmen. As Woodson proclaims, "Out of the church itself or meeting of citizen called on its approval have grown most Negro commercial establishments."[44] The establishments Woodson has in mind here are banks and insurance agencies operating under Negro churchmen. But, as Woodson points out, other Negro businessmen, such as lawyers, pharmacist, dentists, and doctors relied on the Negro Church as a form of advertisement for their services.

Still, the Negro Church is constituted by other displays. The Negro Church is an education institution. According to Woodson, education was one of the keys to freedom for the Negro and the church assisted in educated its members, not only along religious lines but also on the basics of domestic arts such as "sewing, knitting, embroidery, and the like."[45] Religious instruction was first and foremost and many churches served as training grounds for religious education. But Negroes were also taught in the ways of

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[43] Ibid., 7.
[44] Ibid., 15.
[45] Ibid., 7.

agriculture. Eventually, a manual labor college developed out of the basement of an A.M.E Church, which later became a part of Wilberforce University.

But, how could the Negro Church educate is members when only a few seemed to have education? A hidden display is disclosed under the manifold of Negro Church as an education institution. The Negro Church is an integrative institution. Negroes accepted the educational efforts of whites from the North. It would be a mistake to place upon the Negro Church the position of sole educator of the race. As Woodson says, after the Civil War there were several northern whites, philanthropists, who were concerned with the religious and moral education of the Negro. These "Christian workers" established important education institutions for the furthering of Negro education. Among the Universities and schools established were:

> Shaw University at Raleigh in 1865; Roger Williams at Nashville and Morehouse at Atlanta in 1867; Leland and New Orleans and Benedict at Columbia in 1871. The Free Will Baptists founded Storer College at Harper's Ferry in 1867. The Methodists, who were no less active, established Walden at Nashville in 1865, Rust at Holly Springs in 1866, Morgan at Baltimore in 1867, Haven Academy at Waynesboro in 1868, Claflin at Orangeburg in 1869, and Clark Atlanta in 1870.[46]

Several other denominations and traditions jumped on board to assist in the educational development of the Negro. Among them were the Presbyterians, the Episcopal Church, and the American Missionary Association, which was a part of the Congregational Church. According to Woodson the sacrifice of the whites served as an example to the Negro Church who then reached out and established educational extension programs of their own.[47] Thus, when taking into account the educational aspect of the

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[46] Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (The Associated Publishers, 1921), 184.
[47] Ibid., 184.

Negro Church, these efforts must be taken into account so as not to distort the whole of Negro education. It was not simply the heroic efforts of the Negro Church alone that brought about the furthering education of the race. Woodson sees the efforts made by Methodist, Friends, Congregationalist, Free Will Baptists, Wesleyans, and the Reformed Dutch as instrumental in the education of the Negro. Their efforts are so significant that Woodson proclaims, "the story of the Negro church would be incomplete without" accenting these works.[48] Thus, the Negro Church, in some sense, is integrative and indebted to whites for their educational efforts. It was not in its being a radically resistant community to all non-blacks. Woodson thus rejects the point of view of the Black Church as a manifestation of black heroic genius.

Finally, the Negro Church is a political institution. According to Woodson, many Negro ministers participated in politics and the public sphere as they fought for the rights of the race as a whole. Many of these churchmen reached that state legislature and some even as far as the Congress of the United State. While many of these churchmen worked back and forth between their churches and politics, others, who were trained for ministry, left it altogether to pursue a career in politics.[49]

What I have done here is distinguish the displays of the Negro Church at one moment from its displays at another within Woodson's analysis. These displays are the ways Woodson presents and intends the Negro Church. And it is through these displays that the identity of the Church is recognized and presented. Woodson spells out the displays of the Negro Church by turning to historical data. Thus ultimately, he is making an ontological claim concerning the Negro Church. Its being is comprehensive. It is a

[48] Ibid., 186.
[49] Woodson, "All Comprehending Institution," 7, 15.

relational community that "touches almost" every aspect that is significant to Negro life in America. It is an avenue through which opportunities for freedom and human fulfillment are enlarged for African Americans. It is a space in which forms of social solidarity are realized and human needs are assessed.

Ultimately, Woodson's claim that the Negro Church is an all-comprehending institution is correlative to James Gustafson's claim that the Church is a natural and human community. Both thinkers are making consistent empirical and ontological claims concerning the being constitutive of the Church. Race is a factor that significantly distinguishes their two accounts of the Church. Hence, for Woodson racial identity is critical in the meaning of the Black Church as an All Comprehending Community, and thus he can speak univocally of the Black Church as such.

This perspective in Woodson is part of the displays through which the Black Church is presented to us. Again, Woodson speaks along a univocal and analytical frame. However, we must remind ourselves that the Black Church, besides being grasped under an analogical frame is made manifest through other linguistic frameworks.

The Black Church: A Surrogate World

The ways in which the Black Church has been grasped metaphorically must also be spelled out. Peter J. Paris has been one of the more influential African American Theologians and Ethicists that has shaped contemporary interpretations of the Black Church in North America. He has written several volumes including: *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches (1985)*, *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict and Unity (1991)*, *Spirituality of African People: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse*

(1994), and Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience (2004), to name a few. The majority of Paris' work is situated within African American Religious Studies. As he refers to African American religious experience and the Black Church experience in America, he grasps the Black Church as a "surrogate world." This metaphor controls the reading of his text, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*.

At first glance it would appear that Paris is making a similar move as Carter G. Woodson, namely, to describe the Black churches in terms of their aspects and show their overall significance in the lives of black people. However, taking a second look one will discover that Paris is doing something distinctive. For, not only is he concerned with the relation of the Black churches to black people, he is equally concerned with a hidden relation (absence), namely, the Black Church with Western Society.

Paris grasps Western society as a world with a particular horizon. Western society is taken as a whole, whose horizon is constituted by the principle of racism and its various manifolds. Racism has appeared in the form of the "system of hereditary slavery," "racial segregation and discrimination" as a part of the "universal Jim-Crow system in the South," or as the "social realities of segregated housing patterns of ghettoization (including its social, psychological and economic implications) the end of which may well be the development of a permanent racial underclass."[50]

However, Paris does not stop here. He introduces a completely distinct horizon. He does this through the Black churches as he refers to them as a "surrogate world." Clarification is in order at this point. It is not the case that the new horizon (surrogate world) that Paris introduces is simply a manifold of Western society. This new horizon is

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[50] Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teachings of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 4.

not a simple distinction drawn within the West. Rather, it is a radical distinction between the Western world and a substitute world that stands over against it. It is this distinction that grounds Paris' metaphor, the Black Church as a surrogate world.

What is disclosed under these two worlds are two distinct traditions or principles. These principles govern social relationships within these respective realms of experience. The principles and norms governing these fields are not simply markers that distinguish the Western world and Black churches as a surrogate world. Rather, they carry with them hidden manifolds, with which they distinguish race and religion. In Paris' account, the Western world is governed by the principle of racism. The Black Church as a surrogate world is governed by a principle that transcends it and yet institutionalizes it, namely, the principle of anti-racism or what Paris calls the Black Christian Tradition.[51] While these two principles fund worlds in conflict, they are also descriptions of one reality, namely, human relationships.

The first, Western society, takes a utilitarian approach to human relationships, in which people are regarded as means to an end. That is, ones value or worth is regulated to production. Perhaps a better description is superior-inferior relationships in which utility is a dimension or distinctive feature. This is the worldview (*weltenschaung*) that governs the West. As such, in Paris' model, it is the worldview that governs whites and white religion. Of significance here is white Christianity. Because whites were independent and autonomous, they were cast or perhaps better stated, they cast themselves as the superiors within human relationships in the Western world, according to Paris.

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[51] Ibid., 10.

The second, the Black Christian tradition, approaches human relationships from the perspective of equality. One of its defining aspects is a biblical anthropology that grasps all human life as equal under the "parenthood of God." The Black Christian tradition presents a manifold that is radically distinct from the Western tradition. Whereas the Western tradition discloses racism and its manifolds of hereditary slavery, Jim Crowism, and ghettoization and the creation of an underclass, the Black Christian tradition displays anti-racism and its presentations, which are "life-protecting, life-enabling, and life-respecting."[52]

Paris presents these manifolds under various displays. While these two principles (racism and anti-racism) make a distinction between the two worlds and between the races, they also bring out another hidden display. They make a radical religious distinction. The Black Christian tradition establishes a new horizon, a substitute world. This world discloses itself as being entirely dependent upon biblical anthropology of all human beings created equal under God. Biblically, God is the whole that structures human relationships and God does so under the manifold of equality. There is only one superior, namely, God. Thus, the relational structure that whites have constructed and authorize by the theology of their churches is a distortion of the biblical anthropology authorized by God in the scriptures. A radical distinction is being made here. For Paris, to be Christian is to be "black," or at least identify with and assist blacks in the struggle to uphold the basic principle of anti-racism, namely, the Black Christian tradition. In Paris' discourse, whites who continue in the Western tradition of racism are not Christians, even if they have their membership in white church congregations. To be

[52] Ibid., 14.

Christian is to be black.[53] Perhaps a more neutered statement would be that whites who following the Western tradition of racism live a distorted Christianity. Hence, Paris is hankering on an essence or *eidos* that constitutes the Christian life, without which ones life fails to be "Christian."

Paris gets at this hidden display through morality. For him, while all human beings are guilty of sin, the Western tradition and whites are more guilty and "considered the greater evil and possibly the source of all sin," namely, white racism.[54] Because of the pervasiveness of white racism and its enduring effects, Paris casts morality and virtue under the guise of anti-racism. Hence, again, to be Christian is to be black. To be moral and virtuous is also to be black. Whites can only be Christian and moral by seriously taking up the black cause and jettisoning white racism (sin), as they too uphold the unique principle of human relationships authorized by God in the Scriptures and institutionalized in Black churches.[55]

In contrast to the Western world, Paris asserts that the Black churches function as bearers of this normative categorical principle. Hence, the Black churches are expressive of an alternate and substitutionary world. However, it is not merely surrogate. It is an empty intention, anticipatory of not just Black churches, but society at large. In other words, Paris sees the Black churches not simply as institutions chasing their own causes. Rather, Black churches are humanitarian and philanthropic. That is, they are concerned with what is best, not simply for themselves, but what is best for the whole of America.

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[53] Ibid., 11.
[54] Ibid., 12.
[55] Ibid., 15.

Paris plays out the logic of the surrogate metaphor through a series of presentations. One hidden aspect constitutive of human relationships is power. He spells out the manifolds of this hidden aspect in "Embodiments of Communal Power." An analogy submerged in his metaphor is stated here, namely, the Black churches provide for blacks what the Declaration of Independence does for whites, "namely, the condition for freedom and self-actualization."[56] These spaces of anti-racism became the condition for the possibility for an enhanced "moral and social life" as well as the condition for the possibility of intraracial and interracial enhancement.

The power constitutive of black churches is distinct from the power that governs Western society. Both are manifolds of one identity, namely, power. Power for Paris is "the capacity both to produce an effect and to undergo an effect."[57] Thus, power is reflexive. Power presents itself under three modalities: unilateral, communal, and black power.

Unilateral power was considered regulative because it was the power yielded by whites. Paris paints this manifold of power as furnishing negative human relationships. This type of power introduces relationships which introduce, "manipulation, control and coercion" as aspects of what counts as acceptable human relations. This manifold of power constitutes the principle and tradition of racism in Western culture.

Against this form of power, Paris advocates for "communal power," with black power being a species of this manifold. He conceives communal power as anticipatory of a unity out of discord. In other words, communal power anticipates a space in which blacks and whites are equal. As Paris himself asserts, "it is primarily concerned about

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[56] Ibid., 108.
[57] Ibid., 113.

maintaining the capacity for a continued viable relationship."[58] Communal power is committed to fostering communal relationships. And thus, Black churches intend an absence, namely, an interracial community.

Through the Black Christian tradition, Black churches are exemplary of what Martin Luther King Jr., refers to as the Beloved Community or what Max Weber terms "house community." Here is Weber on this point:

> Next comes the sibling community, which the Greeks called homogalaktes, literally "persons suckled with the same milk." Here, too, the decisive point is not the fact of the common mother but that of common living. All kinds of social relationships emerge, in addition to sexual and biological relationships, as soon as the "family" emerges as a specific social structure. Historically, the concept of the family had several meanings, and it is useful only if its particular meaning is always defined clearly.[59]

Now, it is clear, what Weber has in mind here is a literal, biological family in his discussion of what he terms "house community." In his analysis of the siblings, all are situated as dependent upon the parent for sustenance, and thus all are equal in that regard. All of the children are a part of the same house in Weber's analysis, which is the key point for both King and Paris, as all share a "common living" grounded in communal power.

What then is the relation between communal power as conceived by Paris and unilateral power conceived as white supremacy? It is the relation of an absence to a presence. The Black Church as surrogate world comes into meaning only in relationship to the unilateral power of white supremacy. Hence, in relationship to white supremacy, which is manipulative, utilitarian, coercive and debilitating in its exercise of power, Paris

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[58] Ibid., 116.
[59] Max Weber, *Sociology of Community* < http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/society/soci_comm/index.htm>.

conceives the Black Church as a surrogate world regulated by communal power. In communal power, people have value because they are a part of one human family under God. Communal power, therefore, checks unilateral power, which is unruly without the presence of community.

In his discussion of power, Paris also introduces black power as another manifold of power that he intends as a necessary condition for the creation of community for blacks within the context of a Western world dominated by racism. While early Black churches failed to embrace the black power movement, Paris conceives the communal power embodied in the Black Church and black power as non-disparate forms of power. As he sees it, "black power has contributed significantly to the race's self-understanding of communal power."[60] However, black power has a tendency to reach toward unilateral power and be strictly oriented toward power for blacks and black causes.

Hence, as Paris sees it, each manifold of power is a corrective toward the other. Paris says:

> Similarly, the efforts of black religionists to interpret black power as harmonious with communal power served to check and balance its tendency to destroy community in its pursuit of unilateral power. In short, each is a corrective on the other. Apart from unilateral power, communal power tends toward self-impoverishment, and without communal power unilateral power tends toward the destruction of the other. Both tendencies destroy the possibility for community.[61]

Ultimately, power and its manifolds are parts to the whole of human relationships. The disclosure of power, morality, religion and human relationships ground Paris' metaphor surrogate world in the Black Christian tradition. The Black Christian tradition, and thus

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[60] Paris, 124.
[61] Paris, 125.

the Black Church, is grounded in the intra-dynamics of unilateral, communal and black power.

Paris' discourse points naturally to the structure of parts and wholes. He himself attempts to spell out the logic of this structure in a chapter entitled, "Moral Agency in Conflict." The logic of parts and wholes reveals the ontological structure of the relationship the person has to society. Paris takes a person's sociopolitical context as the whole and persons as parts to the whole. But what type of parts are persons? Persons are moments to one another as they constitute the whole. That is, while persons are moments that make up the whole, there are other parts that constitute the whole. These are "conditions for human development," and "the moral ethos of the society."[62] These parts consist of "various communal symbols, rituals, pronouncements, celebrations and the like." Paris refers to these parts as the "cultural paradigm." His movement here is similar to Emile Durkheim, in that, for Durkheim, human beings exist, as human, within communities of shared belief and value, or what one may term a moral community. Durkheim refers to these communities as " a Church." He says:

> We arrive thus at the following definition: A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them… In showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a Church, it conveys the notion that religion must be an eminently collective thing.[63]

Such communities reveal the capacity of human beings for language and symbol deployment. The production and reproduction of communal symbols constitute and reconstitute what Paris has termed the "cultural paradigm" and what Durkheim has

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[62] Ibid., 57.
[63] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Trans., Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 44.

termed, Church. What Paris is getting at here is "world view" or *weltenschaung.* C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya make a similar move in their reference to a *Sacred Cosmos,* which I highlight in the following section. The "cultural paradigm" is that structure in which people continue to discover personal identity and foster group cohesion. It is a paradigm of shared belief, meaning and value operative within moral communities.

Paris captures the essence of this whole under the part, morality. For him, morality is at the heart of human beings as moments to one another. It is a part of the whole as social rather than "privatistic". Morality "constitutes persons as persons." Again, this is a fundamental distinction between the Black churches as a surrogate world and western society or the Black Christian tradition and the Western tradition of racism. Thus, a certain picture is captured here. Blacks have the potential and are moral insofar as they are faithful to the Black Christian tradition. Whites can be moral if they follow suit, by adopting the Black Christian tradition. But whites, as a part of the tradition of racism, are oriented toward immorality in the whole of social relationships. Morality, then, stands as a moment to being a Christian. One cannot be grasped without co-intending the other.[64] Hence, Paris grounds morality at the center of the black "cultural paradigm." However, as already stated, it is more than just black. It is also Christian.

Morality is tied to education and economics as moments that make up the whole of social relationships in the Black churches. All three exist as moments of the structure of Black churches. They all point to the Black churches as communities of cultural representation. Paris captures this when he asserts:

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[64] Ibid., 62.

> The black churches long believed that the education of blacks was not a mere end in itself, but instead a means for changing white public opinion about blacks. All believed that if whites would see more and more blacks embodying gentle manners, excellence in speech, good moral character, industry, and good will, they would cease stereotyping blacks according to the boisterous behavior of the black masses.[65]

As communities of cultural representation the Black churches present a class structure between upper and lower class, with the upper class being the representative of the race. Not only is the upper class representative, it is also paternal. It is the condition for the possibility of the betterment of the race in one sense, but also, the betterment of America so that all may contribute to the whole.[66] Ultimately, Black churches are institutions that promote racial pluralism.

The Black Church: A Sacred Cosmos

A third reading of the Black Church as a Sacred Cosmos, controls C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya's *The Black Church in the African American Experience (1990).* Lincoln and Mamiya's text has been received as the standard text on the Black Church in African American Religious studies. Their text has received a great deal of attention, such that, in some cases it has been canonized as speaking authoritatively on Black Church Studies as well as on African American Religious Experience.

For Lincoln and Mamiya, the Black Church is the "womb" of black culture and as such it is grasped as a "sacred cosmos." Much like that of Peter Paris, their language is metaphorical. They present the Black Church as "sacred cosmos" in an attempt to

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[65] Ibid., 68-69.

[66] Class structure in the Black Church is taken up by later theorists, such as Cheryl J. Sanders (see Chapter 4), as a central problem and one of the key elements that distorts the Black Church experience.

disclose a surplus of meaning. Hence, they work historically and empirically as they spell out dimensions of the Black Church as a sacred cosmos. Lincoln and Mamiya's language presents parts and wholes, manifolds within identity and blends of presences and absences.

That Lincoln and Mamiya speak metaphorically is evident in their attempt to come to terms with the phenomenon of religion. They begin with "experience," arguing throughout that it is through the experiential matrices of black people that Black churches came to life. Various manifolds constitute experience. James Gustafson, among others has laid out these manifolds as moral, religious, aesthetic, and affective (emotional responses toward some x) dimensions of experience. However, as Gustafson cautions, this parsing of experience only admits to the complexity of experience. Experience itself is not so nicely cut and categorized. As he says, "the complexities of experience resist the divisions which analysis makes for purposes of clear thinking."[67] Lincoln and Mamiya highlight the religious dimension and through it they grasp the moral, aesthetic and affective dimensions of experience. This is a very significant point, especially when turning to parts and wholes. These dimensions of experience are parts, arrays of moments that assist in understanding the whole of experience. However, one must be careful in articulating these moments so as not to present of the moments as a whole and the others as parts. Moments are toward one another as they articulate the whole, thus a distinction must be sustained so as not to distort the moments and the whole in question.

Lincoln and Mamiya reveal a religious dimension of Black churches under a unique "historical and cultural configuration." Thus, history and culture are aspects of

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[67] James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective: Theology and Ethics*, Vol 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 117.

the religious dimension of Black churches. In their words, the religious dimension is "the black sacred cosmos." Not only do they inform the reader of history and culture, but they also disclose the particular manifold through which this cosmos comes into being. That manifold is framed by "their African heritage, which envisaged the whole universe as sacred, and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath."[68] Hence, the manifold of religious experience that Lincoln and Mamiya highlight is that of "double-consciousness." The double-consciousness they have in mind here is in the sense of striving to be, "an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[69]

It is through this manifold that history comes through as a type of absence. Blacks were no longer situated within the African basin, but their unique forms of expression were both historical and cultural expressions pointing to a place other than the West. Lincoln and Mamiya explain:

> Some scholars have viewed aspects of black cultural creations as aberrational attempts to mimic mainstream white culture. Other scholars have claimed that, "The Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect." Such arguments seem unwilling to grant to African Americans the minimum presuppositions all other hyphenated Americans are permitted to take for granted, which is to say that their origins were elsewhere, and that coming from elsewhere, if they have a viable history, they must also have an effective culture.[70]

Therefore, Afro-history and culture are parts, moments that are treated abstractly. One of the manifolds revealed through both of these moments is "creative survival." Black churches as unique historical and cultural institutions frame this manifold.

