



Preaching, Teaching and Reaching for
Transformation and Liberation

“CONSCIOUS AND INTENTIONAL MINISTRY: DOING WHO I AM WITH UNDERSTANDING”

Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to
know what Israel ought to do... 1 Chronicles 12:32

THE PASTOR’S PEN February 26, 2023

BLACK HISTORY / BLACK CHURCH THOUGHTS

Over the next few weeks, I will share some of my thoughts from previous writings regarding the Black Church. As I think out loud, I pray that you join me on the journey.

Stage 3: The Black religious experience as adolescent in the Civil Rights Movement.

One of the key questions that marked the civil rights movement was, “Who am I? Older Blacks who spent decades of being identified as “boy” or “uncle” and “gal” and “auntie” were now in a position to redefine who they were. Younger Blacks, too, were in a position, but they were able to create new definitions that better suited who they were and how they wanted to be considered. White people, also, were defining and redefining who they were in response to the systems that had been in place for centuries and the fact that those systems were starting to shake and crumble. The thrust of freedom expressed in the slave church took on greater force in the Black church of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Two individuals that moved to the forefront of the movement were Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. These two men grew up in different parts of the country, in different economic situations, having different theologies. James Cone calls the dichotomy of these two great leaders, “Martin’s dream and Malcolm’s nightmare.”¹ Clearly, these two men traveled different paths as a means to achieve freedom for all oppressed people in general and Black people specifically. Just as clear, these two men had the understanding that a transformation needed to take place. There has to be an inward looking perspective that challenges us to have a vision that accurately defines who we are, and the courage to actually live it out. While these two men had different theological perspectives, at some level I believe that they shared a concept of the incarnation of God that expressed the kingdom of God in us and God working on our behalf.

Whereas King’s philosophy was characterized by love for all humanity, redemptive suffering and an integrated society, Malcolm X’s was characterized by self-love, self-defense and Black independence. For King, nonviolent protest was the only appropriate way that Black people could achieve a just society. For Malcolm X, Black people could use “any means necessary” to achieve justice.²

For King, God was incarnated through a Jesus of love that redemptively suffered, therefore, love was the appropriate answer. For Malcolm, God incarnated in a white Jesus was insufficient to respond to the needs of Blacks.

At this point, the Black church, operating out of the same theological perspective of the slave church, took on the leadership of the civil rights movement. Continuing to see Jesus in the dual position of human and divine, the Black church, identifying with Jesus’ compassionate humanity and divine power, began to make major changes in this country in the name of Jesus and on behalf of God. The Black church, through its bold leadership, gained the respect necessary to speak with authority for much of the community. Wyatt T. Walker, who was close to the movement notes:

Let it be patently clear that the Black Church was not the exclusive agent and resource of this movement. It had help. But the issue was joined as a moral struggle; it developed as a holy cause; the leadership, with rare exception, was ministerial; the rallies were services of worship and celebration; the offering was the ammunition; the troops were the saints and the saints’ children; it was chiefly a Black Church operation. A converse truth stands: If the Black Church were removed from the nonviolent movement in the south, *there would have been no movement!*³

¹ James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) p. 3.

² Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998) p. 50.

³ Wyatt T. Walker, *Afrocentrism & Christian Faith*. (Martin Luther King Fellows Press, 1993) p. 43.

Over a period of time, the movement, primarily characterized by the Black church, was beginning to take on a new look. Over time, the Black church was not fully effective in its effort to provide leadership to bring change and effectively respond to the issues that were being addressed. As a consequence, other non-church based groups began to take on leadership for addressing and combating issues relating to justice and oppression. The Black church began to lose its foothold. Wilmore writes regarding King's inability to keep the Christian church at the forefront of the civil rights movement, "He could not sustain the dominance of Black Christian tradition, and before his assassination...he was obliged to share the leadership of the masses with the aggressive secularity of Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown."⁴ Through this shift, Black Theology begins to emerge. James Cone writes, "The term "Black Power" was first used in the civil rights movement in the spring of 1966 by Stokely Carmichael to designate the only appropriate response to white racism."⁵ As young, Black marcher began chanting "Black Power" alongside the other marchers chanting freedom songs, a whole new understanding of freedom began to resonate in the movement. Freedom no longer meant sitting where you wanted on the bus. Now, freedom meant driving the bus, or even better, owning the bus. Freedom meant Black power. The statement was a reminder to all Black people of the power that they possessed and a call to use their power to obtain their freedom. As well, the statement was a challenge to the white power structure that the movement was moving to a new level that would not tolerate business as usual.

I submit that as the movement evolved, the emphasis should not be placed on what it moved away from, but what it moved towards. The movement moved closer to our enslaved ancestors' understanding of freedom. As previously stated, the enslaved people perceived the notion of freedom as a position to be gained in the present, not a futuristic event following death. Just as the slave church challenged the enslaved people to move beyond a slave mentality, the Black power movement challenged Blacks to move beyond a powerless mentality. The Black church of the civil rights movement, in concert with the slave church, exemplifies the impact that the church can have when it understands that God is with us and working for us in Jesus.

⁴ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1983) p. 46.

⁵ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997) p, 5.

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	Educational Enrichment	Technology Literacy	Athletics & Recreation	Performing Arts	Facility Innovation
\$500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 Subject books for elementary (math, literature, history, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 iPad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 basketballs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 art sets for aspiring artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External security lighting to keep the street well-lit and safe
\$1,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 Summer Bridge books to help students retain learning during breaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 "learn how to code" kits for elementary students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 tennis rackets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 beginner saxophones or 8 beginner violins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camera security system to keep everyone safe
\$2,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 students can be challenged to excel using interactive problem-solving programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 computer for graphic design and website creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 sets of golf clubs for children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Play Scripts with performance/licensing fee and cast instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wireless PA system to easily communicate at the school
\$5,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 smartboard to help teachers engage students in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 STEM lab cart of materials for a classroom with multiple activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-day Speed and Agility workshop for 15 young aspiring track stars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 pairs of tap shoes for aspiring dancers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Battery operated floor scrubber to keep the building looking its best
\$10,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 trip for 15 students to visit 1 HBCU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 Robotic kits to reinforce studies in STEAM subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open gym for 20 young people 1 X a week throughout the winter in a safe place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 200 tickets to see Alvin Ailey Dance Company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LED light fixtures throughout the school to promote learning and natural light

WORK FOR THE WEEK

FEBRUARY MEMORY VERSE

¹²O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes *are* upon You.”

2 Chronicles 20:12

FEBRUARY MEDITATION QUOTE

"Nat Turner's faith in God did not stop his insurrection, nor thousands of slave insurrections all over the south. Every time a black man led an insurrection, he knew that he was doing the will of God. When you fight, you must believe that you are doing the will of God. Just being mad is not enough... We must believe that our struggle is a revolutionary struggle designed to change the world and to establish us in our rightful position.."

Dr. Albert B. Cleage, Jr.