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Teaching the Black Christian Story and the Revival of African-American Religious Education
within Black Pentecostal Movement:

Reintegrating the History of African Americans’ Struggle for Liberation into Efforts to Nurture
Black Pentecostal Spirituality

Introduction

From the start of the era of the forced migration of Africans to the North American continent, there have been diverse expressions of the Christian religious experiences amongst the African-American community. Out of these spiritual experiences and social dynamics, many denominations emerged within the African-American community, one branch that emerges in the early 20th century from the Black Christian experience is the Pentecostal movement. This experience preserves the expression of mind, body, soul, and incorporates music. These forms of expression directly mirror many African spiritual experiences. Within the African-American Pentecostal denominations, there has been a particular emphasis on living a spiritual life and the manifestation of God through song, speaking in known and unknown tongues, dance, and the preached word. Due to a clear need to overcome the oppressions that life brought Black American's. The Pentecostal interpretation of Black Christianity focuses on liberation from this world through a strong emphasis on the "sweet by and by"¹ and ensuring living a holy lifestyle on earth to ensure entry into the heavenly chorus.

In the Black Pentecostal church today, there is still a strong emphasis of the afterlife, sometimes a strong prosperity message, but other times overlooking the historical and social justice aspects from which the black church draws its roots. There is a robust social justice strand throughout the history of the Black Pentecostal community and its involvement in the history of the Black church in America. Therefore, the elevation of this steep history and theology of

¹ Bennett, S. F. B. S. F., Waukegon Academy, University of Michigan, & Rush Medical College. (n.d.). In the Sweet By and By. Retrieved from https://hymnary.org/text/theres_a_land_that_is_fairer_than_day_an

liberation must be changed when religiously educating within the Black Pentecostal movement. Many questions that are raised within the walls of the modern Black church, "once the singing, dancing, shouting is over, and we have a spirituality to help us through personal tests and trials, what practical tools do we have to help navigate the trails in our personal lives, home, and community? How do we address poverty and the ever-growing achievement gap between African-Americans and white Americans? Where is the church's place in addressing the violence in our community?" Of course, there is not a vast division between personal and communal spirituality in every Pentecostal church. There are many churches seeking ways to adjust to the ever-changing social realities of the twenty-first century. Enough Pentecostal communities are equipping their members to address pressing social issues in the light of Christian faith, but the misconception in the media often overlooks these realities. As it is stated in Afro-Pentecostalism," despite being the fastest-growing segments of the Black Church, it does not receive the critical attention that it deserves"².

The Black Pentecostal experience is spiritual, vibrant, and expressive through the use of song, dance, story, and the preached word from the pulpit. This tradition has been carried forward from its origins with the "ring shout," the religious ritual first practiced by African slaves in North America and the Caribbean islands, and during which worshippers move in a circle while shuffling and stomping their feet and clapping their hands. The average Pentecostal would not make the connection of the African expressions that influenced the worship experience during the time of slavery. The connections to the past have become justified through a literal interpretation of texts from the Bible. It is vitally important to recognize that within the

² Alexander, Estrela. Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism. IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011.

Black Pentecostal religious, educational tradition, there is a lack of a full and clear explanation of the origins of its spirituality in connection to the Black experience in America. Estrela Alexander states, "African spirituality contributed a foundational worldview that opened Pentecostal believers up to encounters with the Spirit as the life-sustaining source of their spiritual and social liberation."³ Pentecostal spirituality has been separated from its historical origins and is now associated exclusively with the Bible. This problem persists because of the unique social and cultural circumstances that have shaped Black Pentecostal spirituality and why in the times of the founding of this denomination that the separation may have been synonymous to survival in a divided racial nation.

The thesis of this theological reflection is to insist on the reunification of African American religious education, historical context, and the Black spiritual Pentecostal experience. Religious educators must teach the Black Christian story in a way that re-engages the Black community at large so that the story can become a significant resource for the empowerment of African American people today. In the word of the late Maya Angelou, "if you do not know where you have come from, you do not know where you are going."

