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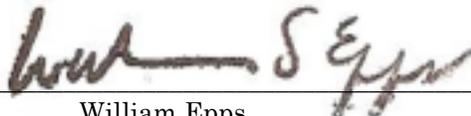
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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
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SHALL WE D.A.N.C.E? – A PROCESS FOR TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JACQUELINE A. THOMPSON
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ABSTRACT

Shall We D.A.N.C.E? – A Process for Transformation and Renewal

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2011

The purpose of this paper is to produce transformation and renewal within the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (hereafter, PNBC) through a change process called the D.A.N.C.E (Discovery, Analysis, Navigation, Choreography, and Execution). This process will enable leaders and members of the PNBC to examine and address critical questions related to their identity, purpose, and agenda in light of post-Civil Rights realities.

The PNBC, like many Black social and religious organizations, emerged as a result of its time, a time characterized by segregation and discrimination legislated by the United States government. Yet with the success of socio-political movements like the Civil Rights Movement, resulting in the passing of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, times have changed. These changes have impacted every aspect of the Black community, including the Black Church and parachurch organizations.

Because the PNBC derived its identity, purpose, and agenda from the sociological, political, and religious climate of the past, several critical questions must be asked at this point. These include: Who is the PNBC now? What is its purpose and agenda today? Most importantly, who does the PNBC need to be in order to remain relevant and progressive in the eyes of a post-modern, post-Civil Rights, “post-Joshua” generation?

The purpose of this paper is to set forth a change process that will produce transformation and renewal within the PNBC. This process will allow this organization to examine and address critical questions related to its identity, purpose, and agenda in light of post-Civil Rights realities. By engaging this process, the organization will be able to re-imagine and revamp its mission with the goal of re-establishing its relevance.

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To my mother, Deaconess Easter M. Green, for loving me, believing in me, and encouraging me to do all God would have me to do—thank you for all you have sacrificed

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: CONTEXT	
Chapter 1. THE HISTORIC BLACK CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY	6
Chapter 2. THE PROGRESSIVE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION (PNBC)	27
PART TWO: FOUNDATIONS	
Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW	43
Chapter 4. TRADITIONAL BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL	64
Chapter 5. THE THEOLOGY OF THE D.A.N.C.E.	82
PART THREE: STRATEGY	
Chapter 6. LET US D.A.N.C.E	97
Chapter 7. RHYTHM AND BLUES: A STRATEGY FOR APPLICATION AND SUSTAINABILITY	119
CONCLUSION	134
APPENDIXES	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY	140

INTRODUCTION

I grew up as a quintessential church kid. As the daughter of a father who served as pastor and a mother who was active in many forms of ministry, church was a regular part of daily life. Choir rehearsals, church meetings, Christian education classes, and of course Sunday morning and often afternoon worship were as routine for me as breathing. My local church was the life blood of our family and its activities fully informed my faith and worldview.

Then one day, as an active teen in youth ministry, I was solicited to serve as a delegate to our church's convention. I never knew our church was a part of a convention and therefore had no concept of what it was or what to expect. But as a youth delegate, I was expected to attend and represent my local church at a series of meetings and services. So I travelled out of state along with other youth and adult delegates to the meeting of the Progressive National Baptist Convention (hereafter, the PNBC). I was astounded by the sheer number of people, delegates from all over the nation representing their local churches at this national gathering. For the first time, the concept of the Church being the body of Christ with many members began to take shape in my mind.

There were people involved in various ministry departments, including Ushers, Youth and Children, Women, Laymen, Young Adults, and Ministers. They were like-minded individuals gathered around common goals, agendas, and ideologies. I was just happy to travel and fellowship with hundreds of other youth and thousands of adults from around the country, but each year as I attended I began to recognize the significance of

PNBC, not just to my local church but to the community as a whole and the African American community in particular.

PNBC is one of the seven major historic African American Conventions formed as a product of its time. Like the others, it served not only as a national vehicle to unite and convene local churches around the cause of Christ, but also around the causes that affected the life and vitality of its membership, namely Civil Rights causes. PNBC and organizations like it have served as vital forces in impacting change and progress in the larger society. In recounting its genesis, the PNBC website states:

The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. started as a movement which reflected the religious, social and political climate of its time. Its mission was to transform the Traditional African American Convention as well as society. The formation of the convention was wrapped up in the Civil Rights movement and was begun by some of the same persons who were deeply involved in the freedom movement for African Americans in the United States.¹

However, with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and most recently the election of the nation's first African American President, PNBC and organizations like it are faced with challenges to their identity, mission, and purpose. Faced with declining attendance and increasing irrelevance in the lives of a post-Civil Rights generation, PNBC must ask some critical questions and make some necessary changes in order to retain its relevance and influence in the future.

Its survival is critical to the lives of local churches and the broader community. As authors C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya point out in their book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, "The Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the Black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such

¹ Progressive National Baptist Convention, "History," <http://www.pnbc.org/PNBC/History.html> (accessed December 15, 2011).

as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities.”² While acknowledging the corporate successes of the past, PNBC must also begin to look to the needs and challenges of the future and the role it will play in shaping it.

The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to introduce a process that will raise these questions and assist the organization in identifying the answers by engaging “The D.A.N.C.E.” (Discovery, Analysis, Navigation, Choreography and Execution), a strategy for organizational transformation and renewal. This paper will be divided into three sections. Part One will discuss the social, political, and religious context that gave rise to the identity, purpose, and agenda of the PNBC. In addition, it will highlight post-Civil Rights realities that challenge its current-day relevance and present barriers to transformation and renewal. Chapter 1 will provide a historical overview of the Historic Black Church, and the unique role it has played in the life of the Black community.³ This chapter will highlight the traits that are specific to the Historic Black Church as well as its current state in relation to the present-day community. This section will introduce the discussion of the current relevance and significance of the Historic Black Church in light of a post-Civil Rights milieu. This section will also discuss how the seven major Black denominations emerged.

² C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church Experience in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

³ The term “Historic Black Church” refers to the collection of Black churches, both historically and at present, which upholds the values that have been in place since the inception of the Black Church in America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Historic Black Church will be discussed in terms of how it differs from the “New Black Church,” which will be defined in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 will highlight one of the conventions introduced in Chapter 1, namely the PNBC. It will discuss the societal context that gave rise to its inception. It will also highlight the founding principles, mission, vision, and goals. This section will also discuss some current external challenges facing the PNBC and other organizations like it.

Part Two will examine the biblical and theological foundations for transformation and renewal. This section will discuss the impact of the traditional Black theology in interpreting and informing these foundations. In addition, this section will present the theology of the D.A.N.C.E. Chapter 3 will review relevant literature on transformation and renewal. Chapter 4 will examine the traditional biblical and theological understandings of transformation and renewal as outlined in specific passages from the book of Exodus. Together, these verses provide a distinct model of transformation and renewal that has served as the theological foundation for the Historic Black Church and the PNBC.

Chapter 5 will outline the theology of the D.A.N.C.E. It will introduce a biblical and theological understanding of transformation and renewal based on the events of Ezekiel 37:1-14. It will discuss the role of the Holy Spirit and the role of leadership in the process of transformation and renewal. It will highlight how the aforementioned pericope informs the process of discovery, analysis, navigation, choreography, and execution.

Part Three will outline a strategy for change and application. This section will discuss the key role of organizational leadership in ensuring the success of the process. This section will conclude with discussion around the future of the Black Church and organizations it has formed, like the PNBC. This section will also present recommendations for sustainability. Chapter 6 will introduce the D.A.N.C.E. as a method

of transforming organizations like the Historic Black Church and the PNBC. It will define each mode of the D.A.N.C. E. as well as highlight why the “dance” as a collective is needed.

Chapter 7 will provide a strategy for engaging organizations in the process of transformation and renewal called the D.A.N.C.E. It will discuss how to identify participants, extending the invitation and introducing the need for transformation without offense. It will provide a process of ensuring that the organization remains engaged and completes the process, and it will identify desired goals and results. In addition, it will discuss how the process of the D.A.N.C.E. re-establishes relevance and provide tools for process assessment and feedback.

Much has changed during the past fifty-one years. It is my hope that by engaging this process, the PNBC and organizations like it will have the methodology necessary to adequately assess and adapt to twenty-first century socio-cultural changes and realities. By adapting as such, they will continue to have a lasting impact for future generations.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORIC BLACK CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Of the many early childhood memories I hold dear, the ones that feature most prominently are of church. Every week we would go to this place where there was singing and praying, shouting and dancing, a man would speak for what seemed like forever, and then along with all the people who had gathered as well, we would eat, talk, and share. I did not know as a child where it was or why it was, but each Sunday morning, my house was transformed in the early morning by the sounds of gospel music and spirituals playing, and the smell of what would become Sunday dinner while getting all dressed up to go to what my mother called “church”: the Black Church.

Definition and Character Traits of the Historic Black Church

The use of the term “Black Church” in the collective sense refers to seven historic Black denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME); the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ); The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME); The National Baptist Convention, USA (NBC); The National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). While there are many predominantly Black churches

that are a part of White denominations, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, authors of *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, point out that operationally the term “Black Church” is limited to those “independent, historic, and totally black controlled denominations, which were founded after the Free African Society of 1787 and constituted the core of black Christians.”¹ It is impossible to define or discuss the Black Church without discussing the social and political realities that gave birth to it. The Black Church as we know it today evolved from what is known as an “invisible institution.” This institution consisted of informal groups of slaves who gathered as clandestine congregations, to worship away from the peering eyes of their slave masters but in the presence of an all-knowing God. This kind of gathering was against the established slave codes and therefore had to be conducted in secrecy. These slave gatherings were occurring as early as 1660, long before the period of widespread conversion to Christianity amongst slaves.

With the mass revivals of the First and Second Great Awakening came the sweeping conversions and public commitments to the Christian faith amongst both slave and free populations that eventually led to a separation of White and Black churches. Prior to this time, slaves in small numbers were absorbed as members into White churches, although often not allowed to participate in the full scope of either worship or church life. According to Henry H. Mitchell in *Black Church Beginnings*, a group of twenty slaves were baptized into the Anglican Church as early as 1705, while in the

¹ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1.

newly developing free Baptist church in Providence, Rhode Island, an African named Quassey was baptized in 1743 along with eighteen others.²

The stages by which Black Christians began to separate from White churches and achieve self-governance varied from region to region, and therefore cannot be precisely defined or dated. However, according to various historical records, the very first Black congregations of various denominations emerged between the years 1750 and 1859. In the South, the first Methodist colony, the first Colored Baptist church, Evans AME Zion, and the oldest Black Catholic community have their origins in this period. In the North, the withdrawing members of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church formed Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal denomination was formed in 1787 in Philadelphia.

Along with defining the Historic Black Church, there are traits specific to its collective that affect the role it has played in the Black community. The Historic Black Church has been and is characterized by a focus on liberation and freedom, expression in worship, and being agents of change. Between 1861 and 1865, the Civil War brought to a peak the continued and heated debate over slavery. Many Black churches were birthed during this time and therefore, unlike their White counterparts, members of these Black churches believed in the message of freedom. In song, word, and deed, the notion that God wants people to be free is woven into the very fabric of the Black Church. A well-known Black spiritual reflects the sentiment of many during this time: "Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be Free." Freedom has

² Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 27.

meant different things at different times in the Black experience. During slavery, it meant deliverance from bondage. During Jim Crow, it meant being free to be educated and employed. During the Civil Rights Movement, freedom meant equality socially, politically, and economically, and it continues to have that meaning today. Lincoln and Mamiya state, “Freedom has always meant the absence of any restraint which might compromise one’s responsibility to God.”³ God’s call to discipleship is a call to freedom.

Akin to the concepts of liberation and freedom as hallmarks of the Black Church in society, is also freedom of expression in worship. This too can be traced back to the invisible slave church and the influence of traditional African culture in worship. The spontaneity of singing, use of instruments, dance, and Holy Spirit possession are all forms of expression characteristic of the Black Church, believed to have survived from Africa. It is believed, as Rev. Dr. A. Louis Patterson points out, that “as with the people of the biblical narrative, African Americans have been an oppressed people but a people who survived, thrived and endured. Whenever a people are confined and shackled but survive to be set free, there is an efficacious expression of energy demonstrated mentally, emotionally and physically.”⁴ This demonstration in worship is reflective of a freedom and liberation of the spirit and soul despite the reality of bondage.

This concept of freedom and liberation is also found in its preaching. Preaching in the Black Church is more than an exegetical, hermeneutical, ritualistic exercise. Preaching in the Historic Black Church provides information, revelation, and interpretation of God’s will at that time. It addresses social, economic, and spiritual

³ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 4.

⁴ William H. Crouch, Jr. and Joel C. Gregory, *What We Love About the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 49.

conditions of the day while challenging perceived injustices and igniting social action. During the infancy of the church it was the central gathering place for Black people. This reality made it a hub of information and news that would not normally be covered or received through conventional sources. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, the preaching of the Black Church provided comfort and inspiration as well as correction and challenge. Messages of plantation preachers were monitored to ensure the meetings were not being used to organize slave rebellions. Yet despite this oppression, Black preaching still communicated the hope of freedom, identifying with biblical liberators, Moses and Jesus.

This hope of freedom and liberation made the Historic Black Church more than a center of worship but also the center for change. Many of the significant gains in acquisition of civil and social rights for African Americans in the United States have its origins in the Black Church. The famous slave rebellions of the 1800s were led by those who had some church affiliation. Gabriel Prosser held preparatory religious meetings prior to his planned conspiracy of 1800. Nat Turner was known as a prophet, possessing many spiritual gifts planned and executed the slave insurrection of 1831. And Denmark Vesey, although free, felt the call of God to secure the freedom of all enslaved, including his wife and children, leading to the rebellion of 1822.

The Abolitionist Movement, although led by mostly Whites in the North, effectively utilized the oratory of the Black preacher and the platform of the Black church to communicate its message of freedom. In addition, the Underground Railroad in the South was covertly engaged in helping slaves escape to freedom. Many of the stops on the journey to freedom were Black churches and the homes of faithful church members.

The Black Church was also in the forefront of establishing colleges and universities to educate freed Blacks in a post-Civil War, segregated society. Many of these historically Black colleges and universities (known as HBCUs) still exist today. Schools like Morris Brown College, the Interdenominational Theological Seminary, and Florida Memorial College, all founded by churches and/or denominations, continue to provide an education to African Americans today.

The famous social achievement attributed to the Black Church is the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Its leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was both a preacher and the son of a pastor/preacher. As a result, the Black Church became a major vehicle through which the movement was launched and maintained. Mass meetings and Sunday services were an important means of securing the participation of Black Christians. As a result of their actions, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed major forms of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, and gender, was secured.