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[68] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 2-3.
[69] W.E.B DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (A. C. McClurg & Co, 1903), 3-4; for a full discussion see 1-13.
[70] Lincoln and Mamiya, 3.

This black sacred cosmos imparts a manifold of objects. In the case of "African syncretic religions" the sacred cosmos discloses itself under "African deities and spiritual forces." In the context of the West in which Christianity is dominant, the sacred cosmos is oriented towards the manifold of "the Christian God ultimately revealed in Jesus of Nazareth."[71] This reveals a dimension of the sacred cosmos that is downplayed, namely, pluralism. There are pluralities of objects that express the one identity, the black sacred cosmos. They are parts that articulate the whole. However, Lincoln and Mamiya, highlight one part of this cosmos and grasp it as a *concretum*, namely, the Black Church, and hence the manifold of the Christian God revealed in Jesus Christ.[72]

In conjunction with the plurality of objects framing this sacred cosmos, there are also symbolic manifolds or a plurality of symbols. The black sacred cosmos is constituted by freedom, justice, racial identity, equality and "racial parity." The symbols display themselves in manifolds. Freedom takes on a significant meaning structure relative to the contextual and cultural matrix. In one setting it took on the meaning structure of release from bondage. In another milieu it took on the meaning structure of equal opportunity and social equality. In yet another it means "social, political, and economic justice."[73] Freedom therefore, is the condition for the possibility of fulfilling ones "calling." Freedom and its manifolds alone, capture the heart of the black sacred cosmos and the Black Church tradition. Lincoln and Mamiya here stand within a rich

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[71] Ibid., 3.

[72] Concretum is a term referenced by Robert Sokolowski in his discussion on parts and wholes. He uses this term in reference to a part that can stand independently from other parts and present itself as a whole. Moments cannot be concretum. See, Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24.

[73] Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

tradition of sociology. The manifolds of freedom are captured under concepts such as "multivocality" and within the concept of "symbolic universe."

Of the first Victor Turner grasps ritual symbols as representative of many things. One may argue that freedom is not a ritual symbol. While this may be the case, it is a symbol in which multivocality is constitutive of its character.[74] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann understand symbols such as freedom to be a part of and construct what they term a symbolic universe, which functions as a system of meaning that creates a level of cohesion between the realm of the transcendent and the world of everyday life.[75] As referenced above, in analyzing Paris' "Surrogate World," shared symbols and beliefs contribute to the formation of moral communities. In this case freedom, as symbol, evokes and reinforces the identity and cohesion of the Black Sacred Cosmos. Lincoln and Mamiya, like Paris, are also operating under the Durkheimian notion of Church, namely a moral community of shared belief and value.

The manifolds of symbols are expressed through the moments of the Black Church tradition. One such moment is the Black Church music tradition. The black sacred cosmos is presented through this tradition. As Lincoln and Mamiya suggest:

> In the Black Church good preaching and good singing are almost invariably the minimum conditions of a successful ministry. Both activities trace their roots back to Africa where music and religion and life itself were all one holistic enterprise. There was no distinction between the sacred and the secular, and music, whether vocal or instrumental, was an integral aspect of the celebration of life, as indeed was the dance which the music inspired in consequence of its evocation of the human spirit.[76]

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[74] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action In Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 153-154.
[75] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treaties in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 92-128.
[76] Ibid., 346.

The music tradition emits certain absences. While blacks were in the absence of the ideals many of these songs talked about, as they heard these songs, those absences became present to them. That is, they were able to intuit them. By intuit, all that is meant here is the having of a thing present, rather than intending it in its absence. Husserl calls this base perception.[77] Through song, many ideals are registered as a part of base perception. One such instance may be found in the spiritual: *Swing Lo Sweet Chariot*:

> 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 to
> Coming for to carry me home.

Through spirituals such as this, the black sacred cosmos frames that which blacks anticipated, namely, unity and community in a dysfunctional society along with transcendence from a society constituted by racial segregation and oppression. Lincoln and Mamiya assert:

> In spite of such obvious obstacles to the retention and transmission of the African's cultural heritage in the new context of American experience, the evidence that critical elements of that heritage managed to survive and their adaptation in the New World is substantial, especially in religion. Black singing and the performance practices associated with it is perhaps the most characteristic logo of the African heritage retentive in the Black Church, whether it is the singing of songs or the "singing" of sermons and prayers.[78]

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[77] Sokolowski, 34-35.
[78] Lincoln and Mamiya, 347-348.

While these blacks were no longer a part of Africa, Africa frames aspects of creative survival as expressed in the singing tradition of Black churches.

This tradition framed by the black sacred cosmos presents itself under various displays. First, the black singing tradition appears in the form of spirituals. The spirituals are constituted by moments such as the black experience, oral tradition and history, and a theological frame. In short, "The Spiritual was the expression of the full range of life experience garnered by the slave."[79] The inner logic of the spirituals unveils another part, namely, the stories of God's intervention in the lives of the oppressed and recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. The spirituals also provided rich blends of presence and absence. Turning to the eschatology of the spirituals, they blend a realm in which all rejoice around God's throne with a world of hardship, pain and struggle. The spirituals are thus a part of the creative options for survival. Lincoln and Mamiya themselves admit that singing was a form of coping and survival when they assert:

> Through the singing of spirituals the enslaved were able to release their repressed emotions and anxieties and simultaneously experience the exhilaration of being creative under circumstances of unbelievable stress. They sang, hummed, clapped, moaned, stomped, and swayed themselves into a remarkable transcendence over their oppressive condition, and so dredged up the spiritual inspiration needed to endure until God would move to change their circumstances for the better.[80]

These songs caused other displays of the black sacred cosmos to be disclosed, such as "the shout." Lincoln and Mamiya describe the shout as a "stubborn retention of African religious ritual firmly fixed in the transition to Christian forms in America."[81] The primary moment of the shout is "dancing." This moment is still a fixture in many

[79] Ibid., 350.
[80] Ibid., 352.
[81] Ibid., 352.

contemporary Black churches as well as in many white congregations a part of the Pentecostal tradition. Dancing and music are moments to one another as they articulate the whole. For Lincoln and Mamiya, in the Black Church, dancing is not a separable entity from music. It is intertwined with the "affective dimension" of the lives of African Americans. What is not clear here is Lincoln and Mamiya's insistence on the emotional character of these expressions (shout and dancing) as indicative of "African Retentions."

The spirituals are not the normative and regulative form of music in contemporary Black churches. But their presence lives on through their displays. The spirituals continue their presence through the manifolds of "hymn-lining," or what was also referred to as lining a hymn. This manifold is framed by the moment of call and response, along with improvisation or novelty. Lincoln and Mamiya characterize the latter as something internal to the African American Church tradition. Their argument is that through improvisation slaves "blackened" hymns sung in the Methodist and Baptist churches. They argue:

> Some of the tunes may also have been of African origin; or like some spirituals, may have been spontaneous creations of an individual or a congregation of black worshipers. But regardless of origin, because of the tradition of improvisation during performance, every melody executed in the black idiom was a new creation each time it was sung.[82]

Peter Paris follows Lincoln and Mamiya on this point. According to Paris, improvisation is an African American virtue.[83] Both call and response and improvisation exhibit themselves through meter music and social salvation hymns. The social salvation hymns

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[82] Lincoln and Mamiya, 355.
[83] Peter J. Paris, *Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 43-49.

focus on the parenthood of God over all people, social redemption, and a "higher patriotism" that focuses on the redemption of the human species.

Perhaps the most notable display of music present in contemporary Black churches in the absence of the spirituals, as normative, is Gospel music. Gospel music is funded by the moments of the "shout," "bodily rhythms" and "improvisation." It is also funded by the moment of call and response characteristic of the hymn-lining tradition. Gospel music incorporates "black folk imagery" to interpret the experiential matrices of African American life. It is a music that calls forth affectivity, hope and faith. Gospel music is exemplary of the dialectical nature of the Black Church. As Lincoln and Mamiya suggest, gospel music is a unity of an other-worldly and this-worldly dialectic within the black sacred cosmos.

All of these forms of music, their parts and manifolds, are expressions and eruptions within the black sacred cosmos. For Lincoln and Mamiya, to talk about the Black Church is to talk about a unique "Afrocentric Christianity" expressed in Black churches and expressed through moments of the Black Church, such as preaching and singing. Thus, the Black Church is an institution of cultural representation and cultural and identity formation. In short, it is the option for "creative survival" for black organic solidarity. It is the umbrella under which all other forms of religious life cohere, as proposed by Lincoln and Mamiya. Both admit as such, when they call the Black Church the "womb" of black culture. It is the black sacred cosmos through the Black churches that gives birth to the black community and black cultural heritage. Culture and religion are thus moments to one another within the black sacred cosmos. Through each of these moments, the unique historical and cultural configuration is expressed and identified.

Thus, it is not simply the case that the black sacred cosmos is expressed through the Black Church and its moments such as preaching and singing. The black sacred cosmos is presented through black culture and cultural expression. Lincoln and Mamiya assert:

> Although this cosmos is largely Afro-Christian in nature due to its religious history, it has also erupted in other black militant, nationalistic, and non-Christian movements. The close relationship between the black sacred cosmos and black culture has often been missed by social analyst who impose sacred/secular distinctions too easily upon the phenomena of black culture. What is often overlooked is the fact that many aspects of black cultural practices and some major social institutions had religious origins; they were given birth and nurtured in the womb of the Black Church.[84]

Lincoln and Mamiya's birthing metaphor presents the Black Church as a necessity for the existence, sustenance and maintenance of black community and black culture. The Black Church is a *germ,* or seed that gives life to all aspects of black life. In Lincoln and Mamiya's presentation, the Black Church, as the womb of the black community, is the primary agency for communal building and cultural formation. It "births" new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing. It has also provided an academy and an arena of political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development."[85] In other words, the Black Church is a "comprehensive community" that touches all aspects of black life. This however, is not to equivocate Lincoln and Mamiya and Carter G. Woodson's graspings of the Black Church. The two graspings are distinguished on the linguistic level. Woodson presents the Negro Church as All Comprehending as a fact. Lincoln and Mamiya's grasping of the Black Church as Sacred Cosmos remains in the realm of metaphor.

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[84] Lincoln and Mamiya, 7.
[85] Ibid., 8.

One of the many processes that constitute societies is that of secularization. Difference is presented in black culture as within white culture through class differentiation, "the development of secular institutions, and the rise of competing black religious groups."[86] At first glance this process may seem to cause a radical distantiation between the sacred and the secular in which religion is ultimately "privatized." But for Lincoln and Mamiya, the black sacred cosmos makes the move to privitization impossible within the black community and black culture. The black sacred cosmos holds the sacred and secular together in a unity. Hence, the relationship between the Black Church and black culture is to be understood in terms of partial differentiation. Lincoln and Mamiya view partial differentiation as a given when examining secular forms of music such as blues and jazz, which they attribute to the Black Church tradition, as well as education through Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's), "which have their origins in black churches."

Given their understanding of the black sacred cosmos, one can see why Lincoln and Mamiya would make such a move. However, a word of caution must be issued here. These moments, sacred and secular, are not identical. They are moments to some whole, namely time and space differentiation. Lincoln and Mamiya tend to collapse the moments into one another and fail to sustain a distinction as they articulate the relationship between the Black Church and black culture. There are time and spacial distinctions made even among blacks. For instance, intending the weekly worship service is not the same as intending work on a daily basis. These are two distinct structures of intentionality in Husserl's language or two distinct "realms of experience" in

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[86] Ibid., 5.

the language of Alfred Schutz. Work is intended as work. It is not intended as the weekly worship service. Again, a distinction among these parts must be sustained or one runs the risk of distorting the whole.

Other distinctions must be made here among terms or one runs the risk of cognitive confusion. Lincoln and Mamiya's understanding of religion is thoroughly Durkheimian.[87] But what would it mean to advocate "partial differentiation" under a Durkheimian model? Durkheim does not use the term, "secular." He does however, highlight a distinction that all religious bodies hold between the "sacred and the profane," by which he means, the stratification of the world, by the human being, into two spheres or dimensions that have **nothing** in common. Cross migration may occur, but it requires radical change.[88]

Perhaps Peter Berger and David Luckmann's (whom they also rely on in their understanding of religion, hence the phrase Sacred Cosmos) use of secularization completes Lincoln and Mamiya's argument on partial differentiation. Berger and Luckmann understand secularization as a social process in which the interest of religion and in things religious is lost. For both, secularization is understood under a dual-manifold. It is a political term, as well as a term that describes the consciousness of individuals who grasp the world devoid of religious interpretations.[89] Berger and Luckmann are dealing with loss of religious interest and the loss of religious authority. The crucial distinction here is not between the sacred and the profane or the sacred and the secular. Rather, the distinction that is crucial to any analysis such as this is that

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[87] Ibid., 2.
[88] Durkheim, 36-37.
[89] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 105-108.

between what Durkheim refers to as "the profane" and what Berger and Luckmann refer to as "the secular." Again, for Durkheim, all religions operate within a dialectic between the sacred and the profane. Hence, in their advocacy for partial differentiation, Lincoln and Mamiya leave unresolved a conceptual problem. Are they advocating that the "secular" and the "profane" are the same phenomenon? If they are, then there cannot simply be "partial differentiation." Even on Berger and Luckmann's definition of the term "secular," namely, the loss of interest in religion and religious interpretations, partial differentiation is rendered problematic. There can be no partial differentiation between two terms that are categorical in their description and meaning.

Their final move in their discourse on the Black Church is to construct a profile or interpretive scheme for examining that institution. They present several profiles and their key characteristics. These profiles include the assimilation model, which interprets the Black Church as a problem for the advancement of black people due to its "anti-intellectual and authoritarian features." These features include examples such as gender authority and reliance on conservative readings of the Bible, even if empirical evidence shows otherwise. The second profile is the isolation model, which interprets the Black Church primarily as lower class and other-worldly exilic community. The compensatory profile interprets the Black Church strictly as pathological. Finally, the "ethnic community-prophetic" profile interprets the Black churches as communities of identity formation and as prophetic voice.

Against these profiles, Lincoln and Mamiya develop their own, the dialectical profile. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, this profile will avoid the oversimplification of the first three profiles and give a holistic interpretation of Black churches. This profile

is constituted by manifolds of appearance. Lincoln and Mamiya call these manifolds "dialectical tensions." The first display consists of priestly and prophetic moments. These two moments are predicated on survival on the one hand, and liberation on the other, both of which are aspects that foreground the Black Church as a refuge community. The second is the "other-worldly versus this-worldly" orientation. That is, Black churches are concerned about heaven on the one hand, and earthly affairs, such as politics on the other. The third is the tension between the universalism of the gospel message and the particular history of Africans converting to Christianity. The fourth is the tension between the "communal" and the "privatistic".

The communal aspect points to the Black Church as Comprehensive Community. The private aspect points to the Black Church as a private institution concerned with the religious nurturing of its members. It must be noted here that Lincoln and Mamiya disrupt this latter aspect, the private, with their view of partial differentiation. The fifth is the tension between the charismatic and the bureaucratic as organizational forms for grasping "the style" of Black churches. Black churches tend to be more charismatic than their bureaucratic white counterparts according to Lincoln and Mamiya. I am not sure what Lincoln and Mamiya could be getting at here. Finally, the Black Church is involved in a tension between resistance and accommodation. Black churches must decide if they will accommodate to the contemporary cultural practices and values or resist them. In other words, they must decide whether they will conform to society or resist the cultural ethos as an exilic community.

Lincoln and Mamiya anticipate further tensions being added to their dialectical model. They display this anticipation through the manifold of gender politics in the

Black Church concerning female clergy. In the chapter, "The Pulpit and the Pew: The Black Church and Black Women," they explain that the pulpit is grasped, in the Black Church, as "men's space" and the pew is "woman's space." They call this an "imbalance" within the Black Church and thus turn to the important role women have had in the Black Church tradition.

This tension between male and female as well as the previous tensions turn the reader back to the black sacred cosmos. Through this cosmos women are grasped under many displays. In African traditional religions black women served as "priestesses, queens, midwives, diviners, and herbalists; they were among the major practitioners of both good and evil witchcraft."[90] Hence, through the black sacred cosmos, black women are grasped as leaders and figures with power. While black women are grasped as such through the black sacred cosmos, according to Lincoln and Mamiya, the adoption of Western culture and values creates a more complex layering to the tension, namely, sexism and feminism.

What I have done here is to distinguish displays within the black sacred cosmos, as it is formative of black identity, black religion and black culture. It is through these displays and their manifolds of appearance that the black sacred cosmos is recognized, identified and presented. Lincoln and Mamiya spell out these displays through empirical analysis. The Black Church and the black sacred cosmos is the option for "creative survival" for African Americans. The Black Church is a cosmos through which identity is formed and Afro-culture is preserved. Besides being a metaphor, the black sacred

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[90] Lincoln and Mamiya., 276.

cosmos is a sign framed by representation. In Lincoln and Mamiya's discourse, the black sacred cosmos accomplishes what it signifies.

Summary

This chapter has been an exploration of three meta-narratives or grand profiles of the Black Church. They include: The Black Church as an All Comprehending Institution, The Black Church as a Surrogate World, and The Black Church as the Black Sacred Cosmos. Each of these profiles operates under a particular mode of linguistic grasping, namely, analogy or metaphor. Woodson's Comprehensive Community is situated under the mode of analogy, whereas Paris' Surrogate World and Lincoln and Mamiya's Black Sacred Cosmos are metaphorical graspings. Each profile has its particular emphasis. For Woodson, the Black Church functioned in many ways as a "government" for black people, much like the United States government functioned for whites. For Paris, the Black Church functioned as an alternative tradition to the Western tradition of racism and Jim Crow. Finally, for Lincoln and Mamiya, the Black Church functions as a matrix for communal, cultural and black identity formation.

In each case, if we peel back, and crawl back to the groundwork set down in chapter one, what each theorist describes, on the most basic and rudimentary level, is the Black Church as a natural and human community fulfilling natural needs, such as education, self-esteem, empowerment, status, and personal and social relationships, all of which the society in which blacks inhabited did not provide.

As I have described each profile on a general level, I have highlighted many strong points of each. However, they are not without their own internal limitations. I do

not wish to dwell on them here, but they are worth identifying. Paris' account of the Black Church as surrogate world is rooted in a dialectical tension between two traditions, namely, the Western tradition of racism and the Black Christian tradition. On this account, without the prevalence of white racism many of the manifolds of Paris' surrogate world decline in significance. While Paris argues for an understanding of the Black Church that is both compensatory (priestly) and political (prophetic), his logic concerning Black church tends to orient itself more toward the political (prophetic) dimension. Paris argues:

> The churches of the lower class tend (over a period of time) to become middle-class churches and thus completely assimilated into the predominant values, customs, and practices of the so-called mainline churches. That has not been the case with the black churches. Regardless of their socio-economic class stratification, they never cease being black churches – on the one hand victimized by racism, while on the other embodying, nurturing, and promoting a radically different view of humanity which they considered to be theologically correct, biblically sound, and morally indisputable.[91]

Thus, the subject position under which the Black Church is grasped metaphorically is ironic. Simply put, the Black Church cannot change relative to Paris' predication of this tradition as a race institution, where race and racism mark *essentializing* forms of interdependency. While asserting the Black Christian tradition would be a true and valid principle even if racism ceased, Paris' talk is an anticipatory posture to preserve the meaning and significance of the Black Church in anticipation of the loss of its prophetic witness should racism no longer require the anti-racism that renders the Black Church a Surrogate World.

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[91] Paris, 9-10.

Lincoln and Mamiya's Black Church as a Sacred Cosmos falls into similar tensions. Their dialectical model houses tensions that are manifolds of the black sacred cosmos. Their defining characteristic is a continuing dialectic. That is, they have "no resolution." Hence, the tensions in their account display the doubleness of the black sacred cosmos. The manifold proper to a dialectic is binary opposites, and in Lincoln's and Mamiya's case, binary opposites without resolve. If this is the case, the manifolds are fixed and hold nothing in reserve. In other words, the Black Church has no other way of appearing. Hence, women can never attain the office of Pastor within a model in which the manifolds are fixed and hold nothing in reserve. This is simply another way of saying the dialectical model that Lincoln and Mamiya propose does not disclose the manifold of change or transcendence. The Black Church is not oriented towards change because it is stuck within its own tensions without resolve.

These three grand profiles are described on a general level. I take three categorial statements concerning the Black Church and open them to the widest ranges of meaning of what these three theorists could possibly mean. General description has served well in that regard. However, each profile has aspects that constitute it. In the next two chapters I explore the aspects that constitute theses profiles under the images of Refuge and Exilic Community.