This History of Religious Education & Black Pentecostalism

Indeed, one could understand why black Pentecostalism may have moved away from the emphasis of the historical culture due to the horrific history of chattel slavery because they were more concerned about healing and liberation of the soul. The holiness movement was carved out as a space to provide Black people a space to be expressive and find the glimmer of hope in

³ Alexander, Estrela. *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*. IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011. Kindle Location 171

times of traumatic circumstances. Historically, there was a strong emphasis on living a holy lifestyle and the evidence of the Holy Spirit. The research on African American Christian Religious Education before the 1880's was buried within the systematic construction of the history of a "white-washed" religious education. The days of the trans-Atlantic slavery system brought thousands of Africans into the United States, where the Christian religion was misused and used as a fixture of oppression in such a complicated system. However, the Black experience caused Black people to realize the gospel message, and that liberation was also a part of the Christian message. Therefore, the religious system that the Africans adopted had begun to take shape over the years; as a result, the formation of the understanding of the African-American Christian experience emerged. According to Anne Pinn, "enslaved Africans recognized the contradiction between word and deed, and those who still embraced the Christian tradition moved beyond falsehood and hypocrisy. They made the Gospel of Christ a liberating religious experience by dropping the message of docility and instead of understanding the Christian life as a free existence. Those enslaved Africans who sought to shape the Christian faith in ways that responded to their existential condition and spiritual needs developed what is known as the invisible institution."⁴ Through the adoption of liberation theology, they began to separate themselves from the bondage of the "slave religion," and many ways changed the dynamics of the church at large in America.

African American Pentecostalism did not just come from conservative white spiritual leaders, but deeply rooted expressions of Black spirituality from the African continent itself. Anne Pinn stated, "the roots of African American Pentecostalism draw from the deep wells of

⁴ Pinn, Anne. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

African spirituality, slave religion, the independent black churches that came out of reconstruction and the nineteenth-century black Holiness movement that unfolded among free Methodists and Baptist.⁵" The other societal circumstance that has shaped the religious education of the Black Pentecostal church was the increased racial division from White Pentecostal communities. The struggle of the Black holiness movement was its diverse racial following, therefore keeping a strong emphasis on the literal interpretation of the bible allowed for a bigger tent. Over time, it was clear that the issues of the black community had to be addressed from the pulpit; therefore, over time, their White counterparts could not fathom being led by Black leaders. The appropriation of the Pentecostal movement has always been debated, but the truth is quite clear that the spiritual expressions are deeply rooted within African spirituality. Anne Pinn writes, "the racial birthright of American Pentecostalism has long been hotly contested among African American and white Pentecostal leaders and scholars, who place its beginning variably at either New Year's Day 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, under the white evangelist Charles Fox Parham, or April 1906 in Los Angeles under the leadership of African American William Joseph Seymour.⁶" Many scholars frequently elevated Parham's voice, therefore delegitimizing of the African-American voice in the Pentecostalism movement in the academy. It is unfortunate how Parham's racial insensitivity toward the interracial environment of the Azusa Street revival had handicapped the Black Pentecostal church to claim the start of a movement that was directly birth out of the reconstruction post-slavery. By solely contributing to the history of American Pentecostalism to Parham is a direct cultural appropriation and underlying racism. This division still contributes to the avoidance of the substantiation and

⁵ Pinn, Anne. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. Loc 115

⁶ Pinn, Anne. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. Loc. 123

incorporation of the history of African-American Pentecostalism within the Pentecostal religious educational curriculum.

However, the most influential form of legitimation is through the religious education curriculum that has been birth by the African-American community. In many ways, it is the most complex and yet powerful movements over the centuries. Many of the great Black minds and Black thinkers of our time in American history started as theologians and religious educators. Before the modern-era, African American Christian religious education was uncategorized in whatever forms it was expressed. It was through the initial work of Grant Shockley in 1974 that highlighted and opened up the conversation about the history of Black religious education curriculum. According to Hill (Religious Education, pg.455), "moreover, his research contributed to the development of AACRE as an academic discipline. His research brought to the attention of theological educators, Black and White, the relevance of the academic study of African American religion and education.⁷" While the culmination of the religious education curriculum of the African American Pentecostal church has not occurred, there is a strong realization that the development of a space for the scholarship of the Afro-Pentecostalism in the religious education space is necessary for the academy.