The historic Black Church, like the Israelite community, was birthed from oppression, and like the Old Testament it is the story of a people and their God. But also like the Israelite nation, after freedom was secured and they entered the proverbial Promised Land, the fabric of the Historic Black Church began to change. According to some, the Historic Black Church of today is very different in its focus and intent.

The Current State of the Historic Black Church

In assessing the state of the current Black Church, there are some who would say emphatically, “The Black Church is dead.” This claim was made in an article by Eddie Glaude, Jr., Professor of Religion and Chair of the Center for African American Studies

at Princeton University. In it he states, “The Black Church as we’ve known it or imagined it is dead. Of course many African Americans still go to church. . . . But the idea of this venerable institution as central to black life and as a repository for the social and moral conscience of the nation has all but disappeared.”⁵

Glaude provides three reasons for the conclusion that he has come to. The first reason is complicated spaces of the Black church. By this Glaude is referring to the seemingly dichotomous nature of the institution itself. While there have been moments of progressive and prophetic action, there is still a large conservative, apolitical mindset amongst its churches and leaders as well. It is well documented that during the initial stages of the Civil Rights Movement, some of its staunchest criticism came from the Black Church. The idea of a monolith of ideologies, theologies, and methodologies is non-existent.

The second reason Glaude cites is the differentiation of the African American community. The Black Church no longer stands as the center of the community as it had in years past. There are other competing institutions and organizations that rival the presence and influence of the Church. In addition, there are a higher number of African Americans attending churches of mixed race and culture, many of which are led by non-African American pastors. Often in these churches the style of worship is akin to the Black Church, but the messages are very different.

Lastly, Glaude cites the routinization of prophetic witness. He is referencing what appears to be the tendency of the Black Church to live in the glory of its past. The

⁵ Eddie Glaude, “The Black Church Is Dead,” Huffington Post, February 24, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html (accessed March 1, 2010).

lauding of past positions, victories, and stances, for Glaude, indicates the Black Church's disconnection from the realities of the present day. Glaude explains, "In each instance, a backward glance defines the content of the church's stance in the present—justifying its continued relevance and authorizing its voice. Its task, because it has become alienated from the moment in which it lives, is to make us venerate and conform to it. But such a church loses its power. Memory becomes its currency."⁶

While there are many who would disagree with Glaude's conclusion, it can certainly be argued that the Black Church is not what it used to be. Rev. Dr. Martha Simmons, in the spring 2007 edition of the *African American Pulpit*, suggests that in the last twenty-five years, the Black Church has experienced more changes than it ever had since its formal formation in the 1700s.⁷ While Glaude's conclusion regarding the state of the Black Church is not entirely correct, the Church is indeed suffering from a severe identity crisis. This crisis can be attributed to two major trends: the emergence of the Black mega-church and prosperity preaching. These two trends, along with others, have created a "new Black Church" that has challenged the very existence of the Historic Black Church and its relevance in the future. The Historic Black Church has been defined by the seven major Black denominations with which most Black churches in America and abroad are affiliated. The new Black Church encompasses churches and ideals that are different in both ideology and methodology. Professor and author Marc Lamont Hill

⁶ Glaude, "The Black Church Is Dead," 2.

⁷ Martha Simmons, "Trends in the African American Church," *The African American Pulpit*, (Spring 2007): 9-16. Simmons cites twenty-one major trends that have impacted the Black Church in the present day. Some of these trends include: the emergence of clergy couples; increased compensation; increased Pentecostal influences in worship; and use of technology.

helps provide a definition for this new Black Church in his article, “I Bling Because I’m Happy”:

New Black Church refers to the current configuration of mainline black Christianity. The New Black Church, which has taken its current shape over the past two decades, is the progeny of civil rights era movements but can be distinguished by its increased materialism, questionable theology, and dubious politics. While this description is certainly not exhaustive—the erasure of denominational boundaries and resurgence of neo-Pentecostalism are also critical features of the New Black Church.⁸

The foundation of the new Black Church coincides with the rise of the post-1980 phenomenon known as the mega-church. Black mega-churches began to emerge all over suburban America to fill the religious niche created by the flight from urban to suburban communities in the 80s and 90s. However, even in urban communities mega-churches are found, some whose geneses pre-date 1980, but who still benefitted from the post-Civil Rights changes in the Black community. For example, in 1969, Fred Price began a church in urban Los Angeles with nine members. By 1999, the church boasted a membership of eighteen thousand and a television viewership of thirty-three million. During this same time, Dr. Johnnie Coleman, a female leader, founded Christ Universal Temple in Chicago and by 1990 claimed a membership of ten thousand and a facility worth ten million dollars.

Mega-churches have traditionally been defined as churches with two thousand or more members. However since 1980, 149 Black mega-churches have emerged with memberships ranging from two thousand to twenty-eight thousand. This phenomenon is characterized by more than mega memberships and facilities. It is the vastly different

⁸ Marc Lamont Hill, “I Bling Because I’m Happy,” Pop Matters, August 5, 2005, <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/column/hill050805/> (accessed May 1, 2006).

approaches to ministry, interpretation of the gospel, and non-denominational yet denominational-like structures and affiliations that have directly impacted the historic Black church. Along with the New Black Church comes a theology and interpretation of the gospel that is completely opposite of that espoused by the Historic Black Church. prosperity gospel, as it is commonly called, is a doctrine which asserts that it is the will of God for Christians to be wealthy. With that notion has arisen a new genre of preaching that shifts the focus from the needs of the community to the need and desire of the individual.

This trend, which actually has its origins outside of the Black Church and predates the new Black Church, was explored by *TIME Magazine* when it asked the question on its September 2006 cover: “Does God Want You Rich?” The article highlights the fierce debate between Christian faith leaders. The Prosperity Gospel first came to public attention during the 1950s healing revivals in the United States. Evangelical leaders such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, and A. A. Allen were prominent progenitors of this teaching. The advent of religious televangelism helped the doctrine gain widespread attention and acceptance. During this time the Black Church also had a history of prosperity preachers, although not as pervasive or accepted. In 1919, Bishop C. M. Grace, known as Sweet Daddy Grace, founded the United House of Prayer for All People, and was known for his flamboyant personal style and shocking preaching. He traveled extensively throughout the United States during the 20s and 30s preaching to integrated congregations. Later came figures like Reverend Ike, a prosperity preacher who founded the United Church of Jesus Christ for All People, and hosted a popular

radio ministry in the 70s. His radio ministry solicited funds from its listeners with claims of financial prosperity in exchange for obedience.

While these preachers and others like them were considered marginal and not a part of the Historic Black Church, modern proponents are completely mainstream. Creflo Dollar, Bishop T. D. Jakes, and Dr. I. V. Hilliard are all popular prosperity preachers today with memberships over fifteen thousand, and they serve as leaders of their denominational-like structures. Despite the critiques of prosperity teaching espoused by the new Black Church and its leaders, its very existence and apparent success (as defined by large memberships, influence, and finances) has left the Historic Black Church in crisis, struggling to remain relevant in the lives of a post-Civil Rights generation, and forced to re-examine its identity and purpose.

The Declining Significance of the Black Church

Crisis, uncertainty, and discomfort are all accurate descriptions of what the world is experiencing at this time in history. These feelings of discomfort and uncertainty appear to be natural given the many issues plaguing the world today. For many, Matthew 24:4-14 reads more like the daily evening news headlines than the prophetic end-time checklist offered by a Jewish teacher believed to be the Son of God and Messiah to his followers:

For many will come in My name saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many

will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:4-14)

With wars in the Middle East, which appear to have no end, devastating earthquakes in Haiti, Venezuela, and Japan; an AIDS epidemic that has affected every continent on the globe, and a world financial crisis, it is easy to understand why the average person would feel a sense of anxiety. One would think this anxiety would create a surge of attendance and sustained commitment in American churches similar to the increase seen after the horrific attacks of 9/11. However, this increase proved to be temporary. As David T. Olson, author of *The American Church Crisis*, states,

Church attendance for the American church this millennium peaked during the five Sundays following the 9/11 attacks. The national trauma sent worshippers to church services in record numbers, but the memory of the event and the attraction to the church was short lived. On the sixth Sunday, attendance returned to normal. Since then, American church attendance has declined in an unprecedented fashion.⁹

Even the Church, an institution that has served as a beacon of light and anchor of stability throughout history, is now itself in crisis. Olson states, “The American Church is in crisis. At first glance this may not be apparent, but while many signs of its evident success and growth abound, in reality the American church is losing ground as the population continues to surge”¹⁰ While Olson believes the American Church is in crisis, the historic Black Church can be described as in crisis as well.

Despite the success of the Civil Rights movement, and despite the election of nation’s first Black president, President Barack Obama, the Black community as a whole

⁹ David T. Olson, *The American Church Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

still remains in crisis. Robert M. Franklin, president of Morehouse College, minister, and author of the book, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*, describes this crisis in detail. Specifically, Franklin speaks of the crisis within the enduring institutions of the Black community: Black families, Black churches, and Black colleges. Franklin contends that the crisis of the Black Church is in fact a crisis of mission. He believes that the mission of Black Church has been threatened by the emergence of the prosperity gospel movement as well. Franklin writes, “That movement is only symptomatic of a larger mission crisis or mission drift that has placed the black church in a posture of assimilating into a culture that is hostile to people living on the margins of society, such as people living in poverty, people living with AIDS, homosexuals and immigrants.”¹¹

This posture of assimilation Franklin refers to serves as a sanction for what is in essence greed, materialism, and narcissism. In addition, it promotes a culture that produces celebrity pastors and a dangerous false theology, resulting in a crisis of faith for individuals for whom Christianity does not produce prosperity in their lives. Franklin explains, “Indeed, the prosperity gospel maybe even more dangerous and insidious because it subverts particular elements of the Jesus story and of classical, biblical Christianity in order to instill a new attitude toward capitalism and riches. It often deliberately suppresses, ignores and/or deletes language about radical sacrifice for the sake of God’s kingdom.”¹²

¹¹ Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

For Franklin, there are other issues that contribute to the Black Church crisis of mission as well. Churches in high poverty neighborhoods often do not respond to the needs of the local community effectively. Current clergy appears to be more preoccupied with titles and honor than productivity. Constant and pervasive issues of gender bias continue to haunt the Black Church, coupled with the “shameful silence” of clergy on issues of social justice.

The crisis of mission Franklin describes can be attributed to what is actually a crisis of significance. Historically, the Black Church was not only the place where the community found hope and healing through its messages, but also the place where they found help. The Black Church was the source of social activism, political empowerment, and societal change at critical times in the history of African Americans in the United States. At the core of mission of the Black Church has been liberation and freedom, a concept that resonates deeply in the hearts and minds of most African Americans. This pursuit of freedom has come to define the Black Church as evidenced in its history across denominational lines. And yet despite the explosion of the New Black Church, the Historic Black Church faces issues of declining attendance, financial resources, and social influence. While Franklin attributes this reality mainly to the Prosperity Gospel, there are other factors as well.

The first factor is the bifurcation of the Black community. In his book, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*, Eugene Robinson asserts,

There was a time when there were agreed upon black leaders, when there was a clear black agenda, when we could talk confidently about the state of black America—but not anymore. Not after decades of desegregation, affirmative action, and urban decay; not after globalization decimated the working class and trickle down economics sorted the nation into winners and losers; not after the biggest

wave of black immigration from Africa and the Caribbean since slavery; not after most people ceased to notice—much less care—when a black man and a white woman walk down the street hand in hand. These are among the forces and trends that have had the unintended consequences of tearing black America to pieces.¹³

Robinson describes Black America as four distinctive communities: the Mainstream Middle Class, the Abandoned Minority, the Transcendent, and the Emergent. These communities are distinct and separated by geography, demography, and psychology. The Historic Black Church as a monolith is challenged in meeting the needs of such a unique and divided group.

The second factor is the emergence of the hip hop generation. In the early 1970s, while the rest of Black America mourned the deaths of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., youth were engaging in a new form of music and dance that would eventually give birth to a culture known as hip hop. Hip hop is a lifestyle with its own style of dress, language, mode of expression, and worldview. Generally speaking, most Black people born between 1965 and 1984 are considered a part of this generation. Like any music form, it is reflective of the political, social, and economic conditions of the time. With the increase and proliferation of this music form, the Black Church is no longer the sole source of leadership or only voice of reason. Many Black churches are struggling to attract and retain the membership and interest of this demographic, whose external influences are varied.

The last factor cannot be attributed strictly to the Black church or community, but certainly has a major impact on both. The last factor is post-modernity. The phrase is used to describe the condition of society after the modern era politically, socially,

¹³ Eugene Robinson, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 3.

economically, and culturally. It is characterized by several ideals; most important to this discussion are the beliefs that truth is relative, established institutions and authorities are corrupt, and morality is personal. All of these prevailing notions have had an influence on the post-Civil Rights generations to whom the Black Church is struggling to reach and retain. This reality challenges the message, method, and ministries of the Church in the minds of a generation who believes that no one has a monopoly on truth, personal behavior is personal business, and the Church is most the corrupt and hypocritical institution of all, and therefore has lost its ability to serve as a moral authority.

The Black Church is one of the oldest and most enduring institutions of the Black community, and has served as the birthplace of colleges, universities, banks, financial institutions, civil rights organizations, and social service programs. However, without serious reflection and analysis of these factors and others, the Historic Black Church will continue to see a decline in its membership and influence in the lives of individuals and the community.

The Emergence of the Historic Black Denominations

Like the Black Church and many other institutions, historic Black denominations were formed in response to the challenges of the time. Denominations served as connectional and associational structures, linking local churches around issues of national concern. Regardless of ideological and theological differences, all seven major denominations were committed to racial uplift and advancement. Whether through abolitionist efforts, education, job training and employment, or evangelism, each in its

own right provided a vehicle by which local churches could have a wider social and political impact and create denominational unity.

The Methodist Denominations

The first of the Black denominations were formed via the Methodist tradition. Black Methodism usually refers to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), known as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church until 1954 when the name was officially changed. Blacks became a part of Methodism as a result of the evangelistic revivals and camp meetings that occurred during the First Great Awakening during the 1740s. By 1786, the Methodist Episcopal Church claimed 1,890 Black members. Being that they opposed slavery, Methodism was an attractive option. Years later they retreated from their opposition, and while Black membership continued to increase, racial tensions did as well.

In 1787, former slave Richard Allen and a number other Black worshippers withdrew from St. George's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Allen proposed a separate place of worship for Blacks and formed the Free African Society. Although listed as a non-religious benevolence organization focused on abolitionist efforts and racial solidarity, the society held worship services that grew and led to the formation of Bethel AME Church, mother church of the denomination. Free African Societies were replicated in other states, and after conflicts with White Methodists over property and ministry assignments, five such societies met at Bethel Church and formed a denomination known

as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Today, they are the largest of the Methodist denominations, with an international membership numbering 3.5 million.