CHAPTER III

THE THEORY OF SOCIAL SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIS AND THE REFUGE IMAGE OF THE BLACK CHURCH

In chapter two, I established three meta-narratives of the Black Church. They include the Black Church as a Comprehensive Community, a Surrogate World and a Sacred Cosmos. I called these narratives profiles. They are general outlines, sketches, frames, or types of the Black Church. As chapter two revealed, each type discloses certain characteristics of the Black Church. In this chapter, I analyze one aspect of these profiles, namely, the Black Church as a refuge community. I seek to expose some of the taken for granted layers of meaning and processes that substantiate this aspect. They are the language of the Black Church, its interpretation of symbols, its interpretations of social contexts of meaning, and situating the sacred within the personal biographies of members within the framework of sermonic displays.

I begin this chapter by parsing out two thematizations of the Church in general (Church as a Community of Language and a Community of Interpretation) grounded in symbolic social interactionism as understood by James Gustafson. He adopts his social phenomenology from the interpretive sociology of Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger and David Luckmann. It is my methodological assumption that these figures and the perspective they advocate on social institutions provide a discreet and deeper analysis of the images (refuge and exile) of the Black Church through symbolic social interaction. This claim is predicated on the belief that the Black Church is constituted by "natural processes" that it

shares in common with other human communities. As such, the Black Church and its images must be interpreted within the framework of social and theological thought.

I proceed to locate these social processes within the refuge image of the Black Church as fully operative within its history, scholarship and preaching traditions. I extend the analysis to three theorist of the Refuge image. They include E. Franklin Frazier, Gayraud S. Wilmore, and Dale P. Andrews. The analysis presented here is also relative to Chapter 4: The Theory of Social Symbolic Interactionism and The Black Church as an Exilic Community. The two general thematizations of the Church as a community of language and a community of interpretation are mapped onto the Black Church. They are not two separate communities, but distinctions within one community, in this case, the Black Church. They are co-present moments in the life of the Black Church. The reader should keep in mind that no single theme comports better or worse to the refuge or exilic images of the Black Church. My parsing them out by these distinctions is a matter of practical efficiency for reading these images within the limited scope of this dissertation.

The Church as a Community of Language

In his delineation of the Church as a community of language, Gustafson makes a clear distinction between two phenomena, namely, language and communication. While distinct, he holds them together as moments within a whole in which the one is a necessary condition for the other. Most pointedly, language is the necessary condition for the communication of meaning in the Church. While one may use physical gestures to communicate, the primary mode of communication in the Church is linguistic. This is

not to say, however, that members of the Black Church are devoid of physical gestures. Pastors may strike the pulpit with a clenched fist. They may hop up and down in one spot on the pulpit as they are in the climatic move of their sermon. Choirs may sway from side to side. Congregants may lift and wave their hands in a moment of ecstasy. These physical gestures are common to most worship services within the Black Church tradition, argues Lincoln and Mamiya.[92]

In these symbolic modes of communication, a pastor's pounding of the pulpit hammers home a point. The mini-hop in the pulpit is indicative of celebration. A choir swaying is indicative of the spirit moving within the ministry of music. However, even these modes of physical gesturing are coupled with language. Both modes of gesturing go hand in hand in human interaction. What Gustafson targets in his thematization of the Church as a community of language is gesturing in the linguistic mode. For it is this type of gesturing, codified in documents that are constantly transmitted from generation to generation, that sustains the continuity of the Church from era to era. While physical gestures are always a part of the worship service of the Black Church, physical gesturing does not sustain the social identity and continuity of the community to the same degree as gesturing in the linguistic mode.

Within the framework of social symbolic interaction, gesturing in the linguistic mode is indicative of symbols and the meaning carried, disclosed and mediated through such mediums in the social processes that are the focus of attention. Symbols are deployed as classifications or categories for objects and people to help make sense and simplify a complex social life world. They are categories for objects and people that

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[92] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 2-3; 346-381.

suggest particular patterns of action. I am driving my automobile on a two way street and I see an octagonal shaped item colored red. I stop and check the intersection for other vehicles. In this index my stopping is a response to a red octagonal symbol. It is not the color red itself that brings me to a halt. I do not index red roses along the road in the place of the octagonal symbol, for my action would be to continue on my drive. But the red octagonal symbol represents an action to be performed when observed. I index it as a stop sign, which generates social meanings that connect my driving with the rules of the road. Thus, I stop driving when I see this sign.

Within the Black Church, such symbolic interaction between symbols and actors is also present. As an usher, I stand on one side of the congregation. Within the worship service, a woman arises from her seat, screaming "Thank You!!" "Thank You!!" "Glory, Glory, Glory!" "Hallelujah! He's worthy!" As an usher, I respond by fanning the woman, putting an arm around her, and then sitting with her as she gives praise to the God of her salvation. Within this index, my response is not simply to a woman standing, but to a woman "catching the spirit" and getting "happy." When a Pastor reaches the climatic moment of the sermon, lifts her hands and proclaims, "The doors of the Church are open," deacons and ushers respond with the movement of chairs to the front of the congregation. Congregants who desire to "give their lives to the Lord" move out of their seats and make their way toward the front. Each actor within this index is responding to the symbol "doors of the Church are open." To the deacon and the usher, the symbol says fulfill your duty by making room for the lost and the weary. For particular members of the congregation, it says, "God is calling you home." These meanings are generated by a symbol "doors of the Church are open" and suggest specific patterns of action.

For Gustafson, such symbolic interaction is necessary for maintaining the Church's social identity, inner unity and continuity in time. The Church deploys specific language constructions that members internalize, making them a part of ecclesial consciousness. The meanings of these symbols are objectively available through externalized productions of the community such as the Bible and church creeds. Thus, as a community of language, the Church is also a community of shared meanings and values derived from productions that sustain it with a common stock of knowledge.

The language of the Church circumscribes those who belong to it and are within its boundaries. Language constructs the social world of the Church through verbal symbols by disclosing personal and social identity markers such as "righteous and unrighteous", "saint and sinner", or "saved and lost". In other words, such languages typify experience under categories for absorption into intersubjective understanding. Because of its particular language, the Church is a speech community whose language defines its structural boundaries such as "house of worship and praise." Such a boundary distinguishes the Church from other social systems and identifies and regulates the attitudes and activities proper to it. Within the Church itself, structural boundaries are operative between the clergy and the laity, clergy and choir, choir and congregation, and finally between ushers and clergy and choir. Each group is identified and distinguished by codes of uniform and emblem. Many pastors adorn themselves in robes garnered by symbols of "the cross" on the sleeves and front panels. In the worship service, the physical position and space inhabited by the pastor in relation to the congregation, the choir, deacons, mothers, ushers and the congregation as well as her behavior further

clarifies her subject-position or boundary position within the Church, distinguishing her from all other participants.

As Gustafson articulates the meaning-content of the Church's language, he foregrounds the centrality of the Bible. It provides the Church with a specific language that distinguishes it from other communities of language users.[93] The Bible is an objective marker that carries, discloses and mediates internalized meanings as it "sustains and develops the social identity and continuity of the Christian community."[94]

The language of the Bible is multifarious in translation and style, fluctuating from one era to the next as translator's attempt to be faithful to the meanings internalized by earlier communities while also framing the text in a language that contemporary hearers may understand and internalize as a part of their personal biographies.[95] The multifarious character of biblical language extends beyond translations to the inner workings of the style of language (poetry, prophetic/apocalyptic) used by early narrators of biblical text. Because of the multifarious character of its language, in terms of translation and style, meanings are therefore not fixed. As Gustafson says, "Language is a bearer of meaning, and diversity in language points to diversity in meaning."[96] The meanings of objects, symbols and events disclosed in the Bible are flexible in meaning. For instance, as a biblical symbol, freedom, highlighted within the refuge image of the Black Church, meant different things for white American Christians than for African American Christians struggling under Jim Crow. As Lincoln and Mamiya attest, for whites,

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[93] James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York, Harper & Row, 1961), 46-50.
[94] Ibid., 43.
[95] Ibid., 47.
[96] Ibid., 48.

freedom meant the lack of governmental and state interference in pursuing ones destiny, and for African Americans, it was the necessary condition for fulfillment of ones calling within divine providence.

> No person can serve two masters, and freedom as a condition of spiritual readiness was no less critical to the religious strategies of Martin Luther King, Jr., than to those of Richard Allen, Nat Turner, Sojourner Truth, and Fannie Lou Hamer. Each person developed a modus vivendi consistent with their times and the resources at hand. Their objectives were the same: freedom to be as God had intended all men and women to be. Free to belong to God.[97]

In this case, freedom is deployed by two traditions within Christianity, however, with different emphases grounded within their particular historical situations. That the languages and meanings are diverse, given particular historical situations, is a reference to what Alfred Schutz has termed "fluctuating boundaries." I will explore this concept in greater depth in the following subsection on the Church: A community of Interpretation.

Despite the manifold of language constructions and meanings disclosed within the Bible, it is a reference point that makes language within the Church common. Christians turn to the Bible as a 'system of relevance' for speaking about their lives within the communal framework. They use its languages, images, and metaphors to describe their experiences of joy, suffering, pain and getting along in their daily existence. Within the Black Church, saints provide public testimonies that "give thanks and honor to God, who woke" them up in their "right mind"; and who has "brought them through many trials and tribulations." They offer thanks to the God "who sits high and looks low", and although the "devil" is out to "kill, steal, and destroy," the saints "thank God for keeping them from the snares and wiles of the adversary."

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[97] Lincoln and Mamiya, 5.

As the content of the language of the Church, the language of the Bible, is "objectively available" to all Christians and functions "objectively." The language of the Bible continues to function objectively through its appresentation of symbols as real elements in daily life. This language constructs frames and fields of experience of the Church and makes present symbols, meanings and worlds that are not readily available for face-to-face interaction. The language of the Bible is thus a mediator between present and past frames and fields of experience in the life of the Church. Thus far, I have pointed to the content of the Church's language under a biblical thematization that carries, discloses and mediates meaning(s) internal to the life of the Church. It is internal to social contexts of interaction in which members relate to each other in specified ways, and communication is the clue to this process.

Following George Herbert Mead, Gustafson grounds the structure of interaction and communication in a social theory of the self.[98] The self refers to the various perceptions that people hold of themselves in relation to other people and social systems. The language of the Church and the activities and behaviors of its members must be understood as situated within social processes in which human beings participate in a variety of social systems. These systems have certain ways of working and producing certain consequences or effects that are taken for granted by the actor. However, actors participate in social systems through interaction with others and are socialized into various systems in their performance of roles. In order to participate and interact within various systems, actors must adopt language and internalize meanings specific to each system. As an instance, lawyers participate in the system of law in which they must

[98] Gustafson, 50.

adopt and use specific language constructions and internalize the meaning (s) of symbols to maintain the system of law. This process of internalization constitutes an identity marker in which the lawyer is shaped by the community in which he/she interacts, absorbing and embodying the ethos of the legal community as a part of his/her identity formation.

Similarly, Christians participate in the Church and its modes of being. They adopt its language constructions and internalize meanings of its symbols. They absorb and embody the ethos of the Church, socially maintaining the unity and identity of the Church. The internalization of the language of the Bible and the meanings of the symbols of the Church are for believers, Christian identity markers. To put it succinctly, the Church is a socializing agent making specific claims on the identity formation and actions of its members. For example, in 1992, Professor Robert M. Franklin sampled 600 black clergy at the Hampton Conference on attitudes on such topics as sexuality, abortion and homosexuality to name a few. He found that at least 79.3 percent "taught about or preached a sermon on sexuality, with 85.3 percent having preached against premarital sex. A total of 77.1 percent had preached about homosexuality with 79 percent indicating their opposition." On abortion and Roe v. Wade, most black clergy tended to fall into the Pro Life category, with 48.2 percent opposing Roe v. Wade.[99]

Victor Anderson, Professor of Christian Ethics, reads these statistics as an indication of the power of religious beliefs, derived from biblical faith and languages, to shape the attitudinal perspective of Black clergy and their congregations. Anderson asserts:

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[99] Robert Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crises* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 79-80.

> I have no doubt that religious beliefs about God's commands, the orders of creation, human beings as image bearers of God, biblical holiness, and of course sexual sins and abomination all function in the Black clergy's attitudes toward homosexuality.[100]

While Anderson's focus is on the attitudinal perspective of Black clergy towards homosexuality, the point here is that the religious beliefs derived from biblical faith have a constraining and internal socializing effect upon black clergy and their members whether the issue is homosexuality, premarital sex, abortion or race relations. From these examples, it is clear that black Christians are socialized into a system of relevance that uses the particular languages of the Church (language of the Bible) to construct shared meanings and values.

To summarize this section, Gustafson's discussion of communication references the centrality of social interaction and relatedness in the processes of "Internal Socialization". Internal socialization emphasizes processes of (a) intersubjective understanding of symbols and language and (b) how symbols and language produce shared meanings and values to form a common life. Christians communicate meanings and values in this dual-manifold of internal socialization through the language of the Bible. Both the content of this language and the structure of communication typify the Church as a Community of Language. Gustafson's typification of the Church as a Community of Language then, anticipates the thematization of the Church as a Community of Interpretation. That is what I now turn to in the following section.

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[100] Victor Anderson, "The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 299-300.

The Church as a Community of Interpretation

In the previous section, communication was noted as being constituted by human interaction and relatedness in the linguistic mode. What is presupposed in all interaction is a social world of patterned meanings and actions. As human actors participate in the social world, they interpret patterns of action and meaning relative to particular indexes of meaning. As an index of meaning, the Black Church is constituted by patterns of meaning and action, which may be deciphered, for instance, according to the gender of its workers. Lincoln and Mamiya suggest that the presence of black males dominate the role of pastor within the Black Church, as their "masculine identity and power" was questioned and diminished by a society that prevented them from participating in "economic and political roles."[101] That black males could attain status and fulfill these roles on some level within the Church is indicative of the part this particular role plays within the Refuge image of the Black Church. Further, the dominate presence of black males as pastors, the attitudinal perspectives of members, and biases of hiring committees all suggest specific patterns of action and meaning of gender stratification among clergy. Marcia Riggs sees this as the internalization of "gender myths about African American women and men."[102] The task of the social interpreter is to point out these patterns of meaning and action and disclose how specific "church work" is distributed among gender boundaries.

Likewise, the Black Church is also an interpreter of social patterns. As Lincoln and Mamiya's study suggests, Black churches interpret patterns of meaning and social

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[101] Lincoln and Mamiya, 278.

[102] Marcia Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 53.

action relative to black youth and the decline in young adult black male church attendance. Concerning black youth, the Black Church interprets patterns such as poverty, unemployment, imprisonment and incarceration, and teenage pregnancy among black youth and young adults. As they interpret these patterns, many Black churches develop programs specifically designed to target youth.. On the question of special programs for attracting young people, 12.1 % out of a sample of 260 constituents turned to athletic and recreational programs. Another 19.2 % turned to gospel music programs and choirs as interest drawers of youth and young adults.[103]

These two samplings internal to the Black Church, the dominance of male in pastoral roles and the perceived alienation of black youth from church attendance, serves to highlight the interconnection of the Refuge image and the role of the Church as Interpreter. That the Black Church has served as a refuge is indicative of its role as a community of interpretation. It is both a social interpreter of events and patterns that constitute the lives of African Americans as well as a communal interpreter that assigns specific meanings to particular language constructions and symbols that frame the faith claims and distinctive identity of the Black Church.

As a community of interpretation, the Church is involved in a specific process of interaction. Gustafson cites at least three constituents as always operative within this process. There is always the interpreter, the object of interpretation, and the recipient of the interpretation. These three positions are united when effective interpretation is achieved. Effective teachers are exemplary

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[103] Lincoln and Mamiya, 325-330.

of this process, as they attempt to transmit meaning to students. A professor of philosophy must know something about philosophical texts. A lecture on Plato's *Euthyphro* may serve as an example. As interpreter, the professor must conform to the object of interpretation, which in this case is the text *Euthyphro*. She may then discover significant meanings of the Socratic dialogue such as the dialogue as an act of piety, or that the dialogue reveals that the nature of religion is investigation rather than holding professional statements and theoretical positions about otherworldly objects. Still, she must be able to translate these meanings to her students for their comprehension. However, in translation, she cannot simply repeat the words of Socrates and Euthyphro. Rather, she must be aware that the horizon of experience of her students is historically distanced from the horizons of the text. Put in other terms, she must grasp the historical thresholds that distances her students from this text for meaning to be effectively transmitted.

Similarly, interpretation within the Church mirrors this process. Preachers must be aware of the historical gaps or thresholds between biblical texts and the congregation if effective interpretation is to be achieved. In a sermon entitled, "A Great New Testament, I AM," Gardener C. Taylor, considered by many a "dean of preachers," presents Jesus as the New Testament fulfillment of God's "I Am" declaration to Moses in the Hebrew scriptures. Taylor turns to the New Testament and provides specific meanings of the "I am" passages of Jesus. In one of these passages, Jesus proclaims, "I am the door." In the act of interpretation, Taylor gives the declaration contemporary meaning saying:

> How many of us have had to stand looking at doors beyond which were the things we needed, yet were denied the right to go through the door?

> Some may not go through the door of registering and voting, but I could tell you of fearful and dangerous times when people risked their lives to try to get that door opened for black people. Some I knew died in the effort.[104]

Here, Taylor bridges the historical gap between the biblical text, "I am the door", and contemporary listeners by translating Jesus, "the door" into contemporary social significance. Whether it is communicating the meaning of *Euthyphro* or the biblical text, "I am the door", effective interpretation requires, in Gadamerian terms, a 'fusion of horizons' between the three positions of the interpreter, the object of interpretation and the recipient of interpretation.

. When, as interpreter, a preacher conforms to the object of interpretation, she seeks to interpret that object in light of specific principles. Co-present in her interpretation of the object is an interpretation of herself as the subject who discloses meanings and unifies the community through the performance of preaching. In a sermon entitled, "From the Wilderness to the Light", Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan relates the meaning of the Black Church and God as a refuge, highlighting the specific principle of "relational love." She says:

> As Christians, we are called to let our light so shine before men and women that they might look to God. We are to be Christ presence here on earth … As we continue to live, we will experience many a wilderness within the deserts of life, but God and love are there. We may be thrown down into the depths of the valleys of heartache, despair, and grief; the light of God and love are there. When we wait on God and we have those mountaintop experiences with eagles, God and love are there; therein lies that which endures: relational love.[105]

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[104] Gardner C. Taylor, "A Great New Testament 'I AM'" in *Chariots Aflame* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 134.

[15] Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "From the Wilderness to the Light" in *This is My Story: Testimonies and Sermons of Black Women in Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 190.

Kirk-Duggan interprets the current situation as needing relational love. Her understanding of God and the ministry of Christians are ultimately framed within such a principle. Her relating God and the Church as agents of relational love is a part of the "community-sustaining" process.

Within the process of interpretation the meanings derived from the object of interpretation are flexible. Interpretation is an ongoing process in which actors, such as theologians, preachers, teachers and prophet's turn to taken for granted meanings of symbols already established within the community. Jesus Christ functions as he does within the Church because most of its members share particular meanings of his office. That is, there is agreement within the Church about the meaning of Jesus Christ and there is understanding of this agreement. However, there are aspects of experience in Church life in which the taken for granted meanings of a symbol may enter into conflict. Distinct interpretations of Christians being "in Christ" emerging from the "necessary division" of the Church in America across racial boundaries are exemplary of this point. H. Richard Niebuhr described the denominational divide within the Church in America as a necessity if equality was to be realized for blacks, as inequality had become compatible with the theology of white churches. Here is Niebuhr:

> Whether the dogma of white superiority and Negro inferiority has been openly avowed or unconsciously accepted, the white churches have nevertheless taken it for granted and have come to regard it as not incompatible with the remainder of their beliefs.[106]

For whites, it was taken for granted that inequality across racial boundaries was compatible with the doctrine of unity and equality "in Christ." The slave gallery within

[106] H. Richard Nieburh, *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1987), 237.

the Church, as Niebuhr illustrates "was a badge of white superiority and of colored inferiority before the throne of God; against it awakened Negroes could not but rebel."[107] Rebellion against the slave gallery by blacks is indicative of rebellion against the larger ethos of white churches in the period following the Civil War. The rebellion is also indicative of an alternative meaning of what it means for Christians to be "in Christ." For blacks, it meant to worship as "true equals," indeed, to be in Christ, there is neither "Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, white or black."[108]

James Melvin Washington highlights a similar phenomenon within the Baptist denomination over the issue of racially separate churches. Washington cites the ministry of Henry McNeal Turner as a stance against racial subordination within the Baptist denomination. According to Washington, McNeal Turner argued "that the new fetish among white folk was to color God white. If God has pigmentation, Turner argued, then he would believe God is black rather than believe God is white."[109] Washington's reference to Turner highlights a conflict in the Church over the interpretation and meaning of God. As Turner's quote displays, if God is white then white Christians have a bases for their blatant racism within the house of God and blacks, rather than resist whites as an act of piety, should subordinate themselves to whites as an instance of turning toward God. However, Turner would rather understand God as black, if one desires to use such symbols. For as black, God would resist oppression and promote equality. Thus, as these examples display, while the meanings of symbols may be taken

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[107] Ibid., 254.
[108] Ibid., 263.
[109] James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), 188-89.

for granted, they are not fixed. Meaning within these particular frames is always interpreted meaning.