There is the biblical religious education within the Black Pentecostal church, but there seems to be the removal of the Black cultural perspective in many strands of holiness and Pentecostal movements. In the modern era, there seems to be a strong resurgence of the need to

⁷ Hill, Kenneth. Religious Education in the African American Tradition A Comprehensive Introduction. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007. pg.455

reintegrate the history of the African-American struggle for liberation into the efforts to be a part of nurturing Black Pentecostal spirituality.

The Loss of the Story

Reclaiming the Black Christian story within Black Pentecostal spaces will require the acceptance of the historical connections to the cultural expression of the storytelling from the past to the present. The void that must be addressed by Pentecostal religious educators is the loss of story and history of the black spiritual experience. According to Dr. Wimberly (Soul Stories. pg.24), "story-linking has cultural roots, it is not always incorporated to any great extent in contemporary African American Christian education contexts. Christian education must offer liberating wisdom, and hope-building vocation is one that offers a process that has at its center our lived stories. Such a process should make possible our arriving at insights, intelligent choices, and making ethical decisions-wise decisions about what is right to do to promote and sustain liberation for ourselves and others. The process should also enable us to arrive at insights, discerning choices, and make the kinds of ethical decisions that lead to our involvement in a vocation that centers on and brings a sense of hope in what often seems to be hopeless life situations."⁸ Many congregants are merely looking for the spiritual experience that integrates and validates the black experience. This incorporation within the religious education of our youth and adults alike will allow the spiritual experience to be meaningful and enlightening.

⁸ Wimberly, Anne. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005. pg.24

For African-American Pentecostalism, straying away from the biblical text can sometimes be a challenge because of the strong emphasis on the stories of the bible. According to Anne Wimberly (Soul Stories. pg.25), "the intent of Christian education for liberating wisdom that leads to liberation and hope-building vocation is to place us in touch with our African American forebears' faith and their experience of God's action in their liberating wisdom and hope-building vocation. Linking with our forebears' story helps to inspire us and to foster our commitment to continue on the Christian faith walk. This linkage also promotes our openness and expectation to be continually formed and informed by the Story of God and the good news of Jesus Christ."⁹ There is a depth of a spiritual experience that through the expression of the Black experience that could connect the individual to be closer to the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the biblical text of Acts 2:1, "when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."¹⁰ The essence of this scripture is the essence of the immersion experience of the African-American Pentecostal movement. The Azusa street experience was multicultural, but there was a strong push back on having a black leader over such a multi-racial and multicultural movement. This movement was addressing the spiritual and economic conditions and a need for salvation and hope. In order to truly understand the rise of the Pentecostalism movement within the black community, there must be a revisiting of spiritual and economic conditions of the late nineteenth century. Anne Pinn (Fortress Kindle Loc. 1212-1214) expresses that "anxiety over the spiritual condition of the United States dominated the thought of many evangelists during the late nineteenth century."¹¹ For example, there are individuals such

⁹ Wimberly, Anne. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005. pg.25

¹⁰ Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version, American Bible Society, 2010.

¹¹ Wimberly, Anne. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005. Loc .1214-1215

as Charles Price Jones, a minister who preached to enslaved Africans during the 1800s, he promoted a sense of spiritual transformation that linked "salvation to the formation of character, which he envisioned as a more important foundation of society than family, politics, economic, or even the church (Sanders. Saints in Exile).¹²"

The loss of story of the Black Pentecostal story has pitted this denomination as part of the evangelical movement, but its roots are one of the human rights and civil rights track. The true story of the Black Pentecostal church is to have spiritual enlightenment and transformation in order to go and be the change in the world that is needed.

From the very early days of the emergence of the Black Pentecostal movement, in both proclaiming the spoken word, in deed through acts of social justice, and service to the community was very much a part of worship. Embedded within the movement is the belief in collective community building. Within the Black Pentecostal movement, there was strong preaching about the unconditional love of Christ, social change, and equality. The strength of a hopeful message was needed during the time of a building up of the black community. Despite the denominational differences of the Baptist, Methodist, AME, AME Zion, there was always a robust uniting understanding that the Black community had to stand up for what was right. Though there were some segments of the Black Pentecostal church that believed that the will of God ultimately governed politics; as a result, the growing movement of the Pentecostal church seemed to be moving away from the traditional Black social justice movement to focus on holy living in order to live life again in heaven. In the present day, the Black church has become focused on the prosperity gospel and very little acknowledgment of the Black Christian story within the religious education of their constituents. Historically, the Black church and the Black