Similarly, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) was formed as a result of racial tension and discrimination. In 1796 a group of Black members broke from the Johnson Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City. Some of these members went on to form an African chapel that was later incorporated as the African Methodist Episcopal (Zion) Church in 1801. They continued to affiliate with Methodist Episcopal Church until conflict over control of church property caused the withdrawal of the two Black churches. These two churches formed the African Conference, which evolved into the AMEZ denomination. The official break from the Methodist Episcopal Church took place in 1824. Today it is the second largest Methodist denomination, with a membership of 1.2 million throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Unlike its sister organizations, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in the South and is distinguished by its historical circumstances. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was originally called, was formed from the Methodist Episcopal Church of the South, which split from the north over the issue of slavery in 1844. Their formation was amicable and done with the blessing of the parent church. Both sides understood the pervasive and ingrained notions of Black subservience and segregation that remained as the vestiges of slavery. Therefore, in 1870, Blacks who wanted independence and autonomy and Whites who wanted to be rid of their Black constituency agreed to part, and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was born with its own leadership and freedom to design its structure. The name was officially changed to Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in 1954. While the smallest of the three

Methodist denominations, the CME church has 900,000 members in the United States, West Africa, Haiti, and Jamaica.

The Church of God in Christ

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) is the only major denomination which does not trace its origins back to larger White denominations, nor was it formed as a result of racial tensions. Rather its history is distinctly interracial and non-separatist, and its formation attributed strictly to the life and ministry of its founder, Bishop Charles Harrison Mason. Bishop Mason was an itinerant Baptist minister who, by his own testimony, experienced the power and presence of the Holy Spirit through sanctification in 1893. Rejected by members of the Baptist community because of his beliefs and preaching on sanctification, Mason began preaching on street corners and the courthouse steps. His following grew to form the St. Paul Church of God in Christ and the Churches of God in Christ in 1897. Amidst increased segregation and racism, many White ministers were licensed and ordained by Bishop Mason through the COGIC. These ministers ordained by Mason would eventually go on to form the Assemblies of God denomination. Today the COGIC denomination is the largest Pentecostal denomination, with a membership of 5.5 million worldwide.

The Baptist Denominations

The emergences of the three major Baptist denominations are most tumultuous of them all. Perhaps because of their lack of connectional relations or ecclesiastical structure, the early formations resulted from associational splits. The National Baptist

Convention, USA (NBC), the National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (PNBC) are all by products of one another.

Like the Methodists, these national conventions also have their roots in early Black churches. As slave memberships grew, the degree of independence with which they could operate diminished. Many slaves met in secrecy as a result, but they were not allowed have any formal associations. In the north and the south, the move toward separate churches was a form of protest against harsh and unequal treatment.

Disassociation was easier for Baptists as opposed to Methodists because of the autonomy of local churches. Black churches continued to form across the country, but it was not until 1866 that an attempt to form a national body began. By this time, two regional conventions had been operating, the Northwestern and Southern Baptist convention and the American Baptist Missionary convention. These two met and formed the Consolidated American Baptist Missionary Convention in 1867. In 1868, records indicated a membership of 100,000 Black Baptists.

Despite these numbers, internal conflict grew as class conflicts and disputes over approaches to activism between educated northern Blacks and southern ex-slaves began to intensify. As this convention floundered, three new organizations flourished: the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention of the United States of America, the American Baptist National Convention, and the National Baptist Educational Convention of the USA. A merger of these three conventions was proposed and accomplished in 1895, which serves as the official founding date of the first historic Black Baptist convention, the National Baptist Convention, USA. This display of unity was much needed, given the intense period of racial segregation that ensued after the Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling of

“separate but equal” in 1896. NBC, USA remained the sole Black Baptist convention until a rift over publishing caused an additional split, leading to the formation of the f National Baptist Convention of America in 1915. The convention would see another split in 1961, which resulted in the formation of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. All three conventions continue to operate today with memberships between two and five million. Despite the sizeable memberships of each of these conventions, they still struggle to retain their relevance and significance in a post-modern, post-Christian era.

Conclusion

The Historic Black Church and the denominational structures it formed have a long and rich history that has been a critical part of every aspect of the Black community. Chapter 2 will detail the history of one convention in particular and its need to adapt to the challenges it currently faces. Adapting successfully will cause it to remain a viable force for change in the churches and communities it serves.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROGRESSIVE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION

It has been said that those who fail to know their past are doomed to repeat it. This sentiment is actually a paraphrase of a quote by famed Spanish novelist and philosopher, George Santayana, in his book, *Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense*. Santayana writes, “Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”¹ The PNBC has a rich historical legacy tied to one of the most successful human rights movements in the world. It is necessary to detail its history in brief to know if the convention founded on the concept of freedom has now become a slave to it.

Historical Context²

There is a bit of historical confusion as to the origins of the PNBC. Some identify its founder as famed Civil Rights leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Others

¹ George Santayana, *Life of Reason* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 280.

² The information in this section comes primarily from Booth, *The Call to Greatness*, 5-11. Other sources are cited throughout.

attribute its formation to the Dean of Black Preaching, Rev. Dr. Gardner C. Taylor. Its actual founder is one who stood alone like John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness. The story of its founding is as much about the National Baptist Convention, USA as it is about the founder himself.

In 1957, the National Baptist Convention, USA was the largest Black Baptist denomination. It had already experienced a split early in its formation and was about to experience another. In an effort to prevent tyranny and ensure a fresh succession of leadership minds, the convention body, under the leadership of Dr. J. V. Jemison, elected to limit tenure for the office of the President to four consecutive one-year terms. But as in the book of Exodus, there arose another Pharaoh who did not know Moses or Moses' God. Rev. Dr. J. H. Jackson became President in 1953, and after his initial four-year term in 1957 he swiftly declared such action as unconstitutional. It was his attempt at a third four-year term that began the rift within the National Baptist Convention.

In 1959, an underground movement formed to identify a viable alternative candidate for President. A call for leadership was issued to Dr. Gardner C. Taylor. Dr. Taylor would appear to have been a formidable challenger as the son of a former convention vice president and a preacher of local and international notoriety. However, the election of 1960 in Philadelphia ended with both Jackson and Taylor claiming victory. The dispute would eventually end with a court prescribed voting process in 1961 in Kansas City, where Jackson emerged the victor.

In this same year, during convention sessions, contentious interactions of leaders resulted in the loss of life and multiple injuries. Ten pastoral leaders who elected to address the actions of President Jackson via the court system were subsequently

unceremoniously expelled from active membership with the convention. Those leaders included Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr., Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, and Benjamin Mays. Most of these leaders agreed to maintain association with the convention despite their aversion to its leadership, however one leader believed the deep division was an opportunity for change.

Rev. L. Vencheal Booth, one of the younger members of the convention, believed it was time to part ways and start a new convention. For him, this split had been steadily approaching since 1953, despite his personal efforts at reconciliation. Concerned about the election process and excessive campaigning, Booth wrote a letter to then-President Jemison, soliciting a corporate day of prayer during which all campaigning and collective bargaining would cease until election day. Again in 1957, he attempted to arrange a non-partisan meeting between the Jackson and Taylor factions facilitated by independent but well respected faith leaders. Both attempts were met with either resistance or apathy. It was then that Booth decided that the only alternative was to start another convention.

After the convention of 1961, Booth wrote a letter to the delegates calling for all interested in “Peace, Fellowship, and Progress” to attend a meeting in November at Zion Chapel Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. His intention for this meeting was clear when he addressed the thirty-three delegates attending and sought to explain the meeting’s purpose. He said, “My final word to you is—the call was honest—the call was sincere—the call was humble. We called you here to organize a new convention. Our purpose has

not changed. If you do not organize a new convention, it shall certainly not be the volunteer chairman's fault."³ At this meeting, the PNBC was formed.

Founding Principles

The PNBC was founded on the principles of "Fellowship, Progress, and Peace." The notion of "Service" was added during the 1970s. The original phrase itself was taken from the actual call letter sent from its founder to delegates, asking them to attend the initial meeting. These principles, along with the Scripture reference upon which the convention was founded, are known as the "Progressive Concept." Originally, the intent of the concept had more to do with individual behavior and conduct than social transformation. By this motto, their constituency was challenged to be personally accountable and responsible in their department. They are a direct result of what they had experienced with the National Baptist Convention, USA, which had been characterized division, regression, and conflict. Dr. Thomas Kilgore, who served two terms as president of the PNBC, discussed each of these principles in his position paper entitled "The Progressive Concept."⁴

The first principle of the Progressive Concept is fellowship. Fellowship for Progressives is meant to transcend racial, denominational, and cultural barriers. It is more than a mere congenial gathering of like-minded individuals. Fellowship is gathering in love and concern for God, society, and one another. Having experienced years of division and strife before forming a new convention, the idea of a fellowship where the goal was

³ William D. Booth, *A Call to Greatness: The Story of the Founding of the Progressive National Baptist Convention* (Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Publishing, 2001), 24.

⁴ Thomas Kilgore with Jini Kilgore Ross, *A Servant's Journey: The Life and Work of Thomas Kilgore* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 228.

care and unity was refreshing and pioneering. This notion of fellowship is further illuminated by the Scripture chosen as the founding Scripture. Romans 12:9-21 admonishes them:

Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful. When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night. If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow. Live in harmony with each other. Don't try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.⁵

Progressive members are challenged to go deeper in their fellowship with one another as a convention founded in love and freedom.

The second principle of the Progressive Concept is progress. There is no understood or agreed upon definition of what progress means for the convention other than the notion of "going somewhere." Founders were of the opinion that the "other convention" (that is, the National Baptist Convention, USA) was not on the path of "progress" as explained in Dr. Thomas Kilgore's statement:

We are going somewhere in the Progressive National Convention. We are done with the cult of personalities. We are through with play prayers and circus sermons. True worship has meaning for us. Orderly sessions mark our business deliberations. Tenure in office is our way of life and a unified budget determines

⁵ All biblical references will be taken from the New Living Translation, unless otherwise noted.

our expenditures. We are on our way to developing a valid and responsible convention. Progress is our theme word.⁶

It is apparent that at its founding, the meaning of progress simply meant not being like the convention from which they succeeded. Throughout the years the convention would experience both numerical and financial growth, but the lack of a clear definitive understanding of what progress means for Progressives would prove to be a challenge.

The third principle of the Progressive Concept is peace. For Progressives, peace does not mean the absence of conflict, but rather that various points of view can be held and compromises reached based on biblical and convention principles. In his book, *The Social Teachings of the Progressive National Baptist Convention*, Albert Avant, Jr. points out that the “idealistic aim of PNBC founders was to create and operate a convention whose sole purpose was the exaltation of Christ by acting in His will, walking in His Spirit, seeking His glory, and by the maintenance of a reverent respect for His people.”⁷

In the 1970s, the term “service” was added to the PNBC motto, making it, “Fellowship, Progress, Service, and Peace.” Although the principle of service was not part of the original motto of the PNBC, it certainly can be suggested service has been a part of the convention since its founding. The PNBC played a critical role in the Civil Rights Movement by providing a denominational home for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a platform to access thousands of Black leaders and congregants as he addressed the masses at national meetings. The second President of the convention, Rev. Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, shared the following in 1968:

⁶ Albert A. Avant, Jr., *The Social Teachings of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. Since 1961: A Critical Analysis of the Least, the Lost and the Left-out* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 101-02.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

As we remember Dr. Martin King's trials and triumphs, we remember our part in them. Progressive Baptists take justifiable pride in the unassailable fact which now must forever be true, that when he had no spiritual home among Black Baptists, cast out from the house of his Fathers, Progressive Baptist gave him a Black Baptist residence. You provided him with an address in the community of Black Baptists. Let angels record that truth and let succeeding generations bring their gratitude to your door.⁸

Clearly service was a natural part of the PNBC before it was added to the motto.

Two other sources also provide insight into how service has been modeled in the life of PNBC. Article II, Section 1 of the Progressive National Baptist Constitution, Inc. states, "The objectives of the Convention shall be to encourage, support and promote Christian Evangelism; Christian Missions; Christian Education, including the necessary publication and distribution of literature; Christian Stewardship; Benevolence; Human Freedom and such other Christian work as the Convention may determine."⁹ The idea of service is evidenced in this value statement. Secondly, Avant notes in his history of the convention that "PNBC views itself as Christ-centered and cause-centered."¹⁰ He notes that PNBC has displayed this principle of service through three areas: "Missions, Civic Advocacy, and Support."¹¹

Mission, Vision, and Goals

According to the PNBC website, the mission statement says: "The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. – an association of Baptist churches throughout the

⁸ Avant, *The Social Teachings of the Progressive National Baptist Convention*, 105.

⁹ The Progressive National Baptist Convention, *The Constitution of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.*, Article 2, Section 1.

¹⁰ Avant, *The Social Teachings of the Progressive National Baptist Convention*, 107.

¹¹ Ibid.

world – is committed to the mandate of making disciples of Christ. The Convention is founded on the precepts of fellowship, progress, service and peace and seeks to affirm the priesthood of all believers.”¹² While the convention has a written mission statement, the vision and goals for the organization vary depending on the focus and agenda of the sitting president, and they have changed depending on the sociopolitical realities of the day. There have been nineteen sitting presidents, of whom ten are deceased.

Dr. Taylor, who served as president from 1967-1968, was committed to focusing the convention on issues of civil rights. Race relations, the Voting Rights Act, and full societal participation were convention goals during his tenure. Rev. Dr. Booth, who served from 1972-1974, was committed to establishing a headquarters with full-time staff and developing a national stewardship campaign. Rev. Dr. William Jones, who served from 1979-1980, wanted to enhance the convention’s social ethics and increase membership. Rev. Dr. Ralph Canty, who served from 1980-1982, focused on sound fiscal management, the civil and human rights agenda, and a strategy for national relevancy. Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., who served from 1987-1988, desired to enhance mission work, Christian education, and evangelism. He established a Civil Rights’ Night, where notable workers were honored, and he also established the Young Adult Women’s department. Rev. Dr. Bennett W. Smith, who served from 1995-1998, noted that his goal was reconnecting the disconnected to restore the fellowship of PNBC churches.

In more recent years, Presidents Major Jemison and T. DeWitt Smith, who served successively from 2002-2010, were focused on issues of advocacy and civic engagement

¹² The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., “Mission Statement,” <http://pnbcinc.com/About%20Us/aboutus.htm> (accessed August 10, 2012).

driven by national and world events of importance during that time. The aftermath of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the Iraq War and the election of the nation's first Black president were all drivers in determining their focus and agenda. Issues of civil rights have remained a theme throughout most presidential tenures including voting rights, equal employment and class disparities, and anti-Apartheid legislation.