Theologians, preachers, teachers, prophets, and lay members participate in a process of interpretation and interaction that is open. The conflicts cited above, for instance, may best represent what Alfred Schutz calls "fluctuating boundaries" of meaningful behavior.[110] That is, given some particular standpoint, an interpretation may be quite stable and constant, but may fluctuate in meaning depending not only on a different meaning context but also on the noematic attitude that the interpreter takes relative to the object of interpretation whether cognitive, aesthetic, moral, or imaginative. Therefore, meaningful interpretation may fluctuate between boundaries of meaning. For white Christians within a particular historical index, the interpretation of Jesus Christ as the "lover of all" fluctuates within social boundaries defined by white supremacy as Niebuhr and Washington display. As a self-identified phenomenologist of the black experience, Riggins Earl cites a similar conflict in his reference to the theological and ethical dilemma facing white Christians "during and following slavery." According to him, while whites would admit that God has created all human beings, the doctrine finds meaningful expression for whites within the notion of "manifest destiny." That is, God "created the white man to rule other races of the world. They [whites] were meant to save and keep the souls of the lesser ethnic brothers of the earth. Subscribers to this

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[110] Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology o the Social World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 18.

belief were absolutely convinced that God was a respecter of persons."[111] God could be *for* or *against* other persons through whites, but never *with* them and their causes.

For Earl, turning to a different meaning context, this same dilemma faces African Americans. "At the heart of black American religious belief has been this dialectical "for and with" idea about God, which best speaks to black Americans' understanding of themselves in proximity to God and vice versa."[112] As Earl attests, Black Christians accept the notion that God is God over all people and have no problem accepting the idea of "God's being for and with everybody because of what God did in Jesus." This may be the case given a particular index of meaning, in which case blacks are treated as members of society rather than slaves. However, given a different index of meaning, I would contend that the meaning of such an expression, that is, *God for and with everybody*, may fluctuate in meaning even for blacks, as the revolts by Nat Turner in 1831 and separatist doctrines within the Baptist denomination advocated by Henry McNeal Turner display. [113] Under an index of Jim Crow, for Blacks, God may be the God of all but cannot be for and with whites in their systemic and attitudinal forms of oppression and dehumanization. Thus, such an expression, given conflict within particular boundaries, may fluctuate in meaning.

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[111] Riggins Earl, *Dark Salutations: Ritual, God, and Greetings in the African American Community* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 81-82.
[112] Earl, 47.
[21]Turners comments are referenced in this chapter as found in Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship*, 188-89. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 250-252; Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*, pp. 90 ff., 146 f.

As a process of interaction, interpretation is a formative and "community-sustaining process."[114] It is formative within member's use and revision of established meanings, and it is community-sustaining in response to members sharing not only a language but also shared meanings. Often, there is agreement upon these meanings, even while acknowledging that intersubjective meanings are not fixed. Interpretation is always an ongoing process of the primary and secondary objectivated signs of the Church that distinguish it from other human communities of language users and interpreters. I use the term "signs" as displaying a dual manifold that references the object(s) to which interpretations refer and "expressive of consciousness." Signs are interpreted within the framework of conceptual maps or what I referred to earlier as classifications, and within the scope of our languages. Returning to the three points of reference in interpretation discussed by Gustafson earlier, namely, "what is interpreted, an interpreter, and the persons to whom he interprets" in the Church, signs are "what is interpreted." In the Church, the primary objective sign is the Bible, while creeds, confessions, rituals and liturgy function as secondary signs. Gustafson writes:

> The Bible carries its meanings and purposes: the Bible delineates its object of loyalty, God. It tells the story of the person who is the center of the Church's life, Jesus Christ. Creeds, ritual symbols, and liturgies function as "secondary signs": they are relatively objective forms and patterns that bear potential meaning in the Church. The continuity and identity of the Church depend upon the effective interpretation of its signs; through interpretation they become meaningful for its members and to others.[115]

The Bible is the object of interpretation of theologians, preachers, teachers, prophets, evangelist and lay members. Within the worship service, preachers interpret

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[114] Gustafson, 58.
[115] Ibid., 71.

this primary objective sign to their parishioners. The interpretation of the preacher on this primary objectivated sign, however, becomes a secondary objectivated sign, inviting interpretation. The preacher's interpretation of the Bible is an expression of the preacher's subjectivity, which itself becomes a "new sign" available for interpretation. Creeds, ritual symbols, and liturgies are interpretations of some aspect of the Church's primary sign, namely, the Bible. They are secondary signs that call for interpretation.[116] Interpretations of these secondary signs generate "new signs" that are available for interpretation, and thus the process of interpretation, in the Church, is a continuous flow of relating meanings to persons in its function to sustain the community from one generation to the next.

The Bible is the distinctive source of the Church's language. Its language instills a sense of unity within the Church by providing its members with a framework for understanding self, other selves, and God. The ethos and identity of the Church is sustained, constituted and reconstituted as the particular language of the Bible is deployed by its members. Its language is its mode of communication within which the Church impresses meaning upon its members and in some cases such as the Civil Rights movement, members of society, as it seeks to develop a common life.

Language, however, involves interpretation and meaning. Language is interpreted and deployed as a framework for understanding the world in which the Church finds itself. The Church has a particular norm and sign of interpretation, namely, the Bible. Such reflection on language and interpretation is relevant to this study, as they are displays of the life of the Black Church. The Black Church, as a Refuge Community, is

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[116] For a discussion on signs as I am postulating it here, see Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of American Press, 2001), 343-348.

indeed a Community of Speech and Interpretation. It is a community in which meanings are sustained, and at times taken up and reconstituted to maintain the identity and solidarity of the group.

Refuge Community as a Community of Language and Interpretation

The above analysis on the Church as a community of language and a community of interpretation serves as a framework for reading the Black Church as a Refuge Community. The refuge image operates within the scheme of symbolic social interaction. It is tempting to interpret the refuge image from a general frame of reference using Sokolowski's phenomenology that schematizes experience within a wide range of relations of parts to whole, identity in manifold, and presence and absence as was showcased in chapter two. However, what is needed is a more complex analysis to grasp discreet meaning(s) of the refuge symbol as an identity in manifold, a part to the whole, an aspect within a profile, and an absence apperceived within the presentation of the Black Church as comprehensive community, surrogate world, and sacred cosmos. Gustafson's social Interaction theory of communication, in which language and interpretation are central, is employed to understand the strict particularity of the refuge and exile images of the Black Church in this chapter and the following one.

Cultural Memory and the Refuge Image

Within the cultural meaning context of the Black Church, E. Franklin Frazier's account of the Black Church as a refuge is significant:

> In providing a structured social life in which the Negro could give expression to his deepest feeling and at the same time achieve status and find meaningful existence, the Negro church provided a refuge in a hostile white world. For the slaves who worked and suffered in an alien world, religion offered a means of catharsis for their pent-up emotions and frustrations. Moreover, it turned their minds from the sufferings and privations of this world to a world after death where the weary would find rest and the victims of injustices would be compensated.[117]

In Frazier's account, the Black Church as a refuge community was an arena in which African Americans could participate in meaningful social interaction in which their black bodies and personalities became objects of their own self-signifying acts. This notion is best seen in what George Herbert Mead has labeled *role taking*. For Mead, role taking is the ability of a self to deploy the perspective and expectations of another as a framework for behavior.[118] African Americans interpreted themselves and their actions within the narratives of the Bible, for instance, through characters such as Job and Samson.[119] Such role taking cast the Black Church into the imaginative mode of intentionality. Frazier writes:

> They remembered from their Bible that the friends of Job had counseled him to curse God and die. They remembered too that Samson when blinded had torn down the Temple and destroyed himself along with his tormentors. Had not one of their leading ministers in his disillusionment and despair cried out against the flag of the nation he had served in the Civil War, "I don't want to die under the dirty rag." But the Negro masses did not curse God and die. They could not pull down the Temple upon the white man and themselves.[120]

The meaning significance of the lives of Job and Samson resonate with a people struggling under oppression with the capitulation toward despair. However, the Black

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[117] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York, Schocken Books), 50.
[118] George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 144-178.
[119] Frazier, 50.
[120] Ibid., 50.

Church casts the experience of African Americans within the narrative contexts of Job and Samson (as well as other Biblical figures) and like these two biblical "heroes", Blacks "retained their faith in God and found a refuge in their churches."[121]

However, Frazier's account of the Black Church as a refuge community suggests more than simple role taking. The socially significant interactions within the refuge community suggest that blacks also became, to some degree, "role-makers." By remembering narratives, blacks were able to continuously participate in meaningful social interaction while continuously re-creating the self. Frazier interprets blacks' role taking of biblical characters as cultural memory, the mode of intentionality under which they perceived themselves as a people.

Dale P. Andrews captures this point on significant social interaction in his account of the refuge image of the Black Church when he says:

> This image includes concerns for the survival, nurture, and growth of African Americans through the Christian faith. The church fulfilled the emotional, spiritual, and sociological needs of an alienated people. It provided a community that affirmed, even nurtured, black humanity and worth in an otherwise hostile and degrading social existence. This safe space was not static. Community provided proactive space for personality development and human relations. The effect was empowerment for living anew.[122]

While Andrews does not highlight role taking within biblical narratives, his point assumes it, as he understands the refuge image to be concerned with "growth of African Americans through the Christian faith."

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[121] Ibid., 51.

[122] Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 34.

Gayraud S. Wilmore also follows Frazier and Andrews relative to the point of the Black Church as a center of meaningful social interaction. According to him, the Black Church was the only space within the American cultural matrix in which African Americans could experience meaningful social interaction and self-development. He says:

> "Going to church" for blacks was never as much a matter of custom and convention as it was for whites. It was rather a necessity. The church was the one impregnable corner of the world where consolation, unity, and mutual assistance could be found and from which the master – at least in the North – could be effectively barred if the people were not of a mind to welcome him.[123]

Wilmore's account of the Black Church as a refuge community discloses it as a center of enablement, extension, and empowerment within the lives of African Americans. In his interpretation, the Black Church is a community of meaningful social interaction in which common beliefs and acts transformed, unified, and commissioned blacks toward new ways of living.

Up to this point, the refuge image is concerned with the reconstruction and development of a denigrated humanity seeking fulfillment in a world radically opposed to it. An emphasis on the subject-position of blacks as a cultural memory has been disclosed within these scholarly sources. However, sermonic material also reveals this subject-position as cultural memory and emphasizes role taking of blacks within Biblical narratives. Here, Alfred A. Owens, Bishop and Pastor of the Greater Mount Calvary Holy Church located in Washington D.C., interprets the subject-position of black congregates within the refuge image as cultural

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[123] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 76.

memory, in "re-membering" David's flight from King Saul to the cave of Addulum where he is joined by four hundred other men. Owens asserts:

> If you keep looking in the midst of the three D's, in the midst of distress, in the midst of debt, in the midst of discontentment, there is another D, called Deliverance. God sent deliverance to the cave. David and those distressed, indebted, discontented men came out with the victory. Don't stop until you reach deliverance! God said that each of us, like David can be delivered from the caves of life. God showed David what to do when people did not like him, and the Lord will show us the same thing today just as quickly. However, we must be like David and look to God as our only Source for help, strength, and wisdom.[124]

In this act of remembrance, Bishop Owens is able to relate his congregation and their historical, social and cultural condition to God. His move is decidedly theological. The issue of role taking is reflexive. Bishop Owens invites the congregation to take the role of David only to present the perspectives and expectations of David, as symbol, as a structure for formulating the behavior of the congregation. The frame of Owens' sermon is that as David found refuge in God, so too can contemporary members of the Black Church. Owens' sermon is a display of memory. However, it also turns one back to the constructions and signs that ground the ethos and identity of the Church, namely, language and interpretation.

The Refuge Image as Community of Language and Interpretation

Frazier's insight into cultural memory is significant when turning to the Black Church as a community of language and interpretation. The Black Church provided a perspective for African Americans to perceive and understand themselves and their situation (cultural memory) within the framework of biblical

[124] Alfred A. Owens Jr., "How to Handle a Crisis Before it Handles You" in Walter S. Thomas, *Outstanding Black Sermons Vol. 4* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001), 96.

revelation. Within this framework, blacks "transcended" the evaluations of themselves as an inferior species, as issued by whites, within, in Paris' words, the Western tradition of racism. For Frazier, the Black Church was that institution within which blacks were socialized on how to respond to racial hostility. Its internal activities, such as preaching and worship established and maintained stability, self-respect and social solidarity within the framework of the race. Dale Andrews follows Frazier on this particular point. As Andrews states:

> Black preaching and black worship have established traditions centered in nurturing black wholeness and empowerment for living under oppressive conditions. The preaching task has focused on interpreting biblical Christianity in the interests of black humanity and faith development in black life. The anticipation of God's activity in human history makes sociopolitical activism extremely important to understanding black preaching. The ability to relate biblical revelation to the experiences of racial and economic oppression weighs heavily in the black community's trust in the preacher's competence. At the center of black worship, preaching functions within a communal effort to nurture black personhood within the biblical revelation of God's activity in spiritual and historical liberation.[125]

Andrew's discourse reflects on the importance of the preacher and the act of preaching within the refuge image of the Black Church. The thrust of his discourse is that the reconstruction of the self, through meaningful social interaction, is grounded in the interpretive act of relating meanings to persons within the communal context. However, to relate meanings of symbols and events from the Bible to persons presupposes that the necessary conditions of communal language and processes of interpretation of signs are operative within the community.

[125] Andrews, 23.

The Black Church is a community of language and interpretation. Under the refuge image the three points of reference within the interpretive process (object of interpretation, interpreter, and recipient) is captured within the act of preaching. Preaching, within the Black Church is also disclosive of that community's language. The Bible is the primary objective sign within the Black Church as it is interpreted in light of "African spiritual values and sacred beliefs."[126] The role of the black preacher within the interpretive process is to relate biblical stories to the experiences of black people. This gives way to a black hermeneutical tradition in which African Americans' experiences of racism and oppression are thrown into salvation history, the history of God's acting on behalf of oppressed people as displayed within the primary objective sign of the Black Church. [127]

This Black hermeneutics is a framework in which meanings of biblical texts and stories are related to the lives of African Americans, as highlighted by Andrews in his interpretation of refuge ecclesiology as formative of a "faith identity." Genesis 1:26-27 marks a significant moment in this hermeneutical tradition that foregrounds the *Imago Dei* as clue to existential meaning. Andrews writes:

> Black Churches were places where black persons could go not simply to escape the horrors of racism, but to celebrate their full humanity as beings created in the image of God. Even in the "hush harbors" of the "invisible institution" during slavery, black people identified with the Genesis teaching that humans were created by God, in God's own image. The slaves rejected both the white masters' and the white churches' teachings which regulated them to an inferior humanity. Along these lines, the

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[126] Andrews, 18.
[127] The "black hermeneutic" is highlighted within a host of scholarly sources. In addition to Andrews' *Practical Theology for Black Churches* see: Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 20-29.

> development of black identity is grounded in the biblical understanding of creation in the image of God.[128]

The significance of this reading re-iterates throughout the writings of thinkers within various methodological traditions within Black Theology such as the "Hermeneutical School," "Black Philosophical School," and the "Human Sciences School."[129] All interpreters of the Black Church convey this message as a "taken for granted" background condition in Black biblical hermeneutics as the cultural memory content of African Americans religiosity in the United States. That is, Black churches interpret their members and all human beings as being created in God's image. Thus, a specific meaning is attached to the text that is disclosive of human subjectivity. Blacks deploy the Bible as a reference for identity formation, and as such, the text functions as a frame or interpretive scheme for meaningful social interaction within the Black Church.

The foregrounding of the *imago dei* points to an interpretation of God as Creator. The notion of God as Creator is a normative symbol within cultural memory for refuge ecclesiology. This symbolic expression, grounded in the primary objective sign (the Bible) of the Black Church, is the clue to early African Americans' understanding of freedom. Andrews writes:

> The biblical notion that all creation is declared by God as "good" confirmed not only the African value of human life but all life. The 'slaves' interpretation of the goodness of all life buttressed the sanctity and divine design of human freedom. Creation in God's image meant that every person is entitled to be free. Denial of this basic right is in direct

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[128] Ibid., 40-41.

[129] For a genealogical listing of African American Religious thinkers who re-iterate this viewpoint, see Fred L. Ware, *Methodologies of Black Theology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002). Other thinkers, not listed within Ware's typologies include: Al Rabateau, Peter J. Paris, Marcia Riggs, Emily Townes, Riggins Earl, Cheryl J. Sanders and Barbara A. Holmes.

> conflict with the biblical view of creation and God's relationship to humanity.[130]

God as Creator is a norm or "sign" embedded within the ethos of the Black Church as refuge community. This sign is an object of loyalty, in the estimation of blacks, that structures "right" human relationships, in which "equality and justice for all" is enacted.

Lincoln and Mamiya highlight this understanding in their discussion of the black sacred cosmos. They write:

> From the very beginning of the black experience in America, one critical denotation of freedom has remained constant: freedom has always meant the absence of any restraint which might compromise one's responsibility to God. The notion has persisted that if God calls you to discipleship, God calls you to freedom. And that God wants you free because God made you for Himself and in His image.[131]

These examples suggest that this sign is interpreted within refuge ecclesiology in such a way that members of the Black Church are convinced of its truth. It is a language construction that evokes a response from those who transmit it and those who receive it.

The Black preacher may function to bring a congregation into a more significant relationship of the meaning(s) of this particular sign by keeping in view specific social problems, such as crises in race relations. In a sermon entitled "The Burden and Blessing of Blackness, Reverend Dr. James C. Perkins heralds:

> Some have tried to use the Bible to imply that God has condemned us to be slaves of the human race. But if the Bible is not clear about anything else, it is explicit about the fact that God made of one blood all nations of

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[130] Andrews, 41.
[131] Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

> persons to dwell upon the face of the earth (Acts 17:26). God is the omnipotent Creator and benevolent parent of us all. To imply that God destined and ordained us to be treated as we have been is a lie that only the devil could conceive, and that demon spirits could promote. But as tragic as it is, this is the untruth that has been perpetuated about black people since the beginning of recorded history…Perhaps the world knows that if we ever discover, by research and conviction, that we are not innately inferior, and that God ordained us for some special purpose, they will not be able to constrain and oppress us, nor to intimidate, denigrate, or destroy us.[132]

The above sermon excerpts by Dr. Perkins, of the Greater Christ Baptist Church in Detroit, expresses a particular meaning of this sign (God as Creator is not a white racist), and social consequences of it (black wholeness and personality development), as he interprets it within the boundaries of racial conflict and racial interpretations on scripture.

Within refuge ecclesiology, God is also interpreted by the Black preacher as the divine Judge. The Creator of all life is also the Judge of it, repaying all for their wrong doings. Wilmore assigns deep social significance to the function of this sign operative within the refuge image. He says:

> The preacher was most relevant to this world when he was telling his congregation what to expect in the next one, precisely because he whetted appetites for what everyone knew whites were undeservedly enjoying in the here and now. His congregation had no difficulty understanding that he wanted them to have the best of this world too, for what else could he mean by always talking about a just God from whom everyone – including black folks – gets his or her due?[133]

In other words, the Black preacher was deemed relevant as meanings of signs from within the Bible, and in this case, a "just God" or God as Judge, was impressed and related to African Americans and their experiences of a denigrated

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[132] James C. Perkins, "The Burden and Blessing of Blackness" in Walter S. Thomas, *Outstanding Black Sermons Vol. 4* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001), 97-98.
[133] Wilmore, 76.

human subjectivity within the geopolitical climate of racism and Jim Crow. For Wilmore, as a community of refuge, it was mandatory to relate this particular sign to the African American experience within the United States. He says:

> But for the slaves and their descendents, a religion that could unveil the reality of another world beyond "this vale of tears" and at the same time interpret what God was doing to redress the wrongs against blacks was an absolute necessity for survival.[134]

As Judge, God was a necessary sign for survival. Its meanings, along with meanings of God as Creator are significant within the refuge image of the Black Church. Frazier also notes that whites evaluations of blacks within the context of racism and Jim Crow had a deep searing effect upon the psyche. But blacks found "an escape from such, often painful, experiences within the shelter of his church,"[135] where specific signs and their meanings were interpreted and related to persons in their struggle to survive.

Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 1963, interprets the sign, "Just God" and relates it to struggle blacks and those who opposed them. King heralds:

> There are those who ask the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality … We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only." … No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a might stream.[136]

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[134] Ibid., 76.

[135] Frazier, 51.

[136] Martin Luther King Jr., "*I Have a Dream*" in James M. Washington, *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), 218-219.

In this excerpt, King does not use the words " a Just God" or "God as Judge," but the sign is registered in its textual and spoken absence, as it functions within the meaning context of the words of the prophet Amos, whom he references in the last sentence. Within the preaching tradition of refuge ecclesiology, Blacks held to the notion that there will be a day where God will visit their oppressors and redeem the oppressed from their hands.

Within black hermeneutics it should be noted that the meanings of symbols fluctuate in meaning. That is, one symbol can have multiple meanings for Black Christians. As black preachers articulate the symbolic expression, "a Just God", as discussed above, congregants take it to mean that they can expect compensation for the wrongs that whites have inflicted upon them in both this world and the next. All have to answer to the God who was working "to redress the wrongs against blacks."[137] Lincoln and Mamiya highlight this point in reference to freedom as discussed earlier. They write:

> During slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century freedom means social, political, and economic justice.[138]

Here, freedom attains significant social meaning for blacks based on the context of meaning in which it operates. Thus, one may conclude that the context of meaning, in large part, frames the meaning(s) assigned to particular signs. Fluctuating boundaries of meaning and contexts is evidenced in the Black Church when Black Church members sometimes interpret the domination of Blacks by

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[137] Wilmore, 76.
[138] Lincoln and Mamiya, 4.

Whites as a part of God's providential plans. Actions oriented toward the degradation of blacks are cast within the framework of "redemptive suffering".

Anthony B. Pinn defines redemptive suffering as the moral evil that human beings inflict upon one another as being somehow justifiable by a divine power as a means to bring about some good or outcome. According to Pinn:

> One such threat arises regarding the issue of human suffering – understood as an aspect of the problem of evil or "theodicy." Suffering and unmerited suffering are used interchangeably (with reference to African-Americans) to denote moral evil. Moral evil denotes oppression, injustice, inequality, and the resulting psychological and physical damage. The problem of evil and "theodicy" interchangeably connote attempts at resolving the contradiction between traditional Christian understandings of God as powerful, just, and good, and the presence of suffering (as defined above), without negating the essential character of the Divine. [139]

Within particular contexts of meaning, as sign, God is attributed specific meanings, such as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer and Judge (primarily of oppressors).[140] However, as Pinn discloses here, these meanings are not fixed. Blacks had to come to terms with the meaning of God, as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, and Judge within the context of "unmerited suffering." Rather than jettisoning these meanings, the sign fluctuates in meaning to allow, as is still preached within the Black Church tradition, "sometimes God allows us to go through things that we may not understand on this side, but we will understand in the sweet bye and bye," or "Church God has promised to not put more upon us than we can bear."

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[139] Anthony B. Pinn, *Why Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 13-14.

[140] These symbolic expressions concerning God are disclosed in James M. Gustafson's *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* vol 1.

The Refuge Image and the Black Preacher as Interpreter

Within refuge ecclesiology, what is on display is effective interpretation of the convictions of the Black Church. Its signs and languages are derived from the primary objective sign of the Church, namely, the Bible. As interpreter, the preacher has knowledge not only of biblical content, but also of the people being addressed. Hence, the preacher is constantly moving back and forth between meaning contexts in an attempt to interpret the convictions and symbols of the Church to an audience. This has been highlighted previously with respect to the "black hermeneutics." Here, a word of clarification concerning meaning context and meaning establishment is in order. [141] The preacher's work, as interpreter, is best understood in the meaning context already established with meaning. There is often a conflation of these layers of social meaning in which the context becomes determinate of meaning establishment. The preacher does not establish meaning, but as interpreter, is operative within the context of meaning. The meaning the preacher assigns to her own acts as preacher is not established by the preacher herself. Rather, the meaning of her actions are already established as a linguistic boundary from which the interpretation itself may be ratified in a number of utterances that include: "Amen!", "That's the word!", It's in the Book!", "Say it!", "That's right!", or just "Preach!!".

Preaching performance compliance may also be regulated by members through critical silences that indicate their disagreement with an articulated interpretation of the Word. In other words, the preacher's interpretation of the

[141] Schutz, 18-19.

primary objective sign of the Church creates a "new sign," a secondary sign, which is available for interpretation. As Royce has observed, the interpretation of a sign itself becomes a sign to be interpreted. This is displayed within the moment of preaching, as many sermons and Bible study sessions have come under scathing critique from Black Church members. Within a Bible study session one may here words of contestation on an interpretation of a text. "That's not what the word says," or "That's not in the book." In such cases, Black Church members interpret the secondary sign as incommensurate with the Church's primary objective sign, namely, the Bible. These secondary signs are as such, as at times they are the subject of scrutiny and disagreement.

In relating meanings of signs from the Bible to persons, the Black preacher functions as "an agent of individual and community transformation."[142] Frazier eloquently rehearses this preaching function within the Black Church's cultural memory in a passage worth quoting at length:

> The Negroes who were free before the Civil War found status in the church which shielded them from the contempt and discriminations of the white world. Then for a few brief years after Emancipation the hopes and expectations of the black freedmen were raised and they thought that they would have acceptance and freedom in the white man's world. But their hopes and expectations were rudely shattered when white supremacy was reestablished in the South. They were excluded from participation in the white man's world except on the basis of inferiority. They were disenfranchised and the public schools provided for them were a mere travesty on education. The courts set up one standard of justice for the white and another standard for the black man. They were stigmatized as an inferior race lacking even the human attributes which all men are supposed to possess. They were subjected to mob violence involving lynchings and burnings alive which were justified even by white Christian churches.[143]

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[142] Ibid., 22.
[143] Frazier, 50.

As interpretation, the preaching moment expands beyond the pews to the Black community at large, connecting this action with the Black Church as comprehensive community, a surrogate world, and sacred cosmos. The social symbolic world of the Black experience must be kept in view by the black preacher in order to achieve effective interpretation within the meaning context of the Black Church.

As interpreter of the Black Church, the black preacher is central to the experience of that institution as a refuge community. It is through the preacher's interpretation (via a commitment to the black hermeneutics) that the members experience the Church as a refuge. The interpretations transmitted by the preacher become significant in the daily lives of the members, and at times, non-members, as they transition between multiple contexts of meaning such as the job, the barber shop, the beauty salon, the street corner, and even within the context of the music studio recordings of non-gospel and at times non-Church artist. Thus, the community is enabled, extended, and empowered through the office of the black preacher as interpreter. The meanings of signs, events, experiences, and symbols emphasized by the black preacher are shared socially and become significant in the continuous creating and sustaining of the cultural memory of the Black Church as a refuge community.

A manifold of verbal symbols constitutes the object (the Bible) of interpretation of the Black preacher and the ecclesial traditions of the Black Church (refuge and exile) have selective emphases among the available language constructions. The refuge tradition tends to focus on signs, narratives, and events from the Bible that "nurture the black person, teaching coping skills and self-

worth, and empowers one to seek the fullness of life."[144] A host of these signs have already been disclosed such as, God as Creator, God as Redeemer, God as Sustainer, God as Judge, and God as the one who brings good out of evil in reference to redemptive suffering. Another sign may be Jesus as God with us, as is referenced in Gardner Taylor's sermon entitled, "A Human Request and A Divine Reply." Taylor takes the disciple Phillip's request to Jesus to "show us the Father, and we will be satisfied," as the point of departure for interpreting as a sign of God with African American Christians. He says:

> This is the bedrock of the faith of Christian believers. We have seen God in the face of Jesus Christ. He is all the God we need. In Christ, Father God is come down out of the clouds and tabernacles to where you and I live. In Jesus, Father God has made Himself forever visible. In Jesus Christ, Father God has visited His lost and wandering children in a far country…. Christ tells us and shows us that God goes "about doing good." God in Christ heals the sick and raises the dead, gives an extra vision to the sightless, and lets deaf people hear the music of the spheres. God in Christ visits families that are mourning and sits down at feasts with those who rejoice.[145]

Taylor's interpretation of Jesus is one that situates God within the experiential frame of African Americans as he says God, in Jesus, has come to where "you and I live." To bring God within the frame of African Americans experience of racism, sickness, disease, and struggling just to make ends meet is to interpret the signs (God and Jesus) within the Black Hermeneutic for the enabling, extending and empowerment of African American life.

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[144] Andrews, 40.

[145] Gardner C. Taylor "A Human Request and a Divine Reply" in *Chariots Aflame* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 148.

Within the refuge tradition, the emphasis on such texts is not an arbitrary selection.[146] Rather, it is socially, historically and culturally generated as is evidenced by the black hermeneutic. Returning to Frazier's delineation of the function of black preaching within the cultural memory of the Black Church, blacks were a people without social status within a culture of white supremacy. To foster self-worth, in Andrews language "black wholeness", one can see how the social and cultural location of blacks played a role in the emphasis on specific texts within the refuge image.

The history of a community is always being selectively transmitted and received. Members also test what is transmitted, using the Bible as the normative context of meaning along with other languages that are part of meaning establishment conditions. Insofar as what is received is congruent with the interpretation of Scripture, driven by social, historical and cultural contexts of meaning, then the received tradition is guarded and remains a part of the life of the community. When what is received is interpreted as incongruent with the Bible and other modes of meaning establishment, the community challenges it, as it reaches into the past and retrieves concepts and norms for testing these claims. Thus, tradition is tested by historically, socially and culturally generated interpretations of Scripture within the Black Church.

Alfred A. Owens Jr. does this in reference to the prosperity gospel phenomenon, which is growing more prominent in contemporary Black churches. He says:

> That is why some who preach prosperity are no longer popular. God does want you to prosper in all areas, including finances, according to 3 John 2.

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[146] James Gustafson refers to these emphases as selective retrievals. See James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective vol 1: Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 136-147.

> Yet, the same Book that pronounces blessings on us also reveals, “in this world, you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). We are going to have some hardships. We are going to have some trials and tribulations, and some crises are going to knock on our doors. A lot of people have quit the church, quit pastors, and some have even quit Jesus because they put their hope in preachers who said, “Let me lay my hands on you, and everything is going to be all right.” This is not biblical. We have to climb some mountains in our Christian walk, and sometimes, it is the rough side of the mountain that we must climb.[147]

As he selectively retrieves from the historical tradition, Owens tests the prosperity gospel within the framework of the notion that trials and tribulations are a general aspect of all human experience, Christian or not. However, this retrieval is not simply historical. The retrieval is grounded within contemporary social experiences of sickness, disease, health care, welfare, racial profiling within the policing of black neighborhoods and a host of other social crises. Owens rejects the prosperity gospel as a distortion of the tradition as he selectively retrieves from the Bible to show that no one is exempt from crises. What Owens’ message shows is that retrievals are historically, socially, and culturally generated and are not arbitrary. Selective retrieval is based on meaning significance and context or establishment conditions.

The language of the Bible is objectively available to the black preacher as interpreter. The black preacher interprets signs, symbols, and events from the Bible and impresses meanings on the members of the Black Church in the development of the refuge ethos of that institution. The thematizations of the Church as a community of language and a community of interpretation are both on display in the writings of Frazier, Wilmore and Andrews as they discuss the Black Church as a refuge community. The Black Church adopts language from the Bible. It also interprets symbols, the Bible, life

[147] Alfred A. Owens, Jr., “How to Handle A Crisis Before it Handles You” in *Outstanding Black Sermons Vol. 4* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001), 91.

and actions a part of the contemporary social context of meaning significance. Its interpretations of symbols are "objectified" and internalized by its members. The Black Church in turn re-presents and expresses these meanings.

Summary

I began this chapter by parsing out two thematizations of the Church in general under Gustafson's account of social symbolic interactionism, namely the Church as a Community of Language and Interpretation. Throughout, I have related these themes to the Black Church as a Refuge community. More specifically, as I turned to the refuge image and the writings of Frazier, Andrews and Wilmore, I show what the theory of social symbolic interaction offers in analyzing this image. I argue that it provides the interpreter with a deep analysis of the specificity, particularity and relevance of refuge ecclesiology. I then turn to contemporary sermonic literature as displays of situating the sacred in the life of the members of the Black Church. In the next chapter, I follow the same mode of analysis as I turn to the exilic image of the Black Church.

The Black Church, as a Refuge Community, is a Community of Language and Interpretation that seeks to provide moments of transcendence for blacks, as it deploys the particular language of the Church, and impresses meanings of signs and symbols on persons living within particular existential moments of despair, in which senses of fatedness, fear, and an awareness of ones finitude are ever present. The moments of this display (refuge) opens the Black Church to an even wider presentation as a Community of Hope and a Community of Empowerment.

Within the cultural memory of the Black Church, specific signs such as "God as Judge" were stamped upon the consciousness of blacks and were necessary for survival. Other signs such as freedom and the *imago dei* resonated with enslaved blacks as a counter to their existential condition. These language constructions created "realms of meanings" that decenter white interpretations and evaluations of blacks. Through these realms, blacks found meaning, even within suffering.

As the primary interpreter of the Black Church, the black preacher fluctuates between meaning contexts and interprets events within "the black hermeneutic." The black hermeneutic is the black preacher's badge of relevancy among Black Church members. She seeks to interpret the signs of the Black Church and their meanings and relate them to people struggling to survive. The Black Church is the meaning context in which she works and hence she is not the producer of meaning, rather she is the interpreter and transmitter of meaning. The adequacy of her interpretations of the material content of the Black Church is interpreted and verified by Black Church members.

What I have attempted to bring out within this analysis is the power of language and how it has functioned within the Black Church. It is within language that the refuge image is registered within the life of Black Church members. To say it another way, without a particular language, the Black Church could not be experienced as a refuge community. While the Black Church functioned to provide social opportunities for blacks (as highlight in chapter two as an All Comprehensive Community), at a basic level, it provided them with a

language for self-understanding and self-appreciation as "children of God." Hence, the language and interpretations of the Black Church functioned as a resource of "situational transcendence." I take up this notion in latter portion of chapter four as I focus on the narrative that is formative of the memory of the Black Church.

The Black Church lives in language. It is a part of the social world and is involved in social projects. It has a future social vision in the form of a social project, namely, the Kingdom of God, or what Martin Luther King Jr., envisioned as the Beloved Community. This vision is predicated upon the language, interpretation and imagination of Black Church members who reach back, and selectively retrieve from the tradition and project the future of the group.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEORY OF SOCIAL SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND THE EXILIC IMAGE OF THE BLACK CHURCH

In the previous chapter, I followed a particular strategy. First, I first spelled out aspects of James Gustafson's social symbolic interactionism under two thematizations of the Church. Second, I displayed where these thematizations were operative under a particular manifold of the Church, namely, the Black Church. In this chapter, I follow the same procedure, taking up two further themes of the Church, which are the Church as a Community of Memory and Understanding a Community of Belief and Action. As mentioned in the previous chapter, readers should keep in mind that no one image (refuge or exile) comports better or worse to these themes. Rather, the parsing out of the themes is a matter of practical efficiency in reading the images within the scope of this project. In this chapter, I first clarify the concept of symbolic social interaction in Gustafson's thematization of the Church as a Community of Memory and Understanding and a Community of Belief and Action. Second, I extend the analysis to three theorist of the exilic image, namely, Albert J. Raboteau, Delores S. Williams and Cheryl J. Sanders. As I extend the analysis, I display material content relative to the meaning establishment and meaning context of this image through an analysis of the African American Prayer Tradition.

Gustafson's thematization of the Church as a community of common memory and understanding is an aspect of the Church that enables our grasping its identity and continuity in time. In this aspect, he unites the many individuals (past and present) into a

whole that helps to develop a fuller concept of what the Church as a community of memory and understanding means. Several thematic elements within Gustafson's thematization of the Church as a community of common memory and understanding are important to address. Processes of objectivation and internalization, subjective understanding, remembering and retaining, the intentionality of imagination, fusion of horizons, and center of meaning all play a significant role in Gustafson's account of the Church as a community of common memory and understanding. His development of each of these themes and the sub-themes co-present within them constructs the theme of the Church as a community of common memory and understanding. It follows, then, that as these themes and their sub-themes are grounded within the Church in general, they are also embedded within the Black Church in particular. In this chapter, I track these themes within the particular image and display of the Black Church as an Exilic Community. As an exilic community, the Black Church represents a counter-memory that shares in events at the center of the Church's life. As an exilic community, members of the Black Church share a "faith" that is expressed in common "social action."

Structures of Common Memory and Counter Memory

In his discussion of the Church as a community of common memory, Guastafson emphasizes both subjective and inter-subjective understanding of this community and its institutional history. He says:

> The common memory of the community consists in a subjective understanding of its past; each of its members in the present relives the meanings of the past events in its history, and makes them part of his personal history. Common memory involves an empathetic participation in the history of the community through the stories and other expressions of past events. Members of the Church in the present time grasp,

> understand, and identify themselves with the meanings of events recorded and interpreted in the Bible, Christian symbols, and other representations. Events in the life of the community, and the community's understanding of the meaning of these events, have been objectified or expressed in literature, liturgies, architecture, and art. These expressions are the media through which the community in the present understands and relives the past.[148]

He begins his account of the Church as a community of common memory in light of processes derived from the social phenomenology of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann. The processes are objectivation and internalization. Berger and Luckmann describe these processes as characteristic of human activity. What they have in mind is similar to Schutz' notion of "having a project."[149] That is, people express themselves within the framework of physical and mental capacities in plans and projects. Results of their physical and mental labor are "human productions" or what they call objectivations. Famous paintings such as *The Mona Lisa* (1503-1507) by Leonardo Da Vinci and *American Gothic* (1930) by Grant Wood are exemplary of the process of objectivation, in which the creativities and imaginations of Da Vinci and Wood bring to life realms of objectified experience, which are called productions.[150]

Through the process of objectivation, people construct the social world and all of its institutions, including the Church. Throughout the process of objectivation, meanings emerge and take on the form of reality, that is, they are objectivated or attain the status of objectivity.[151] These objectivated meanings are then absorbed into the lived experience of persons and community's and taken for granted. It can be said then, that human beings

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[148] James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 72.
[149] Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckann, *Structures of the Life-World Volume II* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1983), 21-45.
[150] Ibid., 52.
[151] Ibid., 60.

construct the social world and are also products of the world they construct. This process of objectivated meaning is displayed well within Cheryl J. Sanders critique of the liberationist model of the Black Church and Delores S.Williams critique of black male patriarchy surrounding women in ministerial office.

Sanders critiques the liberationist model of Black churches for having objectified itself under economic consumerism and a secular ethos. According to Sanders, Black churches within the liberationist tradition reproduce themselves as objectified instances of "economic consumerism" and secularism in the following ways: 1) they abandonment wholistic transformation of the plight of the poor by focusing only on structures but not on personal intervention.[152] 2) they "reject the notion of the church as a separate community that evangelizes the people it seeks to serve,"[153] and 3) they abandonment of the New Testament ecclesiological mission of the Church to be a "called out" people within a theocratic society within the larger dominant society.[154]

Therefore, Sanders concludes that such churches are "in the world and very much of the world." The objectification of the cultural attitudes of economic consumerism and secularism lead constituents of this model to "reflect with great eloquence on the plight of the poor, in settings where the poor are not welcome and prayer is out of order" says Sanders.[155] Under the liberationist model Black churches seek to intervene into the plight of the poor, but ironically display themselves within the consumerism and secularism of the dominant culture itself.

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[152] Cheryl J. Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 126-127.
[153] Ibid., 127.
[154] Ibid., 128.
[155] Ibid., 129.

Williams also displays well the process objectivation in her critique of male patriarchy in black denominational churches. She says:

> As African Americans became more and more "Americanized" by appropriating white American values of individualism, capitalist economics and classism, the solidarity between the black church, the mutual aid societies and the extended family disappeared. The mainline African-American denominational church retreated to the deep receses of the soul of community memory….Black people, in their effort to be "Americanized," began to believe that the white model of the nuclear family could more adequately service the bonding and the wisdom-transmitting tasks absolutely necessary for the survival of generations of black people: women, men and children.[156]

This process of objectivation of patriarchy has led to "attitudes" and debates concerning female clergy in the denominational churches. Williams sees the denominational churches as sending negative messages (internalized cultural myths about all male leadership) to black women who understand themselves to be called to the ministry. Williams has a great deal of support for her criticism based on the attitudinal study of pastors regarding women in ordained offices as conducted by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya. In their study, Black clergy expressed their attitudes (pro and con) on women as pastors. They highlight that, "our study also detected stronger, more intense feelings among ministers who disapproved of women pastors."[157] In a survey of 2,150 churches headed by black clergy a mere 3.7 percent reported female leadership. The verification of female leadership in the Black Church rests upon factors such as sex, age, education and denomination. Eighty-one percent (52 out of 64) of the female clergy in the study were in favor of women as pastors. Male clergy displayed a balance in this

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[156] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 210.