¹² Sanders, Cheryl. Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture.

minister was the prophetic voice for hope and justice toward systematic oppression. “Among the seven historic black denominations, the Black Pentecostals have a different historical origin. Unlike black Methodists and Baptists, they trace their origins not to white denominations, but to a movement initiated and led by Black ministers. Also, unlike Black Methodists and Baptists, these Black Pentecostals began not as a separatist movement, but as a part of a distinctly interracial movement from which whites subsequently withdrew (The Black Church. Kindle Edition. Location 1592).¹³” Therefore, if there is to be a strong emphasis on Black liberation within the church community, the African American Pentecostal community can directly claim that their denomination was created as a result of liberation and freedom of expression.

African-American Social Thought and Action

It cannot be denied that as the African-American community rose out of the period of reconstruction to the present that social thought and action has become deeply embedded into the fabric of the DNA of American. The expression of social action and thought has focused on social justice, political change, and group empowerment in order to move America to live up to its constitutional standards as a democratic society. These expressions were birthed from the Black church, where many organizing meetings and even the creation of schools where political thought, policy, and protesting activity was created. In the present-day Black Pentecostal church, there appears to be a less obvious education movement and minimal social action and expression concerning social welfare within the context of the church. In comparison to the black Baptists, AME, AME Zion denominations (while there are exceptions), historically you will rarely find a Black Pentecostal leader of a social justice movement. In many respects, the present-day black

¹³ Lincoln & Mamiya. The Black Church in the African American Experience. Kindle Edition. Location 1592

church lines have started to blur in terms of expression of spirituality in the church spaces, but the aspects of social justice, service-learning pedagogy, community services perspectives through African-American social thought has not penetrated the Pentecostal denominations. There is an extreme emphasis in bringing the community to the actual church building versus being the church in the community.

There is a dissonance in the Black American experience versus the Black Pentecostal experiences in America. There is certainly a perspective in the Black social context that responded to the urgency of the social obligations to the community needs. Many times, there are unappreciated roots of service-learning and having a social action agenda that addressed the educational issues, increasing political power, and promoted racial pride. Within the message of social justice lies the intense focus on self-help, collective action, and a strong push toward education. The center of the message was always rooted in service to the community and educational advancement, which ultimately solves the economic and cultural gap that may persist in Pentecostal circles. Many social programs created from the black church created the balance of social support and spiritual support, with an integrated education component. Many times, some African-American teachers brought in the academic skills and community organizers who knew what the community issues were. While one can be "refueling" for their soul sake, there must be an interactive refueling of the community in solving the problems that persist and ensure quality education within urban communities. As a result of making the community a perspective that is present in the church, social thought and morality will be brought to the forefront in social and political spheres.

Education as the cornerstone of the Religious Education of the Black Church

The chief cornerstone of the Black church is education. In particular, the role of the Black church has been extremely significant in the fight for educational equity for the minority communities in the United States in its history. The church has always been the core of the Black communities' moral compass. While being religiously educated, they were also being educated for regular life. There has always been an awareness of the educational inequities that led to calls of action. While the fight for educational equity has come a long way, the problem persists, but in a different form. That form is called the opportunity/achievement gap. Yes, there is access to more resources and funding compared to the past, but there is a still significant educational gap that persists in communities of color. What role does the black church play concerning this modern-day issue? What impact has the Black church made for today's fight for a better educational system? How can the black church become relevant in leading this fight, when there are so many players in the game, from politicians, unions, to corporate interests? While the journey for African-Americans throughout the years has been a callous one, there has been one consistent factor, the Black churches advocacy and action in making education available and equitable has proven to be critical for dynamic change to happen.

Historically, the "Black church" has ministered to mostly African-American congregants in the United States. Free blacks created the first black congregations; many of these churches sought to educate and advocate for the freedom of African-American's. In those times, there was segregation, so worship had to be separate from whites. That separation while not ideal, actually created a safe space for Blacks to not only receive spiritual renewal but discuss the many issues that they faced, especially in the realm of education.