Leadership and Organizational Structure

The PNBC is a membership association of Black Baptist churches in the United States and abroad divided into five regions: Eastern, Southern, Midwest, Southwest, and International. Officers of the convention are elected annually and include the office of President, First Vice-President, Second Vice-President, General Secretary, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, Historian, and Editor. In addition to these offices, the regional, state, and district fellowships are reflective of the same structure.

The objectives of the convention are primarily achieved through auxiliaries and departments. In addition, boards, commissions, and committees are created as deemed necessary. The convention meets annually in the week following the first Sunday in August. Generally all auxiliaries, departments, boards, committees, and commissions meet during the annual session. The leaders of these organizations are also elected with the exception of the nominating committee which is appointed by the President. These leaders combined with officers listed above comprise the Executive Board. The Executive Board provides leadership to the convention and is authorized to act in its interest when the general body is not in session. It should also be noted that since term limits was the seminal factor in its succession from the National Baptist Convention,

USA, The issue of tenure has been clearly stated in *The Constitution of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.*: “Officers of the Convention and Auxiliaries or Departments of the Convention shall not succeed themselves in office consecutively, more than three (3) times until at least one year has elapsed.”¹³

Membership is open to all Baptist churches, associations, or other Baptist bodies that meet eligibility standards. Eligibility standards include membership fees of 1 percent of the organization’s annual operating budget. Members are entitled to a certain number of voting delegates to the Annual Session based on the sizes of their membership. Only those members who have fulfilled this obligation are eligible to be elected and hold office in the Convention. In August 2012, the fifty-first Annual Session of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. is being held in Memphis, Tennessee.

Current State and Challenges Facing the PNBC

The Convention has grown from 33 members in 1961 to 2.5 million worldwide. Today there are two thousand member churches. The PNBC is currently under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Carroll A. Baltimore of Alexandria, Virginia. His cabinet includes First Vice President Rev. Dr. James Perkins, Senior Pastor of the Greater Christ Baptist Church of Detroit, Michigan; Second Vice President Rev. Dr. Timothy Stewart, Senior Pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church in Nassau, Bahamas; and Interim General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ralph Canty, who served as the ninth president of the Convention and the youngest ever elected. He also serves as Under-shepherd of the Savannah Grove Baptist Church in Effingham, South Carolina.

¹³ The Progressive National Baptist Convention, *The Constitution of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.*, Article 5, Section 5.

The focus of the sitting President is reflective in the Convention theme set forth at the beginning his tenure: “Securing Our Future: Prayer – A People of Progress.” This is part three of a four-faceted theme introduced when Dr. Baltimore was elected in 2010. “Securing Our Future” is the foundation with yearly subthemes being: Humility/Fellowship, Prayer/Progress, Seeking/Service, and Turning/Peace. His overarching goals are financial integrity, leadership accountability, administrative reliability, and growth exponentially.¹⁴

Active departments include the Laymen, Women, Young Adult Men, Young Adult Women, Ushers, Youth, Health, Missions, Moderators, State Presidents, and Congress of Christian Education. Some of the active boards and commissions that do not include management include: HIV/AIDS, Civil Rights Commission, Seminarian Development, Prison Ministry, Economic Engagement, and the New Pastors/New Churches Committee.

The resolutions adopted also help provide insight into the issues of the importance for the Convention. Twenty-five resolutions were proposed to the Convention body, including: PNBC MLK Advocacy Day, Stance Against Anti-Muslim Laws and Propaganda, Addressing Cyber-bullying, Corporate Social Responsibility with African American Communities, Support for Religious Freedom, Climate Change and Greening PNBC Churches, Support for the Affordable Care Act, and Trayvon Martin/Stand Your Ground Laws. These resolutions represent a diversity of issues and causes including

¹⁴ The Progressive National Baptist Convention, “Leadership – Plan of Action,” www.pnbc.org/PNBC/Leadership.html (accessed August 9, 2012).

those familiar, like race relations and human freedom, as well as newer concerns, such as the environment.

In addition to the President's goals, the Interim General Secretary, who gives administrative leadership to the convention, has goals as well. Dr. Canty, the current Interim General Secretary, has identified six guiding principles that inform his decision making: fiscal accountability, transparent management, collaborative leadership, organizational restructuring, heightened communications, and innovative initiatives and practices.¹⁵ In his 2012 *Interim General Secretary's Report*, he shares an overview of his work, and he details the many difficult but necessary decisions and actions undertaken to achieve desired results. He also includes recommendations for change and improvements that will help strengthen the PNBC infrastructure. His report gives insights into the challenges that the PNBC must address in the immediate future. External challenges facing the Historic Black Church were discussed in Chapter 1. Those challenges are certainly relevant for this discussion, but there are also internal challenges that face the Convention that are more pressing than any external force.

The first internal challenge is organizational identity. During "The Gardner Taylor Hour" every Wednesday at noon during the annual session, the convention hall is filled to hear the preaching of one who epitomizes the life and legacy of Dr. Taylor. This Convention year, the preacher was the Reverend Dr. Jawanza Colvin, pastor of the Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Colvin preached a sermon to convention delegates asking the question, "Who Are We?" He encouraged members of the PNBC to consider the convention's identity.

¹⁵ Ralph Canty, *The Interim General Secretary's Report* (Washington, D. C.: PNBC, 2012).

The issue of the convention's identity was also brought to light by Dr. Canty in his *Interim General Secretary Report*. Dr. Canty reflects upon planning a Presidential Summit in Raleigh, North Carolina, where the current cabinet, two past presidents, and he had the honor of meeting with Dr. Taylor, second president of PNBC. As Dr. Canty states, "The premier consensus emerging from the Summit was that the convention needs to develop a vision statement and revisit its mission statement. These statements are essential tools needed to guide the work and ensure the effectiveness and productivity of our Convention."¹⁶ Several submissions have been made in each area, but it certainly suggests that while the Convention is very clear on who they were in the past, they are challenged in clearly articulating who they are now and who they must be in the future.

The second internal challenge is gender equity. When Avant interviewed the ten former presidents for his work, he asked each one if there were issues of gender equity expressed to PNBC during their tenure. Only five of the ten responded affirmatively, while the others believed it was not a pressing issue or that it was not a Convention issue. One past president, Dr. Booth (1972-1974), when faced with issue of women preaching, appointed a "committee of brothers to study the theological aspects of women preaching," eventually deciding it was a local church issue. Another past president, Dr. Bennett W. Smith (1995-1998), viewed it as a very pressing issue. He felt that the lack of women preachers was hindering PNBC progress, and he appointed two women, Drs. Ella Mitchell and Brenda Little, to his cabinet.

To date, there has never been a woman to hold a presidential office or the office of General Secretary in the fifty-one-year history of the convention, despite the fact most

¹⁶ Canty, *The Interim General Secretary's Report*.

of its member churches are predominantly female. The women's department continues to be one of the largest most active departments and it is fiscally sound. It is within this department that most women find leadership opportunities and occasion for visibility. Of the thirty-one National Chairs, Boards, and Commissions, seven are women. Of the nine PNBC New Initiatives, one is headed by a woman. Of the eleven vice presidents of departments at large, five are women. These five are leading departments traditionally seen as women's work, like the women's department, youth, and missions. No regional presidents are women and the female members of the executive board hold the offices of recording secretaries. While the PNBC has certainly made improvements during the last few decades, if it is to be progressive it must take a stand as a denomination, not just in word but in deed.

The third internal challenge is financial stability. This continues to be a concern of the convention from the time of its inception. In the first report of the Executive Secretary in 1962, Dr. L. V. Booth declared, "The Progressive National Baptist Convention faces the righteous imperative to bring to the Nation a Stewardship Program that will lift it from a mere protest group to an action group as soon as possible. . . . The PNBC must practice Christian Stewardship or close shop."¹⁷ This same sentiment and need has been echoed some sixty years later by the current interim secretary. Dr. Canty writes, "The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. must portray an image of economic astuteness and proficiency. . . . We must model in the Convention sound economic principles and practices and they must be so valid and sophisticated that our churches will

¹⁷ Booth, *A Call to Greatness*, 127.

eagerly desire to adopt them.”¹⁸ Dr. Canty made this statement in response to discovering a number of outstanding Convention expenses affecting corporate credibility. The financial stability of the convention is vital in securing its future.

The fourth challenge is leadership diversity. In addition to issues of gender, the convention is challenged by ageism. Many convention leaders are of a particular age group, having emerged from an era where “waiting your turn” was the practice of the day. As a result, there was no real need to attract, identify, and create opportunities for young potential leaders to learn and be used. While the PNBC has recently appointed a Social Media Minister and assigned potential leaders to serve in areas of Public Policy and Advocacy, there is no plan for identifying candidates for formalized succession. Statistics show that 94 percent of organizations have no succession plan.¹⁹ But even Jesus realized there can be no lasting success without successors. He said to the disciples in John 20:21, “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” The PNBC is challenged to systematically develop a relay team. There must be runners at every leg of the race who are already in their positions, even before the baton is passed.

The fifth and last challenge is prophetic strategy. “Prophetic” in the Black church collective has always meant speaking truth to power. Standing in the tradition of biblical prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel who often called out the sins of the nation of Israel on behalf of God and admonished repentance, the Black Church and its preacher have served in the same role. Yet over the course of time, there are those who believe the Black

¹⁸ Canty, *Interim General Secretary's Report*, 3.

¹⁹ Walter W. Dingham and A. Gregory Stone, “A Servant Leader’s Role in Succession Planning Case Study,” *International Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 2, Iss. 2 (2007): 133-47, <http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/ijls/new/vol2iss2/dingmanstone/DingmanStoneV2Is2.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2012).

Church lost this aspect of its identity and function. Dr. Cornel West, in his book, *Democracy Matters*, states, “The sad truth is the black church is losing its prophetic fervor in the age of the American empire. . . . And when the major example of prophetic Christianity – the black church tradition – succumbs to this temptation and seduction, the very future of American democracy is in peril.”²⁰

For PNBC, the prophetic voice has not been lost but rather silent. The challenge is not what to say in response to the issues of the day, but how to say it, and what vehicles to use to ensure that the “powers that be” know it has been and is being said. The PNBC must consider how it will most effectively communicate its prophetic positions in a manner that is inspiring, impactful, and produces change in the hearts and minds of those who will hear.

Conclusion

While the challenges facing the PNBC are many and the need for transformation and renewal is clear, the opportunities for long-term systemic change that will produce organizational stability and sustainability in the future are even greater. In preparation for preaching, it is necessary to learn from the scholars. In the area of transformation and renewal, there are several scholars who can help the PNBC to establish the theological framework for change, as well as outline traditional approaches. The next chapter will review their work in light of present-day realities facing the PNBC.

²⁰ Cornel West, *Democracy Matters* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 158.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section is designed to provide foundational insight and further support for the need for transformation and renewal from three distinct perspectives: theological, sociological, and organizational. The first section will help establish the need for a new theological framework for transformation and renewal. The next section will identify the current crisis facing the Black community and will consider how that reality should inform the methodology of transformation and renewal. The final section will discuss traditional approaches employed to achieve transformation and renewal in churches and religious organizations.

Developing a Theological Framework for Organizational Transformation

Authors Ray S. Anderson and Phillip Clayton provide significant support for the need for a new theological framework for transformation and renewal. One author discusses in great detail why theology must be done differently. The other discusses how. Having both been seminary professors, both agree and acknowledge their biases to academic theology or the theory of what one believes about God. They also agree that in doing so, a chasm has been created between the Church and the academy that must be

bridged. Academic theology is in danger of becoming irrelevant. Anderson provides insight as to why: “The bridge connecting practical theology to the older discipline of ‘pure theology’ was constructed for one-way traffic. While the discipline of practical theology was permitted as a necessary application of practice to theory, practical theologians ordinarily did not carry union cards admitting them to the theological guild.”¹ Clayton points out,

The primary responsibility for Christian thought now belongs to professors who teach in seminaries and divinity schools. For some centuries this worked, because theologians, like me, wrote books that helped clarify the mission of the church, books that guided thinking Christians and church leaders, books that provided materials for pastors as they prepared sermons and sought to bring the word of God to life anew for their congregations. . . . [Today, however,] theology [has] evolved into another academic discipline pursued according to academic standards and aimed at a largely academic audience.²

The problem, explain Anderson and Clayton, is that seminary professors are responsible for training and preparing candidates for ordination and often for work in the field of parish ministry. These candidates often leave informed but ill-prepared to make the connections between academic theology and faith in daily life. The impact of this reality is potentially catastrophic. Clayton cautions, “Unless the Christian faith can provide the basis for assimilating the truth of the new challenges of the 20th century into a whole that is communicable to many, and unless Christians can point convincingly to what this new vision requires, old-line Protestantism will relapse more and more into

¹ Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 7.

² Phillip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 30.

lukewarmness – and death.”³ Both authors have written their books in response to a need for change, providing definitions and strategies regarding how to achieve such from a theological perspective.

Transforming Christian Theology for Church and Society, by Phillip Clayton

Clayton begins his book, *Transforming Christian Theology for Church and Society*, by describing his own Damascus Road experience in accepting the need and answering the call to do theology differently. He writes that this experience came as a result of two church thinkers: Brian McLaren and John Cobb. McLaren, explains Clayton, has been issuing the clarion call to recognize that now is a time of major transition and summoning church and religious leaders to lead the church through it. McLaren’s call pricked his conscience, but John Cobb’s assertion produced his personal conversion from purely academic theology. Cobb asserts that the professionalization of theology has created a lack of responsibility amongst lay Christians to think theologically, and as a result there is no shared sense of the primary importance of the Christian faith or any urgency to make it a priority. Therefore, Clayton’s book is written for laity and lay leaders. He asserts that theology must be returned to the churches and people if it is to be transformative for society, even if that means risking transforming theology itself. Clayton contends, “[The] Internet and other new technologies have democratized theology in a way that no one could have imagined just a generation ago.

³ Ibid., 31.

Here's the byproduct: rather than lowering the standards for solid theology, these folks are raising the bar!"⁴

In Part One of his book, Clayton solidly establishes that things have changed. Church has changed, technologies have changed, and people have changed. These changes have produced questions and challenges that the Church must answer and face. The answers for Clayton must be theological, a theology that emerges from the very people who must live and practice it.

Part Two of Clayton's book is titled, "Theologies That Can Transform the Church." In this section Clayton provides a definition of transformative theology: "A transformative theology is a powerful statement of what you believe, one that guides and motivates transformative action in the world."⁵ Developing this transformative theology will require intentional reflection individually and corporately and consists of three areas: "Theology as Telling the Story," "Theologies in Action," and "Theology as Self-Emptying." This three-pronged approach mirrors his personal transformation identified earlier in the book.