[157] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 297.

regard with fifty percent approving and forty-nine disapproving. The age, education, and denomination of the potential pastoral candidate reveal stratification among those interviewed. The point is that none of these are strong factors in the approval or disapproval of male pastors, whereas for women they weigh heavily.

From these studies it is seen that the processes of objectivation are the results of human projects. Within the Black Church plans and projects are carried forward and their objectified meanings are grasped through the interpretation of signs, symbols and signifying practices internal to the life of the Black Church as a community of common memory. However, as stated, these objectivations of meanings are reflexively related subjectively to the internal life of the churches and hence can be subjectively understood. I turn now to the process of internal socialization.

Subjective understanding of common memory is indicative of the process of internal socialization within the life of the Church as institution. Internal socialization "socializes" members within a common history, in which members internalize the meaning(s) of the events internal to its history and thus become personally, i.e., intimately identified with the institution in common memory. For instance, the internalization of events and persons from the Bible is ever present within the prayer life of the Black Church. Consider the following prayer:

> I have faith to believe you are the same God that was in the days that are past and gone. Thou heard Elijah prayed in the cleft of the mountain. Thou heard Paul and Silas in jail. Thou heard the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. I have a faith to believe that you have once heard me pray, when I was laying and lugging around about the gates of hell, no eye to pity me, no arm to save me. Thou reached down your long arm of protection, snatched my soul from the midst of eternal burning. Thou place me in the rock and placed a new song in my mouth. Thou told me to

go, and you would go with me; open my mouth, and you would speak for me.[158]

Within the Black Church tradition, this type of prayer highlights internal socialization of persons and events within the history of the Church, which are typified as exemplars of faith. The typification of persons and these events within the prayer indicates internal socialization and the subjective understanding of a "meaningful history" of the Church. In this process of internal socialization, subjective understanding is a reflexive engagement in which members of the Church, grasp in common memory socially objectivated signs, i.e., characters, figures, texts of the Church in simultaneity with their own contemporaneous lived experience. As such, present day Christians may be contemporaneous with predecessors of the Christian's faith.

In the subjective understanding of predecessors of the Christian faith, contemporary Christians have access to the past, now internalized through the objectivations bequeathed to contemporaries within the Church. While absent in the present, Christians have access to the past through the externalized products (primary and secondary objective signs) of the Church.[159] These material content or objectivations assist in the process of self-understanding and identification of contemporary Christians with predecessors.[160] They include the Bible, Creeds, Church history and ritual as well as a manifold of theological treatises. These material contents are manifolds of one event in the history of the Church to which all of its members orient their personal and social

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[158] Harold A. Carter, *The Prayer Tradition of Black People* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1976)

[159] Refer back to Chapter 3 for primary and secondary signs.

[160] Gustafson uses the terms objective markers and primary signs. I shall use the expression material content, as I think it is more faithful to Schutz's phenomenology. Gustafson is relying on both Schutz, Berger and Luckmann as well as Josiah Royce.

identity as Christians. They are manifolds of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gustafson points out:

> Continuity of memory is based in part upon continuity of the lived experience of Christians through the centuries. Continuity of experience in turn is based upon the function of the Bible in the history of the Church. Events that were meaningful in the first century can be meaningful in the present because they are recorded and interpreted in the Bible. Experiences of men in the time of the primitive Church can inform contemporary understanding and experience because they have been expressed in the Bible. The deeply subjective, existential continuity of the Christian community has been possible because of the Bible… Continuity of both the meaning of the person Jesus Christ and the experience of Christians is grounded in the function of the Bible in the Church.[161]

The internalized meanings derived from members "readings" of the Bible, as the objectivation of Christian predecessors holds the community together, insofar as it *expresses the origins,* i.e., the beginnings of the Church. It is as the objectivation of the lived experience of predecessors that the Bible is recognized by contemporaries as authoritative for Christian living. While the Bible is objectively given, its authority depends on the subjective meanings of contemporary Christian social interaction or relationship. Therefore, the objectivations present to the contemporary Christian community function in a reflexive relation with the processes of internal socialization of contemporary members of the Church with Christian predecessors.[162]

The material content of the Church allows Christians to personally identify with the Church through a reliving of the meaning of an absent past (the world of Christian predecessors). Christians relive the absent past through memory, via the objective markers of the Church and through the activity of imagination. In this sense, the

[161] Gustafson, 74-75.
[162] Ibid., 44.

objective markers are displays of the Church's memory that carry and produce meaning. In his grasping of the Bible as an objective marker Gustafson says:

> The Biblical accounts continue to be the basis of a continuity of memory and hope between the present Church and the past. The present generation can be "contemporaneous with Christ" because the Bible expresses his person and what he meant in the early Church. The importance of Jesus Christ is expressed for the past and the future as well as present experience. The history of Israel is seen as a preparation for Jesus Christ, and for contemporary experience of him. The accounts of Christian expectations and hope give an understanding of the cosmic and ultimate significance of Jesus Christ. Personal life, in its memory and hope, is illumined by an understanding of Jesus Christ. Common life is understood in the light of the past, and in the expectation of the Kingdom of God.[163]

The Bible is a reference point for interpreting the Christian tradition and is the primary source of revelation for the Church, functioning in the Church with other material content to maintain the social identity and inner unity of that institution. As Sanders claims, the Bible discloses the identity of the "saints" and is a testimony to their dialectical liturgy and ethics of "being in the world, but not of the world."[164] It holds an authority and power over the lives of the saints as they seek freedom and liberation in a society constituted by both the attitudinal and social structures of "racism, sexism, and elitism." Not only are these objective markers displays of the Church's memory, but also the reality of the Church, both past and present is only possible through these venues. These markers disclose the Church as an identity in manifolds. Not only is the Church a community of common memory and understanding, it is also a community of hope. Christians participate in and relive that past and project the future through the memory of the Church and through imagination.

[163] Ibid., 77.
[164] Sanders, 138.

At this point, a distinction is warranted between remembering and retaining or what is referred to as retention. I think it is important to point out that when Gustafson says that subjective understanding comes through "remembering and reliving," that he is not making a claim regarding the Bible as a book of "Christian retentions." Rather the Bible is what is remembered. As contemporary Christians read accounts from its pages, they read what is remembered and they "retain" such accounts as objects of consciousness within a temporal horizon of experience. In the phenomenological sense, remembering takes on a dual-manifold connotation. First, in Edward Farley's language to remember is to call forth something.[165] It is to re-create in ones memory a previous experience for the purpose of inspection and contemplation. Second, remembering is a deliberative act in which we call forth previous events such as a twenty-first birthday, a bachelor party, a high school championship game, or where we placed our cable bill. In the Black Church, remembrance is often on God's acts in Israelite history. Concerning the Exodus, Raboteau explains that "the slaves believed that God had acted, was acting and would continue to act within human history and within their own particular history as a peculiar people just as long ago he had acted on behalf of another chosen people, biblical Israel."[166]

In each act of remembering, new intentional objects continue to emerge. These intentional acts presuppose the work of "retention" on the one hand, and "protention" on the other. In Sokolowski's terms, retention and protention are moments to one another

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[165] Farely uses the term, "coming forth" in his theological work. See, Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), Part 1, in particular Chapter 5.
[166] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 318.

and are distinguished from remembering in the sense mentioned above. Retention and protention may be understood in the context where one is sitting and listening to a sermon or a song. An introduction, a body of moves, and a climatic conclusion generally constitute the structure of sermons in the Black Church. As the pastor introduces her sermon it is experienced as "spoken now." As the transition is made from the introduction to the first move in the sermon, the introduction is still retained as part of the experience, but it is experienced as fading or receding into the background or into the past. Each move of the sermon is heard at a different moment, a different "spoken now." As each move is "spoken now," the previous move is retained as it recedes into the past. Moreover, as each move reaches its fulfilment there are anticipated moves or "future moves," which are "protended." In the sermon, each move prepares us for successive movements, here the retentional and protentional structures of consciousness hold the experience together in a unity such that there is a fusion of horizons (synthesis in Husserl's terms) between each move within the sermon. In Husserl's phenomenology, retention and protetion are necessary structures of consciousness that makes moments of temporal experience possible.[167]

I highlight this distinction for two reasons. As I have mentioned, the first reason is that the Bible is not a book of "Christian Retentions." Rather, it is a collection of things remembered and when it is read (intentional and active act), what is read is a recollection and re-presentation of "completed" events in the life of the Church. Second, I highlight this distinction within the framework of a debate within Black Theology, in which the slave narratives function as narrative accounts that reportedly "point to

[167] Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 134-141; 152-161.

retentions" of African ancestors and predecessors. This debate is significant, insofar as it centers on the formation of African American Christianity and the development of the Black Church.

Black theologian Dwight N. Hopkins says:

> Though slaves did not have direct access to the specifics of their former African religious practices and beliefs, they did maintain some theological remains – religious Africanisms…Enslaved Africans took the remnants of their traditional religious structures and meshed them together with their interpretation of the Bible. All this occurred in the Invisible Institution, far away from the watchful eyes of white people.[168]

Involved in this debate is the issue of time consciousness, both internal and external or objective time consciousness. One of the issues is whether the slaves, in their adaptation to Christianity, were conscious, intentional, and constructive in their moves of combining their previous actions and practices with Christianity. Hopkins' language suggests the affirmative. The other issue is whether supposedly African retentions are best to be regarded as an imaginative mode of intending within internal time consciousness, as opposed to objective temporality. Although this debate cannot be discussed at length here, at its center is the flow of memory and its importance to the Exodus and Exilic image of the Black Church.

It is also important to highlight the play of imagination at this point in the discussion of common memory. Imagination is taken for granted as a mode of intentionality in common memory and common understanding. The biblical stories of Cain and Abel and Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, and the interpretations and meanings that emerge from interaction with these texts are endless and illustrative. Both

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[168] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 3-6.

stories are familiar within the Church and open discourses on issues such as responsibility, sibling rivalry, jealousy, justice, God's commands, the leap of faith, and God as provider. These interpretations display clusters of meaning on texts that are inexhaustible in meaning. As Sokolowski describes them, they are parts to a whole. The narratives of Cain and Abel and of Abraham and Isaac themselves may become "centers of meaning," however, through imaginative variation, the self typifies these centers in new ways. The new typifications saturate the autobiography of persons in relationship to the present, thus displaying a connection between the imaginative mode of intending and subjective meaning and understanding. According to Gustafson:

> Subjective understanding comes through remembering and reliving the past. Christians gain not only knowledge about the past, but in a sense participate in the past life of the Church. The self participates in the meaningful history of the Church, and comes to interpret and understand itself in the light of these meanings. The meaning of the past is internalized. The same past is internalized by many. In these processes the sense of common purpose and life grows, and the identity of persons with the historical community is deepened. Continuity of an inner community, and the sense of an inner unity, exist through common memory.[169]

The phenomena described by Gustafson matches what Hans Georg Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons. For Gadamer, a horizon is a perspective on the world acquired through acculturation, the depth and boundary of which is grounded in language. Therefore, horizons are not fixed but are brought into contact with one another, resulting in the event of understanding. The Bible is a text constituted by a horizon or a perspective on the world. Scholars often refer to this as a worldview. As such, the Bible has the capacity to speak to the present horizon of experience within its presentation of its

[169] Ibid., 74.

own horizon. Although it is a text that displays a "world" distanced from our own, its worldview nevertheless, makes a claim upon the present. According to Gadamer:

> In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves… In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other.[170]

In other words, the Bible is situated within an "effective history," and interpreters of it stand within a tradition of interpretation, in which the horizon of the text fuses with that of the interpreter, situating the interpreter within a historical tradition.

Interpretations on the Bible are constantly emerging. For Gustafson, there may be multiple centers of meaning within the biblical text which one may continue to typify within the frame of ones autobiographical experience or stream of consciousness.[171] These centers assist in holding the common life of the Church together. However, all of these centers are grasped in light of the One center that is the basis and foundation for the Church's existence, namely, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sermons are exemplary of this point. In the Black Church, sermons on the sacrificial offering provided for Abraham on Mount Moriah are often taken up in reference to Jesus. The voice that told Moses, I AM! That I AM! Is often referenced to Jesus' I am sayings.

To posit Jesus Christ as the Center is to locate the point from which the Church stems and to which the Church refers to its life. Jesus Christ is at the center of rituals and

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[170] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 306.
[171] See Chapter 3 on Selective Retreival.

holidays celebrated by the Church such as Holy Communion, Baptism, Christmas, and Easter. He is the point of origin, the one who is responsible for the existence of the Church. Through scripture and liturgy, he guarantees the meaning of the Church. Put another way, Jesus Christ gives the Church meaning. The apostle Paul speaks metaphorically concerning Jesus Christ as the center of meaning for the Church, when he refers to the Church as the "body of Christ."

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, through many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.[172]

In this passage, Paul highlights Jesus Christ as the Center of meaning for the Church in general through the metaphorical expression the body of Christ. This understanding of Christ as the center of the Church's common memory is also critical to the Black Church as an exilic community. Hence, Christology is also centered in its counter-memory. However, in this chapter I highlight, not Christ, but the Exodus and Exile as formative within the counter-memory of the Black Church.

The Exilic Image as Counter-Memory in the Black Church

The existence of the Black Church as an exilic community represents a counter-memory of the Church as a whole, which was illustrated in the previous chapter in the discussion of selective retrieval. H. Richard Neibuhr hints at this in his discussion of "Denominationalism and the Color Line" when he says:

> The color line has been drawn so incisively by the church itself that its proclamation of the gospel of the brotherhood of Jew and Greek, of bond

[172] *1 Corinthians 12:12*, New Revised Standard Version.

> and free, of white and black has sometimes the sad sound of irony, and sometimes falls upon the ear as unconscious hypocrisy – but sometimes there is in it the bitter cry of repentance.[173]

That the Black Church exists at all is a reflection on the exilic experience of African Americans within White churches prior to their exodus from those institutions. As Neibuhr points out, the slave gallery was "a badge of white superiority and colored inferiority before the throne of God."[174] In other words, blacks were already in exile within White churches with no choices but to separation. By their separation, they erected their own churches as "alternative communities" in exile. Within their churches, the mission of the Church was taken up within the image of exile as counter-memory.

The Exodus is grasped in the memory of biblical Israel as well as in the New Testament. Jews remember themselves as God's people and celebrate God's act of freedom in the Passover. The Exodus is also taken up in the memory of British colonists inhabiting America as the New World when they remember themselves as God's chosen people and America as the land of Canaan, flowing with "milk and honey." The Exodus experience for African Americans functions therefore as a counter-memory to European contact and conquest. For African Americans as for Jews, the Exodus is formative of a nation and a testament to God's power. The theme song from the movie Exodus is illustrative:

> This land is mine, God gave this land to me,
> This brave and ancient land to me.
> And when the morning sun reveals her hills and plains,
> Then I see a land where children can run free.
> So take my hand, and walk this land with me, And walk this golden land with me.

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[173] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Glouchester, Mass: Henry and Holt Company, 1957), 263.
[174] Ibid., 254.

> Though I am just a man, when you are by my side, With the help of God, I know I can be strong,
> To make this land our home; If I must fight, I'll fight to make this land our own; I'll fight to make this land our own;
> Until I die, this land is mine![175]

So, for African Americans, America was not the land of Canaan but the doghouse of Egypt. As Raboteau attests:

> From the earliest period of their migration to America, British colonists had spoken of their journey across the Atlantic as the exodus of a New Israel from bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land of milk and honey. For African Americans the opposite was true: whites might claim that America was a new Israel, but blacks knew that it was Egypt because they, like the children of Israel of old, still toiled in bondage.[176]

African Americans take up the Exodus narrative within a counter-memory that reflects the Black Church as an exilic community searching for freedom and emancipation and a lived space to call *home*.

Neibuhr and Raboteau suggest that the Black Church operates out of a counter-memory funded by a counter imagination of the history of Christianity in America. The Black Church imaginatively becomes an exilic community. In this case, the Black Church as an exilic community references a people or nation constituted by a marginalized subjectivity. Eddie S. Glaude provides an account of African Americans within counter-memory signified by the Exodus as a mythic framework for self-understanding themselves as a nation that is culturally, politically and socially distinct from its oppressors. Glaude focuses on Absalom Jones's analogical appropriation of the narrative:

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[175] Pat Boone, This Land is Mine: The Exodus Song.
[176] Albert J. Raboteau, *African-American Religion* (New York: Oxford Univerisity Press, 1999), 49.

> Absalom Jones's analogical use of Exodus is an excellent example of this initial opposition. The rhetorical move presupposed (and simultaneously created) the corporate unity of the participants while reorganizing memories of Africa in the construction of an African American identity. The sermon began with an account of Exodus and the affliction of the nation of Israel. Jones conveyed to his audience that even though the nation of Israel experienced the brutality of slavery, God had not forgotten them, for he heard their cries and he, not angels, came down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians. Here God's activity in history (salvific history) becomes the basis for rereading the past and mobilizing memories in a dialectical relation with more secular accounts of history. African is reread; the middle passage and slavery are reread; America is reread; and aspirations for freedom and citizenship are formulated as divinely sanctioned ends.[177]

In summary, I have established that the center of meaning of the exilic community is grasped as a counter-memory and orients the Black Church toward an "ultimate end" or Other that evokes acts of worship, prayer, and gratitude. The Exodus provides the Black Church with a substantive content that is constitutive of the Black Church as a Community of Common memory and Understanding. The historical meaning(s) of its symbols, stories, and events are typified and absorbed into the personal autobiography of Black Church members and displayed not only in sermonic materials, but also in the prayer tradition of the Black Church. In the exilic image, Black Church piety is oriented toward God's acts of emancipation and deliverance on behalf of an oppressed people. This is the basis of the counter-memory and understanding of the Black Church as an exilic community. As displays of the Black Church, the prayer tradition is not only indicative of a community of memory and counter memory but also as community of belief and action.

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[177] Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus: Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 94.

Community of Belief and Action

As a community of common memory, the Church is a community of shared meanings and values on a common center. Its members intentionally grasp and accent to beliefs experessive of that center. For instance, one may utter, "I believe in Jesus Christ" and the Christ event is made a part of ones personal autobiography. Here, such a belief is an assent to the articles and confessions of the Church and a heartfelt conviction towards the center of meaning, namely, Christ. Cognitively, assent functions as an entry point into which belief, as conviction becomes significant. It is not enough simply to give cognitive assent to the doctrines of the Church. Rather, there must be some engagement by the individual at both an emotional and moral level. What is impact of these cognitive beliefs on the affectivities of Church members? Moreover, how do these beliefs, i.e., articulations of faith, impact the moral behaviors of members? What is clear is that the inter-subjective meaning that emerges from members' participation in the life of the Church and their internalizations of Church teachings, events, and narratives have great significance for how they both believe and act within the Church cognitively, emotionally and morally.

The Church is not simply a community of belief, but it is a center of cognitive, emotional, and moral meaning. These three dimensions of belief and action ground human communities and give them a social identity. In this sense, belief is a necessary condition for the possibility of the Church as a liturgical and moral community. For Gustafson, belief is understood in terms of "faith," "commitment," and "obedience." For him, faith is neither an article of the Church, nor is it a positive outlook provided by the Church's center of meaning. Rather, faith is a dual manifold of trust and loyalty to a

center of meaning that grounds the Church's existence, and functions as a mode of interaction between contemporaries within and outside the community. Gustafson says:

> In the Church, however, belief implies more than intellectual assent. It implies trust, faith, commitment, loyalty, and obedience in and to the object of belief. These aspects of the Church's common life are more peculiar to its existence than others, and therefore are more difficult to account for in the language of social interpretation.[178]

In other words, faith is not a strict religious phenomenon, which is highlighted in H. Richard Niebuhr *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structure of Human Faith*. It is fundamentally human. And it is this "human faith," trust and loyalty, in the Church's center of meaning that undergirds its existence as Church.[179] Like Niebuhr, I suspect that Gustafson is bracketing the particularism of Christian beliefing, as he focuses on the language of "faith, commitment, loyalty, and obedience." While faith may be human, belief is particular. In the Church the two are mediated by members cognitive accent and emotional, and moral loyalty to its center. Hence, belief embraces cognitive, emotional and moral dimensions of meaning.

As trust and loyalty faith displays a type of social interaction between people and groups that carry cognitive, emotional and moral meaning. Faith is a relationship between members of the Church and the object of faith in which trust and loyalty are the basis for community. Trust is a 'posture' towards the object of faith.[180] However, it is more than an attitude or posture. It is also disclosive of the "affections, sensibilities, and value preferences" that constitute human agency. From Sanders point of view 'saints' are

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[178] Ibid., 90.
[179] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structure of Human Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 1-22.
[180] James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 240-243.

described as having a specific posture towards the dominant culture. This posture may be described as combative, resistant or in Sanders own language a "hard confrontation" with secular values.[181]

As a community of belief, the Church accents to shared meanings around particular confessions. The Church does not only have a posture of trust towards its center of meaning, but members also have individual postures toward the center, as individuals in relationship to others, and relationship to the world at large.