Over time, the Black church became the center of the community, including becoming the place where Black children were educated. According to James A. Joseph "African-Americans connection to the Black church is directly linked to "the overriding belief among African-Americans that service to God is linked to service to humanity (Ball, Erica L. "African American Philanthropy." Philanthropy.Org, 2003.pg 1).¹⁴"

In many respects, true freedom included education of the mind in order to operate in a society set-up against the success of African-Americans. There were black denominations such as the African American Methodist Episcopal Church, that made sure that in its founding documents that education of African-American's be a part of their mission toward true freedom. There were also many allies that supported the black church in its efforts to educate the community. During the 19th century, many white/black religious leaders and churches went to the south to start religious schools, open classrooms for youth, colleges (many of which are now HBC U's), and even medical schools. For instance, the first Black educational institution that the church was birthed at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. A Black pastor by the name of

¹⁴ Ball, Erica L. "African American Philanthropy. The Potential and Limits of Private Generosity in a Civil Society " Philanthropy.Org, 2003.

Moses Adams named the college Rust College in Mississippi, which is now the oldest Historically Black college in the state. While there were many efforts to educate the few blacks that could get access to these schools, the masses of the African-American community did not receive an education before the end of the Civil War, even before public schools were created. During the time of Jim Crow, the laws that ruled in favor of segregation, there was room to ensure that the black schools were underfunded and in deplorable conditions. In modern times, while there are still many black clergies that went through these universities, in many instances emphasis on college for the black community was crucial, but the problem is the achievement gap through the educational system prior to college in order for students to compete and thrive in these college settings. Where does the Black Pentecostal church stand on making an impact on the K-12 system?

Indeed, there have been many changes politically for African-Americans in this country since the time of 1968, and many things have not. Even in the face of having elected and re-elected our nation's first black president, the equality and equity in education for Black people is still the ultimate goal. African-American students still complete college degrees at a lower rate in comparison to white students. There were also less Black students in American with fewer degrees in comparison to white students.

Understanding the Black Experience of Living in the United States Today

The state of the Black Pentecostal church is directly mirrored in the present-day experience of the Black community. For example, the unemployment rate for black workers

stands at 7.7 percent as of January 2018, being the highest among all racial groups. The gap between white and black unemployment rates frequently are often higher during economic downturns and closer during the economic recovery. Financially, there are only 34% of black families that have a retirement account, compared to 60% of white families and 52% of all families. The Black wealth of a household is less than one-fifth of the national average. The lack of wealth has had severe financial consequences and has limited many life opportunities, such as paying for college or starting businesses. One third (which is about 31%) of black children in the United States are growing up in poverty. As a result, many of these children end up with worse health, education, and economic outcomes in comparison to other children. Unfortunately, Black people face higher incarceration rates, despite only making 13 percent of the overall national population. The Black population comprises 38 percent of the federal inmate population. Of course, there have been unfair law enforcement practices that have led to high incarceration rates, which directly impacts Black job applicants with criminal records. There are precise needs and space to not only provide support to the families who are well off but take more direct action towards engagement in all of these issues facing the Black community.

While the question of the state of the Black Pentecostal church and their impact on the educational system seems easy, there is also a struggle to address the health inequities for black people. The impact of being in a low socioeconomic group correlates to having worse outcomes. The Church has a place in addressing not just the needs of health, but also in terms of self-care, there is a need in order to cultivate an experience of empowerment and character development.

The Viability of the Black Pentecostal Movement within the Black Christian Experience in the Twenty-first century: Can the Black Pentecostal Church Educate for both Membership and Community Involvement?

The viability of the Black Pentecostal movement is very high. By reviving the secure connection and conversations to the community, it will be vital to see the continued relevance of the future Church. Within a Pew Report it states that by 2050, the percentage of the U.S. population attending Church will be nearly half of what it was in 1990 (Pew). With the grave issues that plague urban America from drugs, gangs, violent crimes, unemployment, health disparities, failing schools, many would think it is just structural issues, but there is indeed a spiritual crisis. Of course, many structural behaviors must be changed, but there is a distinct opportunity to uplift the community through self-care and empowerment. In the words of Jesus state in Matthew 4:4, “it is written that a person shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.¹⁵” It is from this viewpoint that the Church needs to infuse a moral culture and code that gives a positive perspective of salvation and values to be governed in a person's life. Being that the Church is the center for the teachings of morals in society, the change related to the activities of the Church can support in transforming lives. The Black Church can be the instrument toward seeing behavior change in the community. If the Black Church could be the backbone for the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement, why can't it be the backbone of the Black Lives Matter Movement? If the fastest growing churches are Black Pentecostal churches, imagine the impact that could be had by taking a wrap-around services approach toward ministry. By providing directions for self-care, self-