Part Three is titled, "Theologies That Can Transform Society." In this section, Clayton discusses the issues that continue to plague and divide the Church when it comes to social activism. These issues include "the Evangelical/Liberal debate," "Multiculturalism," "Ministry versus Mission," and "Prejudice." In this section he also outlines in six steps, the process for developing a theology that informs Christian involvement in broader society.

⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁵ Ibid., 145.

Clayton’s work is particularly relevant for this project because of his very deliberate conversation regarding the mainline Church and denominations in particular. He speaks of how many denominations arose out of disputes that were of great importance to generations past, but have no relevance to a large number of church attendees. There is no “brand loyalty” amongst churches or denominations anymore.⁶ This very issue is evident in the PNBC.

In addition, Clayton points out that there are sharp disagreements that have weakened existing denominations, threatening their very existence, including, but not limited to, homosexuality and gender equity. While he acknowledges that large structures like denominations do not pass away quickly, he does affirm the position presented in this paper—that the mainline churches and denominations must begin to examine the role they will play in this rapidly changing society and ask some questions. Clayton asks, “In the future, will [Christians] be shapers of American society, or like other Christian organizations from the past such as the Epworth League, will they exist only on the margins of this emerging new world?”⁷ While the answer is not yet clear, Clayton does remind the reader that the “difference between influence and irrelevance is how well we manage the change that lies before us.”⁸

⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁸ Ibid., 119.

The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis,
by Ray S. Anderson

While Clayton addresses the “why” of change and transformation from a theological perspective, Anderson more concretely addresses the “what” of change and transformation. In his book, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, Anderson asserts that the characteristics of a theology should inform change and transformation. For Anderson, transformation itself is a theological process, one that should be practical. His purpose for writing like Clayton is to bridge the gap that exists between pure/academic theology and praxis/practical theology. He has three goals that he outlines in the book, two of which are relevant for this project: “to define the shape of practical theology as truly theological and not just a mastery of methods and skills, and to define the praxis of practical theology as critical engagement interfacing with the Word of God as revealed in scriptures and the Work of God taking place in the church and world.”⁹

For Anderson, theology is practical before it is systematic, so in attempting to define practical theology he references both historical and contemporary contributors. These contributors include C.I. Nitzsch and Gerben Heitnk, but Anderson focuses on Don Browning’s model as one worthy of significant analysis. Browning’s model of practical theology is informed by practical reason with experience at the center of the model. It asks two questions: “What, then shall we do?” and “How, then shall we live?” in light of our experience.

⁹ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 22.

For Anderson, the model lacks two very important traits: a Christological core and a Trinitarian foundation. He believes that the actions of Christ reveal as much about the nature and purpose of God as Scripture does. It is through Christo-praxis, the “continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁰ that a practical theology must be grounded. Within this context, Browning’s two questions of “what shall we do” and “how shall we live” are no longer solely linked to personal experience at the center, but rather asked and reflected upon in light of what God has revealed through his word and what God is doing through his Spirit. Anderson’s work is important to this project, not just because he provides a theological context for transformation and renewal, but also because he provides the characteristics that should frame and inform that theological perspective.

For Anderson, any theology that informs change is practical and rooted Christo-praxis. It is also missional, ecclesial, hermeneutical, Trinitarian, and spiritually empowering. In Part Two he discusses the “praxis of practical theology” in light of the resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the idea of neighbor, and the Christian perception of humanity. In Part Three, Anderson focuses on a “practical pastoral theology,” dealing with such critical issues as clergy burnout, homosexuality, the family in a postmodern culture, and pastoral ethics.

Both Anderson and Clayton end their books on a prescriptive note. Clayton suggests that there are three conversations worth having around these notions: “Choices, Convictions and Connections,” “Barriers to Belonging,” and “Toward a Progressive Missiology.” He believes that theology that produces transformative action must begin

¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

with the people and not the academy. Anderson agrees with Clayton's conclusion when he states, "The theological task, which properly belongs to the church as a means of naming its own origin, nature and mission, was handed over to scholars, so that church theology became academic theology."¹¹ In his final chapter, he offers a proposal to revamp theological education in a manner that allows the academy to work in partnership with the people in discovering theology. They both agree that this task will call for a radical re-visioning of God, mission, and the Church, but it is Anderson who states that the "task of working out a theology for ministry begins properly with task of identifying the nature and place of ministry itself."¹²

The Need for Change within the Black Church and Black Parachurch Organizations

The next two authors assist in defining the nature and place of ministry in context for this project. What community will the PNBC serve and what state is that community in? What kind of change is needed to effectively reach this community and why? These are the questions that are explored in reviewing the work of Robert M. Franklin and Eugene Robinson.

Crisis in the Village, by Robert M. Franklin

In his book, *Crisis in the Village*, Dr. Robert Franklin, the tenth president of the historic Morehouse College in Atlanta, seeks to contribute to a conversation around what

¹¹ Ibid., 321.

¹² Ibid., 62.

he describes as the current crisis in the Black community. He desires his book to be a call to strategic action for leaders and lay people alike.

Franklin borrows from the African Proverb, “It takes a village,” in his uses of the word “village” to refer to local neighborhoods and communities with predominantly Black populations. Franklin asserts that within the village are anchor institutions – “institutions that have an enduring presence and operate to stabilize people amidst chaos and rapid transition.”¹³ Being a product of a village, an experience he describes in detail throughout the introduction of the book, he suggests that today’s Black communities are facing serious challenges. He isolates his discussion of the nature of the crisis to three areas: familial, religious, and educational. He defines the crisis as present within the three anchor institutions that have traditionally served the Black community: “institutions that African Americans control and for which they set the agenda, determine priorities, and pursue solutions with the necessary and available energy and resources. They are the church, the family and the school.”¹⁴ His book is different from others like it in three ways: he offers a very specific set of strategies for village renewal in each sector discussed; he calls for a culture of accountability around implementing these strategies; and he provides a theological framework for his discussion of the crisis.

Franklin opens by suggesting that the first major crisis is within the family. It is a crisis of commitment. He identifies several historical and present-day factors that have contributed to the deterioration of the commitment to the Black family. The past and

¹³ Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

lingering impact of slavery and migration is a topic of great debate. He encapsulates the essence of the debate by quoting Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson, who states,

After two hundred and fifty years of forced adaptation to the extreme environment of slavery, African American men and women developed a distinctive set of reproductive strategies in their struggle to survive. Tragically, the strategies that were most efficient for survival under the extreme environment of slavery were often the least adaptive to survival in the free, competitive social order.¹⁵

Of the Great Migration to the northern cities during the 1940s, Franklin notes that more Black women entered the workforce and began marrying later, while many Black men remained unemployed and pursued marriage less. Both historical realities, Franklin asserts, resulted in a reversal of gender roles, leaving deep scars between Black men and women. In addition, contemporary challenges such as the declining marriage rate, increased divorce rate, relationship violence, and the issue of same-gendered unions are all symptoms of a crisis of commitment in relation to family. These challenges have resulted in unhealthy relationships, parental irresponsibility, and a youth culture that promotes rude, violent, anti-intellectual behavior. Franklin believes that “if we fail to get the family agenda right, we will take a tragic step backward in our heroic movement for justice and opportunity. In other words, much of the progress made during the post-civil rights movement years could be jeopardized by our inattention to the health of this primary anchor institution.”¹⁶

In addition to the crisis in the Black family, Franklin discusses what he believes to be a crisis among Black colleges. This crisis he describes as a crisis of moral purpose. He points out several critical realities regarding Black colleges that make this crisis one

¹⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Cities* (Washington, D.C.: Civitas, 1998), 41, quoted in Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, 63.

¹⁶ Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, 42.

that needs to be addressed by the entire village. First, communities of the African Diaspora have always been learning communities. Second, when Black literacy and learning was illegal in America, it was treasured and sought after by Black people even at the risk of physical harm. Third, it was during the Reconstruction era when many Black colleges emerged, not only to educate Black people but to instill a sense of character and purpose. Finally, students of Black colleges sparked one of the greatest social transformations in American and even world history: the Civil Rights Movement. Some of the community's best and well-known leaders are products of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Franklin believes that this culture of learning and excellence is being eroded. He attributes this erosion to three things: a lack of institutional purpose, student indulgence, and expressive individualism.

There are many causes of concern as it relates to education and the Black community. Franklin identifies a few major symptoms: the educational gap between male and female achievement, detachment and anonymity, and village and public neglect of schools. He believes there must be a renewal of individual and corporate purpose. Institutions are being called upon to focus not solely upon academic achievement and intellectual prowess, but on spiritual and character development as well. Students are being called upon to not associate their success with educational and material attainment, but rather on a record of service for the larger community. Franklin states, "At a time when the culture of narcissism was and is corrupting and destroying a culture of civic virtue and public service, students may be up against must larger cultural forces than they

can oppose without support. This is where the entire culture of black colleges must be mobilized to instill virtues like personal sacrifice for the greater good.”¹⁷

One of the anchor institutions that the Black community has traditionally looked to for direction and a sense of purpose, an institution that was instrumental in founding of many of today’s Black colleges, is the Black Church. The Church, though, is challenged in its ability to address this crisis because, according to Franklin, it is facing a major crisis of its own. Franklin asserts,

I am convinced that the single greatest threat to the historical legacy and core values of the contemporary black church tradition is posed by what is known as the prosperity gospel movement. That movement however, is only symptomatic of a larger mission crisis or mission drift that has placed the black church in the posture of assimilating into a culture that is hostile to people living on the margin of society, such as people living in poverty, people living with AIDS, homosexuals and immigrants.¹⁸

Symptoms of this crisis are evident by the misallocation of titles and honor, the deafening clergy silence on political and social issues that adversely impact the Black community, the lack of prophetic preaching, and the lingering issues of gender bias that are present throughout the Black church across denominational lines. He calls upon clergy to become leaders of village renewal by making a commitment to focus on specific areas of need within the community. Franklin even goes so far as to challenge each denomination to develop plans of actions around these areas. However, the ability of denominations to do that may be more of a challenge than Franklin has realized, for reasons discussed by Eugene Robinson.

¹⁷ Ibid., 198.

¹⁸ Ibid., 112.

Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America, by Eugene Robinson

In his ground-breaking book, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*, Robinson's premise is simply that times have changed and, as a result, the ways in which any agency interfaces with the Black community must change as well. Robinson states,

There was a time when there were agreed upon black leaders, when there was a clear black agenda, when we could confidently talk about the state of black America – but not anymore. Not after decades of desegregation, affirmative action, and urban decay; not after globalization decimated the working class and trickle down economics sorted the nation into winners and losers; not after the biggest wave of black immigration from African and the Caribbean since slavery; not after most people ceased to notice – much less care – when a black man and a white woman walk down the street hand in hand. These are among the forces and trends that have had the unintended consequence of tearing black America to pieces.¹⁹

Robinson suggests that instead of one Black America, there are four: “The Mainstream Middle,” “The Abandoned Minority,” “The Transcendent Elite,” and “The Mixed Race/Black Immigrants.” These four Black Americas are all different. They are all separated by location, income, class, and mindset. They have different hopes, values, desires, and fears, but most important they all lead separate lives.

Robinson goes on to describe how the break-up happened. There are several historical occurrences that had divisive effects. He traces the splintering back to Civil Rights laws banning discrimination, thus creating opportunities for poor Blacks to join the middle class. The poverty rate in the Black community began to fall steadily until mid-1990s. Today, Robinson points out that 25 percent of all Black Americans are the “Abandoned” and remain in poverty. The presence of a strong Black middle class laid the foundation for the Transcendent, a small elite group with enormous wealth and

¹⁹ Robinson, *Disintegration*, 4.

power. The Emergent is a result of two phenomena: an increase in immigration from Africa and the Caribbean and the acceptance of interracial marriages.

For Robinson the fragmentation is undeniable. He goes on to describe specific characteristics of each group and challenges each faces. He closes by asking the critical question for this work: “We know who we are but who will we be?”²⁰ He ponders whether or not there are still enough shared values, experiences, hopes, and dreams to create a much-needed sense of racial solidarity powerful enough to reconnect a disintegrated Black America. Racial solidarity has been one of the most powerful weapons in the struggle for freedom, justice, and opportunity. He suggests that there are actions each segment of Black America can take in order to reconnect and corporately address the issues of poverty, violence, poor education, and other pathologies that adversely affect the Abandoned. But a changed Black America requires any organization called to serve it to re-examine itself and ensure that its ideology, methodology, and (in some cases) theology are prepared to reach a divided Black America. How does an organization begin this examination process? What is required and expected as a result? The notions of organizational change, transformation, and renewal are the subjects explored by the last two authors reviewed in this section.

Traditional Approaches Employed to Achieve Transformation and Renewal in Churches and Religious Organizations

Before introducing a new process for transformation and renewal, it is important to review current traditional methods utilized in secular and religious contexts. The next

²⁰ Ibid., 223.

two authors outline strategies, principles, and methodologies informing the process of change.

Organizational Development: The Process of Leading Change, by Donald L. Anderson

There is a field of study and research devoted to assisting organizations with the process of change. In his book, *Organizational Development: The Process of Leading Change*, author Donald L. Anderson introduces the reader to the field of Organizational Development. Organizational development is an “area of academic study and professional practice focused on making organizations better – that is, more effective and productive and at the same time more rewarding, satisfying and engaging places in which people work and participate.”²¹ Anderson believes that by learning about the field of organizational development, its processes and values, readers can become effective change agents within the organizations to which they belong.

Anderson opens by sharing traditional definitions of organizational development widely known and accepted by those in the field. He then offers his own definition, which is useful for this work: “Organizational Development (OD) is the process of increasing organizational effectiveness and facilitating personal and organizational change through the use of interventions driven by social and behavioral science.”²² He asserts that the purpose of organizational development (hereafter, OD) is change and that “creating and managing change in order to create higher performing organizations in

²¹ Donald L. Anderson, *Organizational Development: The Process of Leading Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

which individuals can grow and develop is the central theme of the field of OD.”²³ The book is meant to provide an overview of the field, including theories of and models of change used by practitioners to develop skills for real life application.

In addition to a definition, Anderson discusses the eight strands of OD as they emerge. These eight strands include: Laboratory training and T-groups, action research and survey feedback, management practices, quality and employee involvement, organizational culture, change management, strategic change and reengineering, organizational learning and organizational effectiveness, and employee engagement. The two most relevant for this work are the strands of organizational culture and change management.