Trust is a necessary condition for a community of belief and action. As a community of belief and action, members of the Church display dependence upon one another, not only for their various social and natural needs, but also cultivate a sense of mutual obligation that is fostered within the Church and grounded in its center of meaning.[182] Within the exilic consciousness of the Black Church, enslaved blacks turned to the Exodus as a center of meaning. In their turning, they established a posture of trust and sensibilities through which they anticipated God doing for them what he did for the children of Israel.

As belief is cognitively entailed in the phenomena of faith, so also is loyalty. Loyalty is the performative aspect of faith that is co-present with the attitudinal and sensible. Not only do members of the Church "often display, can display, and ought to" display trust, but they perform social acts grounded in that trust.[183] Faith as loyalty takes on a specific meaning. Within the theory social symbolic interaction, as it has been

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[181] Sanders, 129.

[182] For an exhaustive account of sensibility see James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1993.

[183] For an exhaustive account on posture and disposition see James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 240-271.

developed in this chapter and the previous, action always entails multiple actors. Just as co-present in the posture of trust is the sense of obligation to be trustworthy, co-present in the disposition and act of loyalty is the sense and obligation to be loyal. In this sense, faith not only discloses a posture towards its object, but it also reveals a disposition to act in reference to the object. By disposition I mean an anticipation and "readiness" to act in specific ways in light of the center of meaning that constitutes the Church's common memory. Therefore, faith is socially reflexive and responsive within the context of human social interaction. The Church then, is a community of belief and action that is grounded in the dual manifold of faith as trust and loyalty or belief and action.

Certain postures and dispositions are necessary conditions for the Church to exist as a moral community. These aspects govern and maintain the social identity and self-understanding of the Church. Both find their basis in the center of meaning that sustains the common life of the Church. One may speak, then, of a common trust and a common loyalty, in fact, a common faith that sustains the common life and social identity of the group. The common life of the Church is funded by the common acts of worship, evangelism and moral witness. Sanders understands this triad of common acts to be distinctive to the Black Church as an exilic community, signifying such a community as a center "of Christian formation and totalistic transformation that engage[s] in meaningful ministry and worship, inclusive of all who desire to respond to the call to holiness, irrespective of sex, race, and economic status."[184]

To say that common action and common life are constitutive of the Church as a community of belief and action must be understood in light of an identity in a manifold of

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[184] Sanders, 132.

appearances. For, it is not the case that the structure of worship, evangelism and moral witness takes on an identical formal structure across denominational churches. These exist in a manifold of appearances. However, what makes action common is that churches "actually have, can have, and ought to" worship, evangelize both internally and externally, and be a moral witness. These common acts sustain the posture that Christians "often have, can have and ought to have," as well as disclose a common loyalty to the center of meaning that grounds the Church's existence.

Gustafson's thematization of the Church as a community of common memory and understanding is anticipatory of the Church as a community of belief and action. Both disclose dimensions of cognitive, emotional and moral meaning as a shared center is grasped, in memory, as significant and as it functions in the formation and sustaining of members. The Church as a Community of Memory and Understanding and the Church as a Community of Belief and Action serves as framework for my reading of the Black Church as an Exilic Community. As an exilic community, the Exodus and exile are grasped as a counter-memory that makes the symbols, narratives, and ritual practices of the Black Church significant for its members.

Exodus, Exile and the Wilderness in the Black Church Experience

Subjective understanding (*verstehen)* of past events within the life of the Church constitutes the common memory of the Black Church as an exilic community. [185] Such understanding is grounded on African Americans' collective interpretation of their own activity in relationship to the Church's historical past. They relive past events in the

[185] Max Weber refers to this as "interpretive understanding." Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: , 1947), 88-112.

history of the Church and make them a part of their personal biographies. This is evident in the three exilic theorists I have chosen to analysis: Raboteau, Sanders, and Williams.

Raboteau highlights the Exodus event as a source of meaning for the lives of African American slaves during the antebellum period. According to him, African American interpretations and readings of the story undermined and de-centered white readings. Where the Puritans saw themselves as the New Israel inhabiting the promise land that is America, Raboteau claims that enslaved blacks reassigned the symbols of the narrative in their interpretations of the Exodus. America was not the promise land of milk and honey, rather, America was Egypt, and like Joseph who was sold into Egypt, and the children of Israel who were held captive, enslaved blacks were coerced onto American shores into bondage.

These enslaved blacks projected themselves into the Exodus event, as they saw in it a people within similar frames of experience, holding on to God's presence and promise of deliverance from slavery. In doing so, they "subjectively identified" with an event within the life of the Church. Raboteau explains:

> The special meaning that the story of Exodus held for slaves was explained by a slave named Polly to her mistress: "We poor creatures have need to believe in God, for if God Almighty will not be good to us some day; why were we born? When I heard his delivering his people from bondage I know it means the poor African." The story of Exodus contradicted the claim made by defenders of slavery that God intended Africans to be slaves. On the contrary, Exodus proved that slavery was against God's will and that slavery would end someday. The where and how remained hidden in divine providence, but the promise of deliverance was certain. Moreover, the notion that blacks were inferior to whites was disproved by Exodus, which taught the slaves that they, like the Israelites of old, were a special people, chose by God for deliverance.[186]

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[186] Albert J. Raboteau, *African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

The meanings disclosed became significant for the personal existence of enslaved blacks living under the American regime of slavery. Such an event constitutes the common memory of the Black Church and makes possible its common life as many slaves found the Exodus meaningful and internalized the meaning as a part of their own personal biography.[187] The meaning(s) of the Exodus as God's presence, deliverance and promise to an oppressed people are shared and integrates the lives of African Americans in community, thus providing the possibility of what Jerome A. Stone calls "*situational transcendence*" in moments of defeat and despair. In Stone's words, "Situational transcendence has been defined…as referring to resources of growth and renewal which are transcendent, that is, unexpected, uncontrollable, and superior in power and worth to the antecedent ingredients of the situation as perceived by an individual or group."[188]

Under the condition of slavery and Jim Crow, the Exodus story opened horizons of experience for enslaved blacks who anticipated and "expected" the in-breaking of God's victory over the oppressors and ushering in the era of freedom. Within such a framework, African Americans were aware of resources for growth and renewal, as Delores Williams suggests, when she says of the Black Church that:

> We know it when we see it: our daughters and sons rising up from death and addiction recovering and recovered; our mothers in poverty raising their children along, with God's help, making a way out of no way and succeeding; Harriet Tubman leading hundreds of slaves into freedom; Isabel, the former African-American slave, with God's help, transforming destiny to become Sojourner Truth, affirming the close relation between God and woman; Mary McLeod Bethune's college starting on a garbage heap with one dollar and fifty cents growing into a multimillion dollar

[187] This is another way of saying they were committed to the meanings of the story for their lives.
[188] Jerome A. Stone, *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy* of *Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 33.

enterprise; Rosa Parks sitting down so Martin Luther King, Jr., could stand up.[189]

Under this rubric (situational transcendence), enslaved blacks were aware of resources for growth and renewal, and in spite of being pushed up against the limit of their existence (their finitude), they found courage to act in crises centered moments.

This subjective understanding of the Exodus and the situational transcendence it fostered in the Black Church as an exilic community expresses itself in the African American prayer tradition. The prayers of Daniel Cocker and Amanda Smith disclose Exodus as constituting the personal biographies of African American slaves and are exemplary of a collective understanding of the event within the memory of a people. Cocker's prayer, which captures God's presence with Moses, and Moses as a leader of God's people, were composed at sea. Of the dangers and trying times ahead, Cocker utters: "May He that was with Moses in the wilderness be with us; then all will be well."[190] Again, out of tortuous labor and despair, Cocker prays:

> When will Jehovah hear our cries?
> When will the sun of freedom rise?
> When will for us a Moses stand,
> And bring us out from Pharaoh's hand?[191]

In Smith's prayer for guidance she utters:

> As the Lord led, I followed, and one day as I was praying and asking Him to teach me what to do I was impressed that I was to leave New York and go out. I did not know where, so it troubled me, and I asked the Lord for light, and He gave me these words: "Go, and I will go with you." The very words he gave to Moses, so many years ago.[192]

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[189] Williams, 205.
[190] James Melvin Washington, *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 22-23.
[191] Ibid., 23.
[192] Ibid., 71.

In both prayers, Moses is subjectively understood as a predecessor and biblical archetype that leads God's people to freedom. Moreover, one may notice how God's presence in Coker's first prayer and God's promise in Smith's prayer provide moments of situational transcendence for individuals and a people struggling to come to terms with the uncertainty and threats against their lives. For Smith, the narrative and the words of God in Exodus gave her courage to act within a particular experiential matrix.

Even when the Exodus is not explicitly mentioned, the event so constituted the consciousness of African Americans in their social interactions that its themes and imagery foreground the common memory of the Black Church in prayer, song and in worship. Consider the following prayer:

> Dear Lord we come to Thee,
> In quest of Liberty
> Thy mercy lend.
> We know no better way
> Than serve, obey and pray,
> Almighty Friend.
>
> Unsheathe Thy vengeful sword
> Cleave us a way, O Lord,
> As naught else can.
> Let no base foe oppress,
> Let no vain thought repress
> Our future usefulness
> To God and man.[193]

Essentially, the Exodus emerges as a "*significant symbol,*" that carries both symbolic and behavioral meaning. It is a conventional sign that constantly emerges within the Black Church as an exilic community, signifying God's presence and actions on behalf of oppressed people.

[193] Ibid., 131.

Sanders approaches the subjective understanding of the Black Church as an exilic community from the meaning context of the Holiness-Pentecostal Experience and deploys the Babylonian exile as the primary source of meaning for African American Christians in the United States. Not only does the Babylonian exile depend on forced deportation to which the "saints" may relate, given their experience in America, but, the exilic concept discloses fields of emotional and moral meaning that the 'saints' internalize as a part of their personal biographies as "outcasts" in a culture that rejects them based upon their race, sex and class.[194] She says:

> The saints in exile are religious communities of African Americans upon whom the North American Babylon has imposed alien status on account of their race, culture, class, and, in some cases, their sex. Moreover, they have further exiled themselves in significant ways by virtue of their code of morality and their peculiar liturgies of song, speech, and dance. Exile has functioned in this study alternately as descriptive and normative concept. It is descriptive of the experience of African American people under the conditions of oppression and alienation. Its normative meaning is most fully revealed in the expressions of personal and social ethics that come to light as the exilic community worships.[195]

Exilic communities are alternative communities in which the lives of African Americans are ordered within the structure of faith and belief. Sanders' description of these communities discloses them as communities of both trust and loyalty to God and to each other, in worship and in personal and social action. The personal commitments of the saints to God and to each other on the level of cognition, affections, and morality places them in contradistinction, in attitudes of disbelief and distrust, toward the "American Babylon." The following prayer is disclosive:

> 'Though sometimes I don't feel worthy,
> consecrate me. I'm saved, I'm not the same.

[194] Sanders, 63.
[195] Ibid., 143.

Though the world may under-rate me,
Dedicate me so I'll be wholly changed.
Lord, I'm willing. Here I stand.
Lord, I'm willing. Take my hand
And keep me by thy grace,
So I can run this race.[196]

Finally, Delores S.Williams turns to the story of Hagar as a source of meaning for African American women in the United States, whom, like Hagar, are triplely discriminated against by virtue to their race, class and gender. Williams upholds a principle of correlation for African American women and readers of the biblical text. As she sees it, African Americans should read the stories of the Bible to see where they belong in the text and discover where God meets them in their contemporary moment within the life-world.[197] In the end, the biblical text is significant and a source of subjective understanding on the grounds of God meeting Hagar in the wilderness and providing that which is essential for survival and quality of life. In such experiences Williams finds the faith of contemporary black women to be simultaneous with the Hagar text.[198] In addition to Hagar's wilderness story, Williams highlights the wilderness episodes of Jesus as a significant text in which oppressed black women can project themselves.[199]

In such episodes, Jesus is in the place where African American women live on a daily basis, namely, the wilderness. For Williams, Jesus functions as a significant symbol for African American women as one who struggled but survived through the struggle. Jesus' survival in the wilderness is displayed in his posture of persistence to

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[196]Genna Rae McNeil, Lord, I'm Willing, in Washington, 256.
[197] Williams, 1-2; 6-8
[198] Ibid., 3-12.
[199] Ibid., 161-177.

remain faithful to God and to "keep going" despite opposition. For Williams, it is the "resistance activity" of Jesus that makes him significant for African American women. She does not embrace the Cross as an adequate response to the suffering of African American women. The "salvific value" of Jesus for African American life is not in the Cross, on Williams' account.[200] To embrace the Cross is to accept and acquiesce to the surrogacy and suffering inflicted upon African American women. Hence, for Williams, the value of Jesus is within his ministry, in which "a life of resistance," and "survival strategies," are operative as forms of transcendence against structures of power that diminish African American female and male subjectivity.

In both accounts, the stories and symbols of Hagar and Jesus are subjective identifiers for black women due to their capacities to survive in the wilderness, fostering a quality of life, and resisting those forces that oppose them. In other words, the horizons of the narratives of Hagar and the wilderness episodes of Jesus open and speak to the horizons of contemporary African American women as resources for growth and renewal: for survival and quality of life.

As an exilic community, The Black Church occupies a horizon or perspective on world. In the exilic community, the stories that constitute that community's memory are significant for African American experience and contains their own horizon(s) of meaning. As enslaved blacks and African Americans encounter these stories and as the horizon of the stories engage contemporary blacks, a fusion of horizons takes place that opens the present horizon of contemporaries to possibilities of situated transcendence and

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[200] Ibid., 164.

self-understanding. The meanings of the Exodus in the Black Church are thus “called forth” and objectified in songs, prayers and liturgies.

Faith and Ethics in Exile: The Spirituals, the Bible, Worship and Prayer

According to Raboteau, the spirituals function as “provinces of meaning” in the world of everyday life of enslaved and contemporary African Americans.[201] Schutz refers to these provinces of meaning as “the world of the insane, the world of art, the world of dreams, the world of scientific contemplation.”[202] While Schutz uses the term “world,” it does not best describe what he attempts to foreground, namely, a specific time perspective and an experiencing of oneself within a form of subjectivity. To these forms Schutz gives the name, cognitive style.[203] The content of these fields of experience is grounded in a common source of meaning, namely, the Exodus event.

The Bible provides the spirituals with material content. It is an object that contains stories of God’s interaction with a particular people. The Bible is an objective representation that carries, discloses, and mediates particular meanings of the Exodus event that inform the ethos of the Black Church. That is, the Bible informs the cognitive, emotional (affective), and moral dimensions of the lives of Black Church members. It is the nurturer of “faith.” Within the Black Church there are commitments expressed on the

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[201] A key distinction is made here between life-world and world of everyday life. The life-world is the “paramount reality.” It is constituted by provinces of meaning. The world of everyday life is a province of meaning within the life-world. Further, Spirituals served as provinces of meaning in the everyday life of slaves.
[202] Alfred Schutz, *On the Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 253.
[203] Schutz, 252-256.

level of the affections and there are obligations performed on the level of moral experience. Sanders description of the chant of affirmation is worth quoting at length:

> The chant of affirmation is sung with attendant gestures of submission such as lifting up holy hands, shouting, and cries of "Hallelujah," "Glory," "Thank you, Jesus," or simply "Yes." Ethically speaking, there is a dialectic inherent in these signs of surrender; to say yes to God is to become empowered to say no to the world, especially to the powers of evil and deception that would hinder the believer from having peace with God.[204]

In his description of the common worship experiences of enslaved blacks, Raboteau also illustrates this point. These worship experiences are described as being centered on the presence of God. Within the space of worship, affective dimensions of experience are displayed as the divine presence enters "into this world." God is present through the words of the Bible and the faith of Black Church members, which transforms, heals and makes whole those who were broken under the social conditions of slavery. The divine embodies a black enslaved exilic community.[205]

Within the African American Prayer tradition, the following prayer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., also entails this tri-manifold meanings.

> O God, our Heavenly Father, we thank thee for this golden privilege to worship thee, the only true God of the universe. We come to thee today, grateful that thou hast kept us through the long night of the past and ushered us into the challenge of the present and the bright hope of the future. We are mindful, O God, that man cannot save himself, for man is not the measure of things and humanity is not God. Bound by our chains of sins and finiteness, we know we need a Savior. We thank thee, O God, for the spiritual nature of man. We are in nature but we live above nature. Help us never to let anybody or any condition pull us so low as to cause us to hate. Give us strength to love our enemies and to do good to those who despitefully use us and persecute us. We thank thee for they Church, founded upon thy Word, that challenges us to do more than sing and pray, but go out and work as though the very answer to our prayers depended on

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[204] Sanders, 67-68.
[205] Raboteau, 50.

> us and not upon thee. Then, finally, help us to realize that man was created to shine like stars and live on through all eternity. Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace, help us to walk together, pray together, sing together, and live together until that day when all God's children, Black, White, Red, and Yellow will rejoice in one common band of humanity in the kingdom of our Lord and of our God, we pray, Amen.

King's prayer reveals a tri-manifold of meanings: deep affectivities, sensibilities, and a vision of a moral community in which all human beings participate in inter-racial community or meaningful social interaction is expressed throughout. Within these manifolds, the continuity of the present Church, in terms of its common memory, belief, and common action is sustained.

King's use of words such as, "the only true God of the universe" "humanity is not God," and "man was created to shine," express a specific understanding of God as Creator. Words such as, "thou has kept us," "we need a Savior," "give us strength," "keep us" and "help us," reveal an understanding of God as Sustainer and Governor.[206] These understandings of God are already operative within the common memory of the Christian tradition. King's adaptations of these symbols connect black contemporaries of Christian faith with the past, and sustains the common memory of the Black Church as an exilic community.[207]

As I read King's prayer in relationship to Gustafson's account of Christian piety, King articulates these sensibilities: the sense of gratitude as expressed in the expressions "we thank thee," and "we come to thee today, grateful." The sense of repentence is expressed in the words: "thou hast kept us," "man cannot save himself," "we know we

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[206] These titles of God correspond to Gustafson's theocentric perspective as outlined in *Ethics from a Theological Perspective: Theology and Ethics* Vol 1.
[207] Victor Anderson takes up these senses in "The Smell of Life: A Pragmatic Theology of Religious Experience," Chapter 4 of *Creative Exchange: A Constructive Theology of African-American Religious Experience* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2008), 135-140.

need a Savior," "help us," and "give us strength" are all disclosive of a sense of dependence. A sense of repentance is expressed in the expression, "Bound by our chains of sins and finiteness." A sense of obligation towards others for the common good is expressed in the supplications for unity among the races. A sense of possibility is articulated within the same expression, along with "hope for the future."

These sensibilities reveal a deep piety that highlights specific forms of sociality between intra-human contacts and human contacts with the divine. King's prayer discloses a particular cognitive style and affective and moral dimensions of meaning that is not out of the ordinary. For instance, Sanders proposes that the liturgy of the Black church is formative of exilic ethics.[208] That is, liturgy is constituted by a specific cognitive style that has social effects. The liturgy structures both static and estatic forms of worship. In worship, the Bible is revered as a center of meaning. It provides the meaning structure to the identity of the Church as "saints," who are "saved, sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost," according to Sanders.[209]

The Bible occasions outlines and meanings for the life of holiness in its various dimensions of experience. Sanders' exilic liturgy focuses on the embodiment of the divine in believer's ecstatic and moral behaviors. This embodiment is expressed through particular forms of worship, such as the Holy Dance and Shouting, the chant of affirmation, as highlighted above, and welcoming. These forms of worship described by Sanders are ways of knowing which have their basis in both the Bible and African religious traditions.

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[208] Sanders, 58.
[209] Ibid., 58

As an exilic community, the Black Church is a community of embodiment. Within its common life and common act of worship, the Bible serves as a medium through which believers may project themselves into the narratives of the Exodus, Exile and Hagar. As an exilic community then, its ethos, memory and common life, is structured and grounded in the Bible. Sanders has provided an adequate description of members of the Black Church as an exilic community as, when she refers to them as "a people of the book."[210]

To refer to the Bible as an objective marker and province of meaning that informs the ethos of the Black Church does not mean that there are static and unchanging aspects of the community. The ethos of the Black Church is constantly fluctuating in relationship to shifting contemporary meaning contexts in which the exilic community finds itself. It is here where the processes of interpretation foregrounded in the last chapter are operative. At times the contributions of the Bible may need to be re-examined or even rejected in light of the fluctuating contexts of meaning.[211] Cheryl Sanders and Delores Williams point to the deeply sedimented patriarchal practices grounded in scripture in mainline denominations concerning the issue of women in ministry as a particular display, in which cultural norms from Biblical narratives were internalized within the common memory of the Black Church. In such cases, interpretation is crucial. The cultural norms on gender roles need re-examining, and in this case, as Sanders and Williams proclaim, must be rejected given the contemporary meaning context of gender equality.