¹⁵ Matthew 4:4. Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version, American Bible Society, 2010.

empowerment, and community service. While morality cannot be legislated, the empowerment of the model of Christ through the efforts of the Church can improve the quality of life for the community.

In today's times, a significant portion of the black Church has seemingly, moved toward a spirit-centered approach versus a social justice movement approach. There nothing wrong with that spirit-centered emphasis, but because the black Church has become so mainstream, its involvement and pressure is absolutely needed. While it may be easy to start to talk about what the Black Church community is not doing, it is vitally important to address the reason why we do not see the type of resolve and activism that existed in the past. First, it is essential to note that the hard-fought fights of the past had become successes for the present times that we live. From Brown vs. Board of Education to the creation of school choice options for students who may otherwise be attending lower-performing schools. There had been many sacrifices that have been made to even get to the point that the educational system is right now. Second, in the years after the American Civil rights movement, it had been documented that there was a significant decline in church attendance, which resulted in a decline in membership. Also, many black churches began to sustain the older members, versus younger families who may be more active in continuing the actions of the past. Ultimately, the loss of membership means a loss in donations, and without funding, it is hard to sustain and maintain intentional campaigns toward educational equity. So, the absence of such a force has given rise to non-profits that may be funded by corporate interests who have specific agendas, therefore causing political gridlock when it comes time to fight for and on behalf of the educational equity issues in the urban centers. Of course, these types of movements can turn away Black church communities that may be involved in the

fight, but do not want to be connected to entrenched political wars that may go well beyond the issues that this discourse addresses.

Practical ways to preserve African-American Religious Education within the Pentecostal movement

The practitioners of religious education within the Black Pentecostal movement must review the methods concerning interpretations and the praxis of religious education. We must revitalize and develop curriculum in order to bridge the gap within the modern-day community. The Black religious educator's interpretation is based on the denomination of their ordination and the congregation they association. The bottom line is that there is not a curriculum that the entire African-American church uses because there are many different orientations of the Bible. Those differences can be interpreted from power dynamics, worship styles, political beliefs, race, etc.

The African-American Christian community has had a deep interest to study the Bible, but there has also been a benefit to find the essence of the Afro-Pentecostalism approach. By finding this inspiration is necessary and needed in order to present the teachings to the community. It is through the revision of religious education that can support the present-day struggles that the Black community still faces. Some of the major types of educational models that can still have a significant impact on the curriculum in religious education are Afrocentric, kerygmatic, contemplative, holiness, confessional, and liberation. It is through these lenses that the religious education of the African American church community interacts.

In conclusion, there is the liberation spectrum that seeks to reflect and seek action in order to transform society. This lens came directly from the black Christian tradition, going back to the days of slavery. Model of liberation through religious education is to uphold the Black Christian story and reflect on the actions of liberation past, present, and future. The task of Christian liberation education is continuing to improve the praxis of a critical conscious impact that would empower the people to act for social transformation in line with the prophetic witness of the gospel. Hill puts it best, "a liberation model of Christian education seeks to recover the Black church's historical relationship to social action (Hill. Religious Education. Loc. 1922).¹⁶"

Renewing Religious Education & Community Activity

In order to rejuvenate the religious education of the Black Pentecostal community, there is a need to create a curriculum for renewing religious education for the congregation and increase the community activism incorporating self-care & service learning. In many urban centers, the discussion of self-care and addressing racial trauma in the church might be foreign but revolutionary. Many times, it is virtually difficult to educate without the proper training religiously and solidifying the thoughtful revision of the curriculum. The revised curriculum acknowledges the pain of the history and trauma of the Black community through mindfulness and creating a practice of journaling.