Anderson recalls that a 1980 *Business Week* article originally popularized the concept of organizational culture. The article featured two highly successful companies. In assessing their values and success drivers, the article noted that an organization’s strategy and culture must be in alignment for success; the author concluded that if they were not aligned, either strategy or culture must change. Culture, in this context is described as the “shared attitudes, values, beliefs and customs of a social unit or organization.”²⁴ Culture becomes a powerful source of data in attempting to determine if an organization is ready for change and what level of change it can engage in and sustain. The Church is unlike any organization in that its culture varies by denomination, ethnicity, and even geography. Any systemic change that endures must be sensitive to

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 29.

the shared values and beliefs of that particular environment. The culture of PNBC will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Change management and strategic change is also a strand of OD relevant to this work. Anderson points out that this strand experienced rapid growth as field research increased in the 1980s and 1990s. It shifted the concept of change from one driven by external factors like market conditions, customer needs, and finances, to internal ones like vision, mission, goals, and strategy. The ability of an organization to manage internal change became the difference between mediocre and successful organizations.

The ability to manage change successful is largely dependent of the model of change employed. Change occurs on many different levels, at different paces and with different outcomes. Because change can be planned or unplanned, large or small in magnitude, and episodic or continuous, one must be clear about the organizational theories that inform most models of change.

Models of change for Anderson are driven by how one views an organization. In the field of OD, organizations are seen as either systems or as social constructs, and each has models of change developed from its particular perspective. Systems thinking views an organization not as individual components but in totality, as interconnected. The goal is to understand what drives the system and how those drives affect outcomes.

Organizations can also be viewed as social constructs, not a thing on its own at all but rather the result of a concept developed out of actions and language. The goal is to understand the meanings ascribed to the organization by its members. While there are many lenses through which one might view an organization, it is clear from Anderson's

work that the success of a transformation model must first explore and understand the lens through which it views itself.

According to Anderson, OD is more than just the application of theory or following of rigid systematic procedure; it is about the core values and beliefs of those seeking change. Decisions about change are “those decisions guided by a set of values and ethical beliefs about how organizations should be run and how people should be treated and how organizational change should be managed.”²⁵ Those field values include authenticity, participation and involvement, group development and learning, and dialogue and collaboration. These values should inform how change is approached within any organization, and the Church is unlike any other organization. Discussing change in the general sense, as Anderson does, is informative, but change in the specific context of the local church requires further discussion.

Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey,
by Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr

In their book, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey*, authors Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr address how transformation occurs in this unique and delicate organism known as the local church. Their framework comes from working with over one hundred churches and from teaching the change process to over one thousand pastors and lay leaders. At the heart of their transformational model is spiritual and relational vitality. Before the process of transformation can begin, the church and its leaders must be committed to spiritual and relational vitality. The authors believe that “spiritual and relational vitality

²⁵ Ibid., 37.

is the life giving power that faithful people experience together as they passionately pursue God’s vision for their lives.”²⁶

Churches and leaders can position themselves to experience and express this vitality through a four-fold process: “Encountering the holiness of God”; “Experiencing God’s grace”; “Embracing unity”; and “Engaging community.” They write, “The resounding message of this book is that without authentic spiritual and relational vitality in a local gathering of believers, the church does not have the resources that are demanded to engage transformation and to influence the world.”²⁷

The actual transformational process consists of eight steps. These steps are grouped together and discussed as they relate to three transformational goals. Each set of steps is designed to lay the groundwork for change, discern and communicate the vision, and achieve and maintain widespread impact. The eight steps are: make personal preparation, create urgency, establish vision community, discern vision and vision path, communicate the vision, empower change leaders, implement the change, and reinforce momentum through alignment. Each chapter includes suggested action items for facilitating each step and the related key benefits and challenges. Successful transformation in the authors’ estimation also requires leaders who not only possess a specific set of skills, but who have mastered and practice a set of transformational disciplines. They write, “The need for these skills grows out of the turbulent nature of our culture and the current state of Christianity in America. Church leaders of the past could be successful by gradually improving on what their predecessors had done. In

²⁶ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2000), 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

today's context, leaders cannot depend on tradition for many insights. The current setting for ministry demands continuous learning."²⁸

There are four disciplines that leaders should learn if successful transformation will take place. First, leaders must generate and sustain creative tension. Creative tension is created when a clear vision of the future is continuously held, juxtaposed to a picture of the current reality. This tension, the gap between the two, is what drives change. Second, leaders must also harness the power of mental models, which are "the images, assumptions and stories that we use to interpret our world and drive our actions."²⁹ Transformation requires that one knows one's current mental models as well as what new models are needed to produce change. The third discipline is enabling team learning. Team learning is the process of enabling a group of people to produce as a unit far more than they ever could as individuals. Learning in this context is not just receiving or retaining new information, but rather that which expands the team's capacity to achieve a desired result. The fourth discipline is practicing systems thinking. The authors assert that how a leader views the organization has a direct impact on how he or she assesses and views the current reality and discerns the vision, and how he or she formulates solutions. Generally, churches are viewed as individual parts, dissected and analyzed as such when change is needed. However, the authors believe that "congregations are spiritual and human social systems that are complex, connected and changing."³⁰ Viewing a church as such allows for a clearer picture of the current reality

²⁸ Ibid., 95.

²⁹ Ibid., 113.

³⁰ Ibid., 144.

and informs proposed solutions in light of the interaction between spiritual and material dynamics. Mastering this discipline increases the probability of deep and lasting change.

The authors found in their work that there six dynamics of congregational transformation that they now consider universal. They close the book by sharing these dynamics. The sixth dynamic, “Healthy change takes time,”³¹ provides the perfect transition to the next section of this project. They state, “Deep changes are those that move beyond superficial circumstances, such as attendance and morale, to underlying corporate attitudes and practices, such as the structures and mental models of the congregation.”³²

Often these structures and mental models are biblically and theologically informed. This is particularly true of the Historic Black Church and the organizations it spawned, like the PNBC. Chapter 4 will explore the traditional biblical and theological framework for transformation and renewal that has served as a foundation for these organizations.

³¹ Ibid., 160.

³² Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

TRADITIONAL BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL

In the section of the literature review devoted to change in organizations and churches, both authors discuss the importance of organizational learning as a critical key to successful transformation. Specifically, they reference the importance of understanding the mental models that an organization holds. The term “mental model” is borrowed from the work of business leader Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. In this book, Senge defines mental models as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.”¹ These mental models usually result in actions and behaviors that are entrenched and intricately woven into an organization’s identity, hindering its ability to innovate. What the authors fail to address is where these mental models come from, how they are formed, and what influences their development. In this chapter, this author suggests that for the PNBC and the many historic Black churches that comprise it, the primary source is theological. It is

¹ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Element: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1990), 9.

necessary to examine this traditional theological understanding of transformation and renewal for their context in an effort to uncover how this framework may be limiting forward progression. This will be done through reflection and analysis of several texts from the book of Exodus and a reflection on the challenges with this framework.

The book of Exodus is a riveting account and action-filled story of rescue that would rival any Hollywood film produced, past or present. It has all of the makings of a feel-good thriller with the traditional exposition, rising action, and resolution. The cast of characters includes the nation of Israel, a chosen people of God to be witnesses on the earth; Pharaoh, the villain and oppressive despotic monarch; and Moses, the hero from humble beginnings.

In this book, the nation of Israel is enslaved, living in Egypt under the oppressive rule of Pharaoh. However this relationship was not always one of bondage and slavery. Just a generation before, an Israelite, Joseph, was one of the highest-ranking officials in the land of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. During his lifetime, Israel enjoyed a prosperous relationship with the government and lived in freedom and prosperity in a foreign land. But Scripture indicates that after the death of Joseph, there arose another king who did not know Joseph or Joseph's God. Intimidated by the rapid expansion of this foreign people, he enacted a policy of forced servitude in hopes of quelling what he feared was a potential political threat to his kingdom. It is in this context that the reader sees the emergence of the story's third character, Moses. In addition to a policy of forced servitude, the king enacted a policy of forced male genocide. Israelite males born were to be killed. However, Moses, through fate or divine providence, lived and eventually became a leader of Israel and played a critical role in Israel's being freed from slavery.

Because of its theme of oppression and political and social liberation, it has served as the inspirational and foundational text for many theologies of liberation, including Black theology.

The concept of liberation theology has its genesis in the Catholic Church of Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s. It emerged in reaction to the widespread poverty that went virtually unaddressed politically or religiously. Gustavo Gutierrez, who is considered the founder of liberation theology, believed this theology arose out of the experience of the poor and the oppressed and cannot be separated from the social and political context that created it. For Gutierrez,

The liberation of Israel is a political action. It is the breaking away from a situation of despoliation and misery and the beginning of the construction of a just and comradely society. . . . The Exodus is the long march to the Promised Land in which Israel can establish a society free from misery and alienation. Throughout the whole process the religious event is not set apart. It is placed in the context of the entire narrative.²

Gutierrez also makes clear the key role that God plays in this religio-political event. He writes, “The God of Exodus is the God of history and of political liberation more that he is the God of nature.”³

God as an Agent of Transformation and Renewal

While Moses is generally identified as the deliverer of Israel, Scripture indicates a fourth character. In Exodus 3:7-9, clearly God is the actual agent of liberation for the nation of Israel; he is the producer of their transformation and renewal. The New Living Translation reads,

² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 155.

³ *Ibid.*, 89.

Then the Lord told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. Look! The cry of the people has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them.”

The text indicates that it is God who has seen, God who has heard, and God who has come down to intervene and take action in this situation. While Moses is the vehicle, God is the source.

It is clear why this story of slavery and deliverance would resonate with Black people. As discussed earlier in this work, the Black Church has slave beginnings. Black people were also a people oppressed, and they believed and hoped based on this text that God would deliver them from bondage in the same way he delivered Israel. Even the songs sung by the people during this time reflect their deep connection to the Exodus story. In 1872, the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University published these words:

When Israel was in Egypt’s land: Let my people go.
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let my people go.
Go down Moses,
Way down in Egypt’s land,
Tell old Pharaoh
Let my people go.⁴

In the song, Israel represents Black slaves while Egypt and Pharaoh represent the slave masters. It was also believed that songs like these were used on the Underground Railroad to provide guidance and direction to those slaves running away to freedom.

This Scripture text reveals several qualities about the nature and character of God that have remained dominant understandings in the Black Church even today. First, God

⁴ *When Israel Was in Egypt’s Land*, anonymous author, Hymnary.org, http://www.hymnary.org/text/when_israel_was_in_egypts_land (accessed September 4, 2012)

is the liberator. Although Moses is the human vessel, it is God who divinely orchestrated the circumstances of Moses' birth and adoption. It was God who led Moses out into the desert where God eventually called him, endowed him with special powers, and acted on his behalf to secure the freedom of Israel. James Cone, who is considered to be the father of Black theology, supports this notion in his book, *God of the Oppressed*, by stating, "In the Exodus – Sinai tradition, Yahweh is disclosed as the God of history whose revelation is identical with his power to liberate the oppressed. There is no knowledge of Yahweh except through his political activity on behalf of the weak and helpless of the land."⁵

Second, Israel belongs to God and God to Israel. There is the notion from this text that despite Israel being enslaved, they are a people who belong to God; they are the possession of God. In that, God is ultimately responsible for their condition and for changing their situation. In Exodus 3:6-10, Yahweh uses relational terms such as "your Father" and "my people," denoting a connection that was established during the time of Abraham, promising deliverance for his descendants. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of the oppressed.

Finally, God is on the side of the oppressed and desires their freedom. In Exodus God is not the transcendent, distant, unfeeling God who does not interact with creation. God is genuinely concerned about their condition and fully prepared act on their behalf in securing their deliverance. Cone states, "He is a political God, the protector of the poor and the establisher of the right for those who are oppressed. To know him is to

⁵ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 59.

experience his acts in the concrete affairs and relationships of people, liberating the weak and helpless from pain and humiliation.”⁶

These same themes undergird the traditional theology that has shaped and informed the mental model of the Black Church. In the preface to his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone writes that “theology is not a universal language about God. Rather it is human speech informed by historical and theological traditions written for particular times and places. Theology is contextual language – that is, defined by the human situation that gives birth to it.”⁷ The situation that gave birth to Black theology was the Black experience in America of legislated racism and the struggle to understand what it means to be Black, Christian, and free. Cone also identified Black culture, Black history, revelation, and Scripture as constructive sources. The task of Black theology, as Cone puts it, is to “analyze the black man’s condition in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people and providing the necessary soul in that people to destroy white racism.”⁸ Even in this context, God is the ultimate agent of transformation. Cone points out that “God enters into the social context of human existence and appropriates the actions of the oppressed as his own. When this event of liberation occurs in thought and praxis, the words and actions of the oppressed become the Word and Action of God. . . . The task of

⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁷ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), xiii.

⁸ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 117.

theology is to show the significance of the oppressed struggle against inhuman powers, relating the people's struggle to God's intention to set them free."⁹

It is clear in looking at the history and mission of the PNBC and its member churches that liberation and freedom were at the heart of its founding and continue to inform its work. The Black Church in many ways sees itself as the liberating vessel, the Moses, called of God to secure the freedom of oppressed peoples. The Black Church believes, writes Cone, that "God himself has taken up the cause of the oppressed and promises today what was promised to Israel while they were yet slaves in Egypt."¹⁰

Cone then quotes Exodus 6: 1-8: "Therefore, say to the people of Israel: 'I am the Lord. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment. I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt.'"¹¹

The Exodus as the Act of Transformation and Renewal

When referencing the Exodus, one is generally speaking of the series of events that takes place in the entire book leading up to the parting of the Red Sea. There are many incredible, pivotal moments in the story that all interlock and intertwine to move the reader through the narrative of transformation and renewal of a nation. The resistance of two Hebrew midwives which led to the miraculous birth and survival of Moses; the adoption of Moses by the Pharaoh's daughter; the slaying of an Egyptian by Moses, son

⁹ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 98-99.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

of Pharaoh; and the burning bush—all are pivotal moments that prepared the way for the transformational act of liberation, but none produced transformation itself.

In Exodus 6, God speaks of performing great acts that redeem and rescue from oppression. Exodus 12: 31-36 indicates,

Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron during the night. “Get out!” he ordered. “Leave my people—and take the rest of the Israelites with you! Go and worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you said, and be gone. Go, but bless me as you leave.” All the Egyptians urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible, for they thought, “We will all die!” The Israelites took their bread dough before yeast was added. They wrapped their kneading boards in their cloaks and carried them on their shoulders. And the people of Israel did as Moses had instructed; they asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. The LORD caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So they stripped the Egyptians of their wealth!

The text indicates that the transformation and renewal for the Israelite nation was realized with single act. Pharaoh directs Aaron and Moses to get up and leave from amongst his people, taking the Israelites and all associated with them. The power of his word as reigning political leader was enough to shift the future of an entire nation socially, politically, and religiously. The Pharaoh who had remained hard-hearted throughout nine plagues, which had affected agriculture, the environment, livestock, weather patterns, and even the health of Egyptian citizens, had a change of heart with the leveling of the tenth plague: the death of firstborn males. This text reveals many truths of transformation and renewal that provide evidence for the suppositions of this work. But the truth that will be explored further in this section is that transformation and renewal is generally initiated with a single decisive act.