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[210] Ibid., 138.
[211] I highlighted this in chapter three under the discussion of selective retrieval.

Summary

I have been exploring two additional thematizations of the Church in general, namely, the Church as a Community of Memory and the Church as a Community of Belief and action. As I have examined the exilic image of the Black Church, I have sought to disclose these taken for granted themes operative within the community, highlighting its tradition of prayer, the Bible, and its primary narratives of Exodus, Exile, Jesus and Hagar. While these narratives are operative within the memory of the Black Church, Exodus, more than any other event in its life, is one of remembrance and formative of a nation. It is an event held within internal time consciousness, constituted by the modes of retention and protention as it is continuously recalled and rehearsed as a framework for grasping the African American religious experience in the United States.

The process of subjective understanding and remembering are social processes that ground all communities and institutions. What distinguishes the Black Church as an exilic community from its counterparts is the perspective and particularity on what is remembered, understood, and made a part of the living present in the lives of its members. Exodus and Exile are "objective expressions" that constitute the ethos and faith of the Black Church. These events are centers of meaning that are internalized within the life of that community and institution. The exilic community remembers, understands, and gives contemporary expression to Exodus and Exile in personal and common life. The saints, as Sanders refers to them, are loyal to the Black Church, and to the principles that govern their common life together. Common acts of worship, prayer, evangelism, and moral witness are grasped within the framework of their commitment to the principles that govern Black Church life.

The Black Church as an exilic community is committed to God and to Jesus Christ, with the narratives of Exodus and Exile functioning as unique sources of meaning. Even Jesus Christ is grasped within the frame of these narratives. Within the Black Church, Jesus is an exile within the society in which he walked, talked and performed his ministry. The meaning significance of events such as the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples is grasped within the framework of Exile. That is, Jesus and his disciples were an exilic/separate community within a hostile world. Their last meal together was conducted in exile from the very world they inhabited, but yet, opposed them.

Black Christians under the exilic image find in Exodus and Exile the basis of their common life. They commit themselves to the Church as an exilic community and to God who is at the center of both Exodus and Exile. Their commitment to God and to the Black Church is a socially reflexive faith grounded in a counter memory that informs their common acts. The Black Church as an Exilic Community is both a Community of Common Memory (Counter-Memory) and a Community of Faith.

The meanings of the Exodus narrative, as an object of memory, is constituted by acts of imagination, in which Black Church members reconstitue and retypify their experience of the life world. Hence, the horizon of experience of Black Church members may be said to be contemporaneous with the children of Israel. The Exodus narrative is thus a meaning structure deeply sedimented in the experience of the Black Church as an exilic community.

Conclusion: Can These Bones Live? The Significance of This Study

This project is birthed out of two narratives. The first is a biblical narrative familiar to many Black Church members, namely, the Valley of Dry Bones located in the thirty-seventh chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. The second narrative is my own biography and my experiences with one of the most significant and powerful social entity's that gives shape and direction to African American life: the Black Church. The book of Ezekiel is a book of four visions of the prophet Ezekiel. His third vision, which is of importance here, is of the skeletons, the bones of Israel's defeated army. As Ezekiel scanned the battlefield of Mesopotamia, within his gaze, as far as he could see were many bones. The voice of God asked him: "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel responded: "Lord, you know." Some suggest that the bones in Ezekiel's vision are a reference to the fallen army of Israel. Others regard the vision as inclusive of Israel's army and the entire house of Israel scattered throughout the empire. Then, miraculously, Ezekiel sees the dry bones in the valley come together, erected in full bodies, life is breathed into them, and the army of Israel is restored to new life.

Ezekiel's vision informs the significance of this project on the Black Church. I started out with a negative disposition toward the Black Church as I and many of my contemporaries experienced it. I began the study with specific concerns and suspicions. I judged the Black Church to be an institution that does more harm than good.   I saw the Black Church as a center of shame and guilt, a center of exploitation and broken promises. I found it and its interpretations of the Bible and Christian experience to be radically out of sync with what I came to know the real world to be empirically and existentially for many African Americans. I saw the Black Church as "Fallen", a valley

of dry bones. These images were grounded in a deep existential angst and rooted in a pessimistic outlook on what the Black Church offers for African American life.

I viewed the Black Church as "fallen," but only because I first viewed it as a community of "Truth", and a "Family". The Black Church was for me a center of comfort and assurance, of trustfulness, safety and protection; it was a center of salvation and redemption, and a center of wholeness and health. These images of the Black Church are strictly theological and, for me, taken-for-granted until experiences of ministerial sexual and fiscal misconduct and Hurricane Katrina called into question these taken-for-granted theological understandings, meanings, and relevances of the Black Church in my experience. Such experiences as these called into question, not only for me, but also for many of my contemporaries our trust, sense of safety and protection that we gave to the Black Church.

This "I", self, is not the maker of meaning, for such a view would lead only to a whirlwind of solipsism by which to view the meaning and significance of the Black Church. Rather, in this study, I bracketed my own suspicions in order to see new possibilities for understanding and appreciating the Black Church by disclosing layers of meanings that were shielded from me by my own experiences and my own subjectivity. I had to put into question my understanding of the Black Church as a " Fallen" community and a community of "Truth".

In this dissertation I have sought to bring to clarity layers of meaning in our understanding of the Black Church that for too many have been forgotten, whose meanings have recededed far into the background of consciousness and rendered hidden in contemporary significance. However, while pursuing this study the Black Church

came alive through phenomenological analysis as a powerful institution in American society that is at once grasped categorically as the "Black Church" and presented from a variety of aspects or modalities of its being that include: The Black Church as an All Comprehending Institution, The Black Church as a Surrogate World, The Black Church as a Sacred Cosmos, a Refuge, and an Exilic Community. By bracketing the natural attitude and the two graspings under which I understood the Black Church as a fallen community and a community of truth, deep, rich complexities of that institution emerged that had become taken-for-granted. Because of the taken-for-granted complexity that constitutes the being of the Black Church, I pursued this study along phenomenological lines in the interest of understanding and appreciating that institution within African American experience.

I subjected the Black Church to several lines of inquiry, testing it within multiple layers and categories of meaning that, drawing on the work of Robert Sokolowski, include: identity in manifolds or manifestations, presence and absence, and a whole and its parts. Within the framework of interpretive sociology, I moved to more specific levels that turned to thematizations of the Church in general and the Black Church in particular as a Natural and Human community, a Community of Language, Interpretation, Memory and Understanding, and a Community of Belief and Action.

I deployed these categories in relation to categorical profiles of the Black Church as an "All Comprehensive Community", "a Surrogate World", and "a Sacred Cosmos". The Black Church is also taken into view not only under these profiles but its aspects as a community of refuge and exile.

My discovery was one of deep appreciation and affirmation of the profiles and aspects of the Black Church. However, the great insight that I discovered was that while any one of the profiles of the Black Church (as an all comprehensive community, surrogate world and sacred cosmos) and their aspects (refuge and exile) may evoke a sense of appreciation and affirmation of the Black Church, its complexity or multiple layers of meanings "call forth" meanings deeply sedimented and anticipated that resists simple reductivisms, over determinations, and oversimplifications to any one of its aspects, profiles, manifolds and parts.

In parsing out the profiles and aspects of the Black Church, the "about which" the discourse turned was not simply that the Black Church as a Natural and Human Community of embodiment that fulfills natural and human needs, but rather, if our categorial statements about the Black Church as a Comprehensive Community, a Surrogate World, a Sacred Cosmos, a Refuge, and an Exilic Community are to have meaning, they must connect to the sufferings and strifes of peoples. For, it is in their sufferings that members of the Black Church and black communities ask, "Can These Bones Live?"

I parsed out processes internal to the Black Church, such as language and interpretation, and memory and understanding, to retrieve from its memory and call forth pictures that instill hope. Under its profiles and aspects as refuge and exile, the Black Church finds relevance in visions and pictures that clarify for African Americans social conditions of poverty, sickness, disease, unemployment, black on black violence, drug addiction, incarceration, gender inequality, and sexual difference that mark black reality. Through the images of the Black Church, meaning structures, contexts of meaning and

established meanings about contemporary African American life are placed within frameworks of a power that provides possibilities against senses of fatedness and futility.

As a Refuge and as an Exilic community, the Black Church connects people to the pictures of possibility and transcendence from the cares of daily life. Images of refuge and exile disclose the internal logic of that institution as intermediaries of transcendence, which is played out in a host of examples. Singing is a tradition in the Black Church in which all members may affectively express themselves. It places singers and the hearers within a context of established meanings in which transcendence is anticipated and claimed. Consider the lyrics from the gospel song, "What Shall I Do?", performed by James Cleveland and the Southern California Community Choir.

> What shall I do? What step should I take?
> What move should I make, Oh Lord, What shall I do?
>
> I'm going to wait, For an answer from you
> I have nothing but you
> Oh Lord I'm going to wait
>
> I know He'll come through, with a blessing for me,
> Lord set my soul free
> OH LORD, I know He'll come through.[212]

In this song, transcendence constitutes a basic logic in the Black Church (dry bones). These bones must live for the Black Church to remain meaningful and relevant for African American life. Hence, transcendence becomes a norm that guides the language, interpretations, beliefs and actions of Black Church members.

When referring to the Black Church as community of language and interpretation, the use of the word "black" already sets a limiting condition for understanding the

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[212] Reverend James Cleveland and the Southern California Community Choir. "What Shall I Do?" Having Church. Savoy Gospel, 1990.

Church within a context defined by racism and racial denominationalism. While these relations are objectively given in the institutional understanding of the Black Church, subjectively the Black Church is constituted by relationship of community: a community of thought, common worship and common affirmations. However, the Black Church is also understood rationally insofar it is constituted a community of belief and morally as it is constituted as a community of action. Finally, to substantiate these thematizations in concrete terms, I turned illustratively to sermons and prayers constitutive of the Black Church Preaching and Prayer Traditions.

Given the ruptures that Hurricane Katrina and other social crises held for me and many of my contemporaries about the efficacy of the Black Church to fulfill its images, the question remains whether the images of the Black Church can be reclaimed, not only in contemporary moments of crises, but also in our postmodern moment. The answer to its reclamations will depend on whether the Black Church can call forth out of its taken for granted stock of knowledge the fundamental internal logic that runs as a common thread throughout its profiles, aspects, and displays, namely, the Black Church as an institution of transcendence.

As I analyze the Black Church as a refuge community within the processes of Language and Interpretation, a common thread is revealed that grounds the Black Church as Refuge in its historical meaning. Through language and interpretation, the Black Church paints meaningful pictures and visions of transformation, unity and empowerment. Historically, it was a community concerned with freedom. However, freedom is an "end" condition that requires "means." Hence, deliverance from some x is the pre-condition for freedom.

In the Black Church, the Bible is a storehouse of narratives that emphasize transcendence in its moments of deliverance and freedom. The sermon "Telling the Good News to the Weak and Defeated" by J. Alfred Smith on the encounter of Jesus with the woman from Samaria is illustrative here. Here is a woman that is quadruplely discriminated against along religious and gender lines. She is described as the lowest of people, the least of these, the "disinherited" in Howard Thurman's language. Jesus stops to rest at Jacobs Well and has an encounter with this woman. He issues a simple request, to "give me to drink." She is surprised by Jesus' request. How is it that Jesus, a Jewish male, an elite, could associate with this outcast, who is also a woman? Jesus reveals himself to the woman and promises "living water" that satisfies more than ones earthly thirsts and desires. The woman departs, leaving her water jar and enters into the town bearing witness to people.

Smith brings this message home to contemporary hearers when he says:

> The response that this woman made to Jesus' self-revelation as Messiah is one we must remember. Her response made her do two things. She left her heavy water pots. No longer did she carry the heavy water pots of guilt and self-rejection. No longer were her stops weighted by the heavy water pots of sin. Now she had replaced guilt with the living water of joy and self-acceptance. Now, instead of carrying on her head the heavy water pots of sensuality; she carried within her heart the living water of spirituality.[213]

The woman's experience with Jesus was one of transcendence in which deliverance and freedom constitute its moments. She left her water jar. She was released from guilt, shame and the evaluations of her personhood by her contemporaries. Now, it did not matter that she was considered the lowest of society. She had a new

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[213] J. Alfred Smith, "Telling the Good News to the Weak and Defeated," in *For the Facing of This Hour: A Call to Action* (Eglin, IL: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1981), 40.

understanding of her personhood as "a little talk with Jesus" made things right. Through his words and interpretation of the woman as "significant other" she was delivered from psychosocial signifiers that weighed down her conscious. She could stand up and say, "I aint no mammy," I am a woman. I "aint" no boy, I am a man. I am somebody, and I am a child of the King. Through language and interpretation, the Black Church as a refuge community delineates visions and pictures that "the world didn't give and the world cannot take away," a message often heard and sung in Black churches. Its pictures are of transcendence, deliverance and freedom for the least advantaged. Hence, the refuge image is a signifier of salvation. Smith's celebratory move is worth quoting on this point:

> Come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did. The New Testament Greek for this saying is, "Come see a man who understands me in a way no one else understands me." He understands me because He is able to enter our pain. He understands me because His shoulders are broad enough to carry our burdens until our strength is sufficient to shoulder them ourselves. When the storms of life are raging and our lives are being dashed upon ragged and jagged rocks, the God who understands me will be there to console and caress me.[214]

Refuge signifies a "safe place from" some threat to ones existence. Hence, it shares many aspects of "home." Our homes are a location of the reality, "lived space." For most of us, our homes are "spaces" in which we feel protected, as well as having a sense of security and a sense of "self." Home is a space of self-expression.

The Black Church as a refuge community is a lived space in which African Americans gather a sense of self-identity, and a space where they are encouraged by one another through words and interpretations of "the Word." They sing:

> Jesus, Jesus, I love calling Your name.
> Jesus, Jesus, everyday Your name is the same.

[214] Ibid., 40.

> When the troubles surround me,
> and I didn't have to despair;
> Lord, You told me that You'd be right there.
> Seems like all my problems, they have just begun;
> but I'm not gonna worry about it no more, You've already won.
>
> I remember the time when I felt so all alone,
> when I needed You, Jesus, all I had to do was call.
> I called You in the morning,
> I called You late at night,
> but when I went on my knees and called You, Lord,
> You made everything alright.[215]

This song discloses that if the language of the Black Church and the interpretations of its symbols are to have meaning and relevance for African Americans, they must connect to their moments of doubt, despair, troubles, heartache, loneliness, and pleadings. They love to call the name Jesus, because in him, they find a Refuge.

Through Language and Interpretation, the Black Church as a refuge community has the capacity to shape African American experience in the 21st century. The spaces inhabited by many contemporary African Americans evoke a social sense of inferiority, hostility, vulnerability, anarchy, despair and hopelessness. This was the case in Katrina and is the case in many inner city African American neighborhoods, signified as ghettos. Since lived space shapes human experience of that space, many African Americans are in danger of falling victim to the social spaces they inhabit.

To prevent these existentials from becoming the mode of existence, African Americans find refuge (home) in the Black Church. The sense of vulnerability and inferiority in the lived space of society is combated with the senses of affirmation and assurance within the lived space of the Black Church. The senses of nothingness and

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[215] Shirley Caesar, "Jesus I Love Calling Your Name." Her Very Best. Epic USA, 1991.

worthlessness in the world gives way to the attainment of status and the sense of "somebodiness" within the confines of the Black Church, as all are interpreted under the parenthood of God.

Hence, transcendence and its modes of deliverance and freedom are the clue to the meaning and significance of the refuge image of the Black Church. Members of the Church sing the gospel song "Walk Around Heaven All Day":

> One of these mornings won't be very long
> You will look for me and I'll be gone
> I'm going to a place where I'll have nothing, nothing to do
> But just walk around, walk around heaven all day
>
> When I get to heaven I'm gonna sing and shout
> Nobody will be able to put me out
> My mother will be waiting
> And my father, too
> And we'll just walk around, walk around heaven all day
>
> Dear lord above don't you hear me praying
> Walk right by my side
> Hold my hand when my way gets a little cloudy
> I need you, I need you to be my guide
>
> Every day will be Sunday, my lord
> Sabbath will have no end
> And we'll do nothing but sing and praise him
> Then he'll say well done
> And my race, my race will be won
> And I'll walk around, walk around heaven all day.
>
> Walk around heaven.
>
> I'll just walk around heaven all day.[216]

The song tells the story of our taken for granted daily presence in the world with our contemporaries. However, it discloses a vision of a home, where the cares of this life

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[216] The Mighty Clouds of Joy, "Walk Around Heaven All Day" Memory Lane: The Best of the Mighty Clouds of Joy, Recordings from 1960-1993, Sony 1993.

cease to be a concern. We will be free to be and reunite with significant predecessors. It then shifts back out of the vision to the existential plight of need of deliverance and freedom, and a need of a presence to walk with me, and carry me when I cannot walk any further. In this sense, deliverance and freedom are both existential and eschatological.

By analyzing memory (processes of understanding and reliving) and self-conscious commitment (belief and action) I have attempted to foreground a pattern that governs the Black Church as an exilic community. The same pattern governs the Black Church under the refuge image, namely, the Black Church as a community that discloses meaningful pictures of transcendence. While they are narratives of capture, enslavement and defeat, the Exodus and Exile are also pictures and visions of triumph over tragedy, hope for a better day over despair and fatedness, a sense of being cared for in a world that could care less about the fulfillment and flourishing of ones subjectivity, and finally, the sense of being at home in a space in which one is regulated as an outcast. As an exilic community blacks could truly say, “it does not matter what they do,” and “it does not matter what they say,” “we have each other,” and we have a God that will lead us over every mountain, through every valley, and through the darkness of wilderness.

Through the Exodus narrative blacks internalized meanings and understandings that provided moments of transcendence over despair. They internalized a “faith” that gave them strength to march and protest against a society that diminished their human subjectivity. I am reminded of the film “The Long Walk Home” (1990), starring Sissy Spacek and Whoopie Goldberg. Spacek plays as Miriam Thompson, a white woman a part of the social elite class of American society of the mid 1950’s. Goldberg plays the role of Odessa Cotter, an African American woman who works as the housekeeper for

the Thompsons. The relationship between Thompson and Cotter is situated within a society in which Cotter is a social outcast, an exile, who would rather walk to work than ride and sit at the back of the bus. Even if she had the resources to ride the bus, and even if it is safe to ride the bus, Cotter refused to do so in light of the meanings signified upon blacks that do. As an exile, she would rather take the long tortuous walk to work and back home.

The most powerful scene of what the Black Church as an exilic community means is orchestrated as the movie closes. Blacks were gathering for a meeting concerning the bus boycotts. A constituency of white males, the power elites, enters the scene to reveal the "misdeeds" of Miriam Thompson to her husband Norman, as she had been transporting blacks to the meetings and transporting Odessa to work. Tunker Thompson, Norman's younger brother confronts Miriam to let her know that she has lost and her cause was in vain. She tells him to go to hell. He then slaps his sister and law and is later knocked to the ground by a right hook from his older brother Norman. The other white male elites confronted the black women gathering for the meeting with racial slurs and messages informing them to "go back to where you came from." Amid the attacks upon their subjectivity, the women stood there, faced their attackers and began to sing the internalized messages they had read about and heard preached. They sang:

> I'm going through,
> I'm going through,
> I'll pay the price,
> Whatever others do,
> I'll take the way of the Lord's despised few,
> I started with Jesus, and I'm going through.[217]

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[217] George Fenton and Herbert Buffman composers, "I'm Going Through." The Long Walk Home Soundtrack. Varese Sarabande, 1991.

In this song the singers are conveying the act of prayer, disclosing an essential quality that is present within the prayer tradition of the Black Church and within the Exodus narrative that informs its memory, namely, transcendence. While the social action of "exiles" may take on the form of resistance, the content of the exilic experience is transcendence. Without transcendence, the Black Church as an exilic community loses meaning, significance and relevance.

Reclamation of these potent images of the Black Church may be possible when the contemporary Black Church, in the flux of social change, understands and appreciates itself to be a natural and human community whose care for the poor, destitute, uneducated, unemployed and those castigated by the dominant culture because of their race, ethnicity, sexual preferences, and class, are refracted through its power as a community of language and interpretation, common memory and understanding, belief and action. Such thematizations of the Black Church are not only disclosive of basic structures of meaning and relevance that constitute the Black Church as an institution only, but are bearers of the basic internal salvific logic that speaks not only to predecessors and contemporaries, but most importantly to successors. Can these Bones Live?

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