Next, create spaces for discussion amongst smaller groups that support one another — also creating a space for professional help and resources to provide self-care. By continuing to inspire and enlighten through the preached word, the community would receive empowerment to

¹⁶ Hill, Kenneth. Religious Education in the African American Tradition A Comprehensive Introduction. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007. Location 1922

channel those issues toward productive community solidarity and support. The revisioning of a religious education curriculum for the Black Pentecostal community will ultimately create a collective positive impact. The kind of impact that would bring the broader black church community together. For instance, in the City of New Haven, Connecticut, there are over 21,000 students, majority-minority students who attend. There are at least ten black churches in the City of New Haven who came together to adopt a school. That fundamental collaboration alone was the beginnings of a movement of social activism. This movement provided the service of tutoring young people on ensuring they have the foundational basics of reading and mathematics so that they can be on par for the next grade. According to the New Haven Independent, "the main goal of the Adopt-A-School Initiative is to focus on enhancing literacy through reading, assisting in the Singapore math program, and mentoring. Lincoln Bassett plans to work closely with the volunteers and their schedules to maximize the number of volunteer hours in the classroom ¹⁷" (the primary goal of the Adopt-A-School Initiative is to focus on enhancing literacy through reading, assisting in the Singapore math program, and mentoring. Lincoln Bassett plans to work closely with the volunteers and their schedules to maximize the number of volunteer hours in the classroom). Unfortunately, this is the only school that has been formally adopted in the city by a black church in the majority black community. Also, in Oakland, California, there has been a partnership created with Black churches that involve the creation of 20 pilot academic centers at the actual churches. They would provide academic assistance to perform well on the required state exam for passing high school in order to prepare for college (KONG. Vol. 19, No. 3).¹⁸"

¹⁷ Martin, A. (2012, December 5). Churches "Adopt" Their First School. Retrieved from https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/it_takes_a_village_to_ra/

¹⁸ KONG. Black Issues in Higher Education. Vol. 19, No. 3. Kong, Deborah. "Educators want to join with churches to help minority students." March 28, 2002

Nationally, this very discourse has been studied, in terms of measuring success of the involvement of the church community in the urban centers. In Howard University's Journal of Negro Education in 2010, reported how the Black church's involvement in the school's educational success. "In Faith in the Inner City: The Urban Black Church and Students' Educational Outcomes,¹⁹" Dr. Brian Barrett, an education professor at the State University of New York College at Cortland, describes the unique contributions black churches play in cultivating successful students in the inner-cities. He observed that "religious socialization reinforces attitudes, outlooks, behaviors, and practices ... particularly through individuals' commitment to and adoption of the goals and expectations of the group" that is conducive to "positive educational outcomes." While many may begin to question how the church and state flags could be eight raised, it is vital to realize that in order to improve these schools outside resources would be crucial.

In many cases churches would naturally have social services that do not involve the use of the Christian message. Dr. Brian Barrett continues to state that, "for black inner-city youth who reported attending religious services often, the black/white achievement gap "was eliminated." Barrett reports that one of the most essential advantages of inner-city churches is that they provide "a community where Black students are valued, both for their academic success and, more broadly, as human beings and members of society with promise, with talents to contribute, and from whom success is to be expected (Bradley, Inner-city).²⁰ "Churches also affirm inner-city youth as trusted members of a community that celebrates academic success, and the practices that produce it, which overrides the low expectations communicated at school.

¹⁹ Bradley, Anthony B. "Inner-city Education Fails without the Church." Acton Institute. Accessed March 29, 2019.

Additionally, Barrett highlights how black churches, because they are equipped to deal with families, are effective at sustaining and encouraging parental educational involvement from the heart as well as providing contexts where youth can have regular contact with other adults for role-modeling and mentoring."

In conclusion, the American Black Pentecostal church is still a very in a very crucial stage of growth, but there is a need to integrate the Black Christian story and start a revival of religious education that can make an impact for genuine change to occur in our most needy communities. While many great accomplishments have occurred over hundreds of years, there is still a fight that persists. Many times, this fight goes unnoticed, but the truth is that many black communities are still being crippled by lack of opportunity and hope. The Black church and the various denominations do not have all of the answers, but it certainly can be a part of the solution. Therefore, on a macro level, it must be realized that the universal church must be involved in making an impact. While the Black church must lead the charge again on social justice, but we must revive the religious education of our congregations.

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