Transformational acts are those that are commonly known as watershed moments. Watershed moments are those turning points in history where nothing will ever be the

same. In the history of Israel, this act of release by Pharaoh is a watershed moment. It is transformational and has three critical effects. First, it produced liberation and freedom. In this text the Israelites are changed. They are no longer slaves under the oppressive regime of the Egyptian empire; in this text they are free to pursue the purposes of God as a community. Transformational acts are freeing in that they release individuals, communities, and organizations from agents that bind them, allowing for the possibility of movement.

Second, it created an opportunity for change. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 430 years. Generations lived and died with no identifiable intervention from God or any indication that life would change. But with the exodus, an opportunity was created for transformation. It created an opportunity for Israel as a corporate entity to change its vision, mission, and identity. The Israelites in one moment went from being a people forsaken by God to a people chosen and elected by God to be an instrument of purpose.

Finally, transformational acts spawn forward movement. The Israelites were now free to explore how their lives, identities, and future could be different. In the literal sense, they could change their location, both physical and social. Their economic and class standing changed in that they went from being a people who lived in poverty to being a people leaving with plunder. As a people, they are now able to progress and embark upon a journey toward full freedom.

The Exodus has also come to serve as a symbolic watershed moment inspiring other movements of liberation and transformation in religious and secular history. The American Revolution, The Civil War, The Women's Liberation Movement, the anti-Apartheid movement, and even the Protestant Reformation all reference the story of the

exodus as an influential foundational text for inspiring their movements. Pinchas Lapide writes a chapter titled, “Exodus in the Jewish Tradition,” in the book, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, in which he points out that “this unique moment in the history of Israel that began by turning subjugated forced laborers into runaway slaves in order to subsequently forge them into the people of God in the harsh merciless desert has over three millennia become the epitome of all liberation.”¹²

There are several decisive acts in Black history that have come to reflect the exodus motif and have resulted in community transformation for Black people. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 issued as an executive order by President Abraham Lincoln was the act of exodus that freed nearly 3.1 million of the 4 million slaves that lived in the United States at the time. The Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1954 was the act of exodus that declared the practice of “separate but equal” decision of Plessy vs. Ferguson unconstitutional. This decision ended public segregation, a transformational act that liberated, changed, and allowed for the forward movement of millions of Black people.

The most famous of decisive acts of great significance for the Historic Black Church and the PNBC came as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Author Gary Selby, in his book, *Martin Luther King and the Rhetoric of Freedom: The Exodus Narrative in America’s Struggle for Civil Rights*, writes of how the story of the Exodus was a critical narrative, often repeated throughout the Civil Rights Movement. He analyzes five of King’s speeches comparatively to show how prominently the exodus

¹² Pinchas Lapide, “Exodus in the Jewish Tradition,” in *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, ed. Bas M. F. van Iersel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, LTD, 1987), 47-55.

themes of bondage, oppression, and liberation figured. In his 1957 sermon, “Birth of a New Nation,” King states,

There is something in the soul that cries out for freedom. There is something deep down within the very soul of man that reaches out for Canaan. Men cannot be satisfied with Egypt. They tried to adjust to it for awhile. Many men have vested interests in Egypt, and they are slow to leave. Egypt makes it profitable to them; some people profit by Egypt. The vast majority, the masses of people never profit by Egypt, and they are never content with it. And eventually they rise up and begin to cry out for Canaan’s land.¹³

As a result of this movement, the decisive landmark piece of legislation that outlawed major forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender was passed. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was followed by subsequent acts that extended and strengthened the liberties granted in this act.

The Exodus as an act of transformation has become one the foundational understandings of the theology that informs the Historic Black Church, its work, and the organizations it has formed, such as the PNBC. Cone explains why: “The Exodus was the decisive event in Israel’s history, because through it Yahweh revealed himself as the Savior of an oppressed people.”¹⁴ Because God is the Savior of oppressed people, “participation in the historical liberation spearheaded by God is the defining characteristic of the church. The task of the church is threefold. First, it proclaims the reality of divine liberation. . . . Secondly, the church not only proclaims good news of freedom, it actively shares in the liberation struggle. . . . Thirdly, it is the visible

¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Birth of a New Nation” (sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL, April 7, 1957), http://www.famousquotes.me.uk/speeches/Martin_Luther_King/2.htm (accessed September 3, 2012).

¹⁴ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 63.

manifestation that the gospel is a reality.”¹⁵ Although the proclamation of release by Pharaoh was a decisive act resulting in national liberation, the true transformation and renewal of the Israelite nation was a process that occurred over the course of time. The Red Sea event is a symbol of this process of transformation and renewal.

The Red Sea as the Process of Transformation and Renewal

It can be argued that liberation is instant, but transformation and change are a process. Once the Israelites were freed, the real process of transformation began. Their journey to freedom consisted of communal and individual change on many levels: geographical, social, and religious. George V. Pixley, author of *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, notes, “Liberation from servitude in Egypt, and victory over pharaoh, were only the first step – a necessary one, of course – toward the establishment of the people of Yahweh as society of abundance and justice.”¹⁶ Goran Larsson, author of *Bound for Freedom*, notes that there are no shortcuts to freedom. He suggests that based on Exodus 6:6-8, there are five stages to freedom: being released from oppression, being rescued from slavery, being redeemed with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment, being claimed as a people of God, and being brought into the land sworn to be given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁷

The Israelites are in stage three of Larsson’s model and now must embark on the next leg of the journey toward freedom that completes the total act of liberation. In

¹⁵ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 130-31.

¹⁶ George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 81.

¹⁷ Goran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 49-51.

order to do so, they must go through the “Red Sea,” actually known as the Sea of Reeds. The events that lead to the crossing of the Red Sea outline a process of transformation and renewal that has informed the understanding of the Historic Black Church and the PNBC, and how these entities have experienced change in the past.

The Red Sea crossing, described in Exodus 14:14-29, is considered one of the greatest miracles of the Old Testament and certainly a climactic event in the dramatic tale of freedom for the Israelites. In the opening of this biblical scene, Israel appears to be trapped. With Pharaoh behind them, mountains to west and the Gulf to the east, fear and panic begins to set in and they long for the familiarity and comfort of Egypt, the place of their bondage. Before detailing the process, this reality also provides some insight into the nature of transformation and the change process.

First, change often creates feelings of doubt, fear, and discomfort leading to conflict. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr make the distinction between life-giving and life-threatening conflict: “Life threatening conflict occurs when people lose sight of the vision to which God has called them. It is found in the Exodus story. After the people left Egypt for the Promised Land, the people lost sight of the mission. They began to murmur against leadership and openly disobey God.”¹⁸ Second, change often causes the romanticizing of the past. The Israelites, when faced with imminent change, did not recall the heavy labor, being forced to make bricks without straw. They did not recall the cries for relief that initiated divine intervention. In the moment of change, they preferred the life of slavery to what the change required to transform their future. Finally, change can cause one to demonize the future. In this context, moving forward would mean

¹⁸ Bonem, Herrington, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 8.

death. For many who resist change, it is uncertainty and fear of an unknown future that they cannot control. Left unaddressed, it is here where the change process generally stalls, and organizations fail to transform or renew; they experience stagnancy and decline instead.

In addition to the challenges to change this reality, there are also some general critical foundations and key actions that are revealed as well. The first is that identification of key leadership is paramount. Throughout the entire liberative process, God has been the source, but Moses has been the face of liberation. Liberation for Israel would not have occurred without the direct action and visibility of key leadership which included Miriam and Aaron. In the same manner, in the Black community, prominent social movements that produced change were initiated by key leaders. Although there were many who were involved in laying the foundation for what is undoubtedly one of the most famous change movements in history, it was Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who emerged as the face of the movement. The selection of key leadership was crucial in securing success.

The second critical foundation is key leadership communication of the vision and strategy. In this text, Moses encourages and instructs the people as to the next steps in an effort to assuage their fears and inspire commitment and forward movement. God speaks to Moses and Moses speaks to the people. This becomes the motif throughout the forty years of the exodus movement. In the same manner, it was the fiery speeches and sermons of Dr. King that ignited the hopes and dreams of a people who desired a country free of racial and ethnic segregation. In both cases, communication became a key component for moving a people through the process of liberation.

The third critical foundation is that key leadership initiates liberative action. Moses was instructed by God to initiate this process of parting the Red Sea by picking up his staff and extending his hand. It was the action taken by leadership that resulted in the divine manifestation of the east wind that blew all night, creating a wall of water and drying the sea floor so that the nation of Israel was able to cross on dry ground. It was also that same action that secured certain deliverance from their Egyptian enemies as the waters returned to their place, effectively drowning both chariots and charioteers. In 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a White passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, it was the decision of key leadership, in this case, Dr. King, to form the historic bus boycott that served as the initial liberative action that sparked the famed Civil Rights Movement. Leaders initiate key actions that lead to transformation and renewal. This three-step process revealed by the Red Sea event became the marker and model of transformation and renewal, duplicated repeatedly, not just for the Israelites but worldwide in socio-political movements in Latin American, South Africa, Ghana, and India.

Conclusions

The notions of God as liberator, Exodus as the act of transformation and renewal, and the Red Sea as the process are the three components of theological framework that have informed the process of change for the Black Church and community historically. God is the ultimate source of liberation. The act of liberation is always freeing the oppressed from injustices. The process of securing that liberation is key leadership that communicates vision and initiates action.

There is no denying that this framework has informed some of the most successful change movements in America. Whether it was Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement, Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Million Man March, or even the election of the nation's first Black president, Barack Obama—the theological framework remained the same. It continues to serve as the normative source of the mission, vision, and purpose of the Black Church. However, there are some challenges to this framework as well.

It has been suggested that the theological framework that has informed the missions and ministries of so many churches and religious organizations is possibly irrelevant for this day and time. Dr. Anthony Bradley, author of *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America*, offers several critiques of this framework and the theology it formed. He takes issue with elevating individual or corporate experience above historical orthodox scriptural doctrine. He suggests that placing the Black experience, culture, and history at the center of a theology results in an individualized, culturally specific framework that skews any conclusions drawn about God, Jesus Christ, and the Church. Bradley writes, “If theology is not grounded in Scripture but is instead grounded in the mind of man, the entire edifice of theology, however skillfully and creatively constructed, collapses like a house of cards.”¹⁹

He also notes that at the base of this framework is “victimology.” This is a term and concept that he borrows from John McWhorter, author of *Losing the Race* and

¹⁹ Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 23.

Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America. McWhorter defines victimology as the adoption of victimhood as the core of one's identity.²⁰ This sense of victimhood prevents one from having a clear view of any present progress or potential for such in the future. McWhorter also offers a critique which suggests that victimology leads to what he calls "therapeutic alienation." Therapeutic alienation is a self-inflicted alienation, "unconnected to, or vastly disproportionate to, real-life stimulus, but maintained because it reinforces one's sense of psychological legitimacy, via defining oneself against an oppressor characterized as eternally depraved."²¹

Bradley and McWhorter seem to be suggesting that the physical bondage and oppression experienced by the Israelites and others who have suffered a similar fate has been replaced with a mental oppression that is rendering this framework ineffective in a current context. While this mental oppression does not render this theological framework irrelevant, Bradley's and McWhorter's points are well taken in that the mental oppression must be considered. Dr. Myles Munroe, in his book, *The Burden of Freedom*, agrees; he contends, "When oppression becomes a mental condition, physical freedom is not enough."²² Munroe goes on to say that what is needed is change, but not simply in a physical sense. He explains, "Without mental transformation, the actions we take to change may only produce a new place where we continue to do our old things."²³

²⁰ John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 3.

²¹ John McWhorter, *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005), 6.

²² Myles Munroe, *The Burden of Freedom* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2001), 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

This chapter ends where it began: considering the influence of mental models, particularly those influenced by theology, and the impact they have on transformation and renewal. This is a critical point of reflection for the future of Historic Black churches and specifically the PNBC. If the theological framework of liberation has traditionally informed the mission, vision, and ministry of these organizations, what impact does perceived irrelevance have on its future? What theological framework is required to reestablish relevance? What impact will this have on the process of transformation and renewal? Is there a theology of the oppressed and a theology of the free? What will a different theological framework mean for the mission, vision, and ministry of these organizations? These are the questions that will be explored and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGY OF THE D.A.N.C.E.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, saying, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2). Paul seems to provide biblical support for the notion of mental models as a key component in successful transformation, as suggested in the previous chapter. How a person thinks or in this case how an organization thinks is critical to their ability to transform and renew. Chapter 4 has suggested that theology informs mental models and, as a result, influences what a person or organization believes about change: when to change, if change should happen, and how change should happen. While Bradley and McWhorter are incorrect when they suggest that the traditional liberation theology framework is irrelevant, their point raises two important questions that have long been debated in theological and academic circles, and must be addressed briefly here before presenting the theology of the D.A.N.C.E. These questions are: Does theology change? If theology does change, when and how should it change?

Theology which Does Not Change

There are those who argue that true theology never changes, because the subject—God—never changes. Citing passages such as Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8, some theologians suggest that theology does not and need not change because of God’s immutability. However, there are others who believe that theology is contextual and therefore arises from its *sitz im leben*—it changes as the situation changes.¹ Of this notion, Cone points out that “one’s social and historical context decides not only the questions we address to God but also the mode or form of the answers given to the questions.”² This leads one to believe that as situations in life change, so does one’s theology. If true, this prompts concern as well. Ray S. Anderson asks, “Does a political or black theology appropriate revelation to a concrete situation in such a way that the immediate occasion becomes the authoritative text? Has theology virtually become hermeneutics—where self-understanding incorporates the data of revelation into one’s own experience and action?”³ While the debate will certainly not be settled in this work, there are factors within a theological framework that do change, and there are certain factors that should not.

In any theological framework, there are two things that should never change: the commission and the message. The Church and parachurch organizations function as missionaries commissioned by God to perform specific tasks. Matthew 28: 18-20 defines

¹ The phrase *sitz im leben* is a German phrase meaning “setting in life.” Wikipedia explains that the term “describes what occasions certain passages in the Bible were written for.” See Wikipedia, s. v. “*sitz im leben*,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitz_im_Leben (accessed September 23, 2012).

² Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 15.

³ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 61.

clearly what the Church has been commissioned to do. It is commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations. Believers do that by baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to obey all that has been commanded. This corporate mandate stands universal as the mission of any and every believer, including those who gather as the *ecclesia* known as church.

In addition, the message should never change. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever should believe on him should not perish but have everlasting life.” This was one of my earliest childhood verses committed to memory. It reflects the essence and nature of the gospel. God loves so God gave so we could have. This message is eternal and establishes the reason why the Church and organizations like PNBC exist. What should be changing continuously is the method in which this message is delivered and mission accomplished. This is where so many organizations get stuck. They are challenged in finding and implementing new methods for communicating the message and achieving the mission based on their context. Many believe the old methods are timeless and should be sufficient, particularly when past methods have been successful. But as the apostle Paul suggested to the Romans, God transforms by changing the way we think. It is important that mental models remain fluid and flexible so they do not become mental prisons prohibiting forward progress.

When a Theological Framework Should Change

At this time, the liberation theological framework, which has informed the Historic Black Church and organizations like PNBC, should change. There are several

reasons why this is true, many of which are based on realities discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3, which highlighted the work of Eugene Robinson, author of *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*. However, three reasons will be discussed here. These reasons for change could be applied to any theological framework.

First, theological framework should change when there is a lack or breakdown of shared history and experiences. The Israelites of Exodus were a unified people who, up to the point of the Exodus event, had a unified social, political, and religious history. Their forefathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew the promises of God made to Abraham and were living under the partial fulfillment of that promise as slaves in Egypt. They lived together in community under the veil of oppression.

In the same regard, Black people in the United States had a shared socio-political, religious, and cultural history and they shared the experience of slavery, racism, and legislated segregation. They too lived under the corporate veil of oppression together. The Church where they worshipped God was birthed out of this corporate reality. This shared experience and history created a sense of unity, physically and theologically, regardless of denominational differences.

However, with the bifurcation of the Black community into four distinct groupings and the progression of time, that experience and history is no longer shared or embraced corporately. One component of the Emergent,⁴ the Black immigrant community, does not share the historical experience of slavery as it was lived in the

⁴ The term “Emergent” refers to its usage Robinson’s book, *Disintegration*, as discussed in Chapter 3.

United States. The second component of the Emergent, the mixed race community, often has difficulty in identifying as solely African American and certainly does not share the views and opinions of race and culture as previous generations. The Transcendent and Mainstream communities often, because of material success, are challenged in embracing a God of Liberation when they do not see themselves as oppressed, and they are disconnected from the abandoned of today and of previous generations as well. These varied experiences would certainly produce different questions about God and different views of God's presence in the world.

Second, a theological framework needs to change when there is a breakdown or lack of shared cultural norms and values. When a once-unified community becomes splintered and their experiences are no longer shared, then what they value and embrace as normative becomes divided as well. The Historic Black Church was once the center of the Black community. It is where primary source of information and inspiration. It was where many of the social services that met the needs of the Black community were birthed, and it was the place where political movements were spawned and ignited.

In a bifurcated Black community, particularly in a postmodern context, the role of the Black Church has diminished as integration has opened up new avenues for gaining information and inspiration. The need for social services now depends on which group one falls into, and political movements can begin via the internet or other non-religious settings. In all four groupings, there is a fast-growing population of un-churched generations. Their theological understanding is no longer drawn solely from this historic institution and its teachings, if they have any theological underpinnings at all.

Finally, a theological framework should change when its ability to effectively communicate its message and accomplish its mission has been compromised because of the framework itself. While the debates rage on regarding whether or not God and theology change, what is certain is that times change. With changing times come new realities that give rise to new questions about God, God's interaction with the world, the meaning and relevance of Jesus Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, and many other topics. If God is revealed progressively over time, then is the God of Liberation who authored the exodus event the same God of the Wilderness? Or do the generation born in the wilderness need a new framework for seeing the same God? This chapter suggests that a new framework is needed. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the components of that framework.

A New Framework for the Historic Black Church

If the Historic Black Church (including organizations like the PNBC) is going to be successful in the transformation and renewal process, it must revisit the theological framework of liberation and the mental models that have historically shaped its identity and informed its mission. This section presents the theological framework needed for embracing organizational change.

In the pericope of Ezekiel 37:1-14, Ezekiel has been called by God to serve as priest and prophet to the Israelites living in Babylon. He is specifically expected to serve as a watchman and one who speaks the words of God. Despite the fact the Israelites find themselves once again in captivity, the goal is not necessarily liberation and freedom from the oppressor, as has been discussed earlier in this work. In this context,

Babylonian exile is the result of the Israelites breaking covenant with their God. Exile has caused a theological crisis. The covenant established at Mount Sinai is often seen as a high point in Jewish history. The Promised, The Temple, and the Davidic covenant are all major components of their relationship and understanding of God. Now they have been exiled from the land, the temple has been destroyed, and throne of Davidic lineage has been interrupted. Ezekiel's prophetic ministry is one of speaking truth to power, but in this case there is no Pharaoh. The power that must be dismantled is the Israelite mindset itself.

How God acts in this context, known as the second exodus, sheds light upon the needed theological shift that must take place if transformation and renewal will occur. First, God the Holy Spirit serves as inspiration. Second, Ezekiel serves as the prophetic agent of transformation and renewal. Finally, prophetic vision serves as the act of transformation and renewal.

God the Holy Spirit as Inspiration

Generally when one speaks of inspiration in a Christian context, he or she is referring to the doctrine of inspiration, which seeks to support the notion of biblical inerrancy by explaining the assertion in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The Greek word for "inspired" in this verse is *theopneustos*, meaning "God-breathed" or "inspired by God."⁵ This understanding helps to establish the initial principle of the theology of the D.A.N.C.E. God the Holy Spirit causes, participates, encourages, and empowers, all of which are concepts encapsulated in the word

⁵ Strong's Concordance online, s. v. "*theopneustos*," <http://concordances.org/greek/2315.htm> (accessed October 6, 2012).

“inspires.” The word “inspiration” in this context is being defined as that which motivates, stimulates, and influences one to action or creativity. In Ezekiel 37:1-14, the Holy Spirit is specifically the source of inspiration that leads to transformation and renewal in the second exodus.

In the first exodus, God the Father is clearly the one acting as the agent of deliverance and liberation. The plagues are acts initiated and executed by God. In this text, verses one and two illustrate how God the Holy Spirit inspires: through direct interaction with humanity. In verse one Ezekiel speaks of the “hand of the Lord” being upon him and being moved or carried out by the “spirit of the Lord.” The hand of the Lord is a symbol of God’s presence and influence in life and ministry. Ezekiel had been commissioned as a prophet earlier in chapter 3, but his ability to do so would require divine inspiration. The hand of the Lord and the spirit of the Lord are seen throughout the Old Testament as signs that God is at work with his creation in achieving divine purpose through them.

God the Holy Spirit can be seen throughout the Old Testament serving as the source of inspiration in many ways. The Spirit in the Old Testament is the *ruach*, the breath of God. In Genesis, the breath of God hovers over the deep as the creative process is initiated. It also filled inanimate matter and created human life. The breath of God is also seen as empowering for service. In Numbers 11, the same spirit that rested upon Moses was placed upon the seventy elders empowering them to serve the Israelites. The spirit of Lord raised up charismatic leaders like Othinel, Gideon, and Samson to defeat the enemies of Israel. In this text, the spirit of the Lord specifically inspires in three ways: divine guidance/movement, prophetic utterances, and direct action.

By the spirit, Ezekiel is brought to and sat down in a valley that is full of dry bones. He passes by all around the bones and does an initial assessment, noting that there are very many and they were very dry. Ezekiel is moved by the spirit and placed in a specific context for the purpose of addressing the issue at hand. God the Holy Spirit is inspiring, breathing in concert with humanity to bring about liberation and change. Richard Tholin, in his book, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation Movements*, writes, “The major prophets took the spirit-concept out of these surroundings, and transformed the divine spirit from something religiously and ethically neutral into the concept of the purposeful and deliberate operation of God’s personal power in history and creation.”⁶

This is a critical distinction given the challenges facing the Black Church and community today. In many ways, there is the prevailing sense, under the traditional theological framework, of waiting on God to move and act on behalf of God’s people as God has done in times past. But in reality, the people themselves are well able to work and actively participate in initiating their own transformation and renewal through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel as Prophetic Agent of Transformation and Renewal (Ezekiel 37:1-4)

In this text Ezekiel becomes the human agent expected to initiate the process of transformation and renewal for this valley of dry bones. He is not waiting on God to act on his behalf, but rather God is waiting on Ezekiel to act on God’s behalf. His actions outline the role of prophetic transformational leaders in this process. Brueggemann states, “The prophet is called to be a child of tradition, one who has taken it seriously in

⁶ Richard Tholin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation Movements* (Nashville: Tidings Publishing, 1974), 42.

the shaping of his or her own field of perception and system of language, who is so at home in that memory that the points of contact and incongruity with the situation of the church in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency.”⁷

The first role of Ezekiel as prophetic agent is as an accurate assessor. Ezekiel, being moved by the spirit, was placed in a situation where he was called upon to see, discern, and assess the place, position, and state of the bones. Before any level of change can transpire, leaders must be able to accurately assess their current position. This is often a challenge when organizations are not able to face the reality of their day. It becomes the task of the leader to boldly proclaim, “We are in a valley. The valley is full of bones and the bones are exceedingly dry” (verse 2).

Ezekiel then reflects the second task of prophetic agency: to envision an alternative future. After his assessment inspired by the Spirit, Ezekiel is directly engaged by the Spirit to offer his opinion on the possible future of the bones. God says to him, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (verse 3). By posing this question, Ezekiel is being enlisted as the agent that the Holy Spirit will use to bring about change in the valley. Ezekiel is being challenged to not only speak to the “is-ness” of his current surrounding, but also to the possibility. Ezekiel is being asked: Is this the final state of these bones? Is there any other future possible for them? Brueggemann writes, “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”⁸ Brueggemann underscores that prophetic agents of transformation and renewal must be able to envision

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

a future for their organizations that is radically different from its current state. This is a concept Brueggemann calls “prophetic imagination.”

Ezekiel is then instructed to initiate the third task of prophetic agency: to communicate the alternative future. God instructs Ezekiel, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord’” (verse 4). Communicating the future possibility is a critical component of transformation and renewal. Brueggemann states, “The hope-filled language of prophecy in cutting through the royal despair and hopelessness is the language of amazement. . . . The language of amazement is the ultimate energizer.”⁹

The last task of prophetic agency is to enact a strategy to achieve the future. Brueggemann continues, “The question facing ministry is whether there is anything that can be said, done or acted in the face of the ideology of hopelessness. . . . The task of prophetic ministry and imagination is to cut through the despair and to penetrate the dissatisfied coping that seems to have no end or resolution.”¹⁰ The strategy given to Ezekiel to cut through despair is the word. Brueggemann writes, “The prophet only has the word, spoken word and acted word, to contradict the presumed reality of his or her community.”¹¹ Once Ezekiel received instruction and revelation, it was his responsibility to enact the strategy given by speaking the word. Ezekiel’s obedience and participation is critical to the success of the process. Similarly, leaders must be the driving force for change in any organization by enacting the strategies of transformation developed.

⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹¹ Ibid.

Ezekiel's role is not just prophetic in the traditional sense. Ezekiel is used as the primary agent to initiate a process that results in a valley of dry, lifeless bones becoming a living, vibrant vast army. He gives the nation of Israel insight into the mind and heart of God while casting an alternative image for their future, which seemed impossible given their state of captivity.

Prophetic Vision as the Act of Transformation and Renewal (Ezekiel 37:5-10)

Prophetic vision fuels a church's theological framework toward change. The goal of prophetic imagination for Brueggemann is alternative community. The goal is a different social reality than one presently being experienced. But the over-arching question is: How does one get there? How does a people, a body, organization go from its present state to an alternative state? In this context, vision provides insight into the process of transformation and renewal.

Vision produces transformation and renewal when its source is in God. In this text, the vision comes directly from the heart and mind of God. Although it is filtered through human agency, it is not generated from humanity. When invited to become an active participant in the visioning process, Ezekiel declined participation by placing the onus back on God as evident in his response, "Lord only you know" (verse 3). Leaders may be carriers, communicators, and even facilitators of the vision, but for transformation and renewal to take place, the vision must be divinely inspired.

Vision produces transformation and renewal when it provides a compelling picture of the alternative purpose of God. A vision is a vision because it is not reality. Rather it is visual preview into a reality that does not yet exist but can. God provides this

compelling picture to Ezekiel when he says, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD” (verses 5-6). This picture becomes the guide, informing the strategic actions needed to achieve or create the vision.

Vision produces transformation and renewal when leaders embrace and communicate the vision. Ezekiel as a transformational leader plays a critical role in the process, as discussed in the last section. It was his obedience to the word of Lord and prophetic action of prophesy that initiates the process. Leaders can receive vision and even embrace vision, but if they fail to communicate the vision, the process never begins or is stalled. Once Ezekiel casts the picture of alternative reality he finds, “Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them” (verses 7-8).

Often, like these skeletons, it is possible for vision to be fully formed but ineffective in producing transformation and renewal because it has no life in it, no breath. Breath in this text is the wind of God – the Spirit. Vision produces transformation and renewal when the spirit of God breathes into the vision and gives life. The same spirit that participates in the creative process and the same spirit that breathes into dirt and forms humanity is the same spirit necessary to give life to transformational vision. How does one know, then, when the vision is God-breathed? One knows by the response of those expected to embrace and follow the vision. When Ezekiel called for breath to come

and fill those bodies, there was a response. He says, “So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army” (verse 10). There was a response to the spirits moving and a body of people stood ready, invigorated and inspired to act upon leading. This is the same response to God-breathed vision one can expect in a church or an organization. Brueggemann writes, “We need not ask whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable. We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought.”¹²

Conclusion

The theological framework of the D.A.N.C.E. is one of hope. The only verbal response of the people in this text is narrated. The nation of Israel, represented by the bones, has said, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished’ (verse 10). The God of liberation revealed through the first exodus event appears silent and unresponsive in this context. The people are in need of hope. Brueggemann writes, “The prophet must speak metaphorically about hope but concretely about the real newness that comes to us and redefines our situation. . . . The hope that must be spoken is hope rooted in the assurance that God does not quit even when the evidence warrants his quitting.”¹³ The Ezekiel text closes with the language of hope

¹² Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 146.

needed in three areas. God promises to cause Israel to rise again from the graves of exile; God will restore the nation to their promised land; and God will fill them with his spirit.

This chapter has discussed whether a new theological framework should inform the process of transformation and renewal for the Historic Black Church and the PNBC, and how these organizations must change how they see the role of God, leadership, and vision in the process of transformation and renewal. But Clayton reminds his readers that there is a danger in spending all of one's time describing how theology might be done without ever actually getting around to doing it. An effective theological framework must actually inform and lead to action. Clayton states,

It is not enough to just justify existing practices, to make one's own in-group comfortable at the expense of all the rest. This new theology, genuinely transformative theology, calls for deep personal involvement, openness to criticism and new information, engagement with the world as it really is and with other persons as they really are. It calls for the courage to be unsure, to question, to know when to say "I don't know." Above all it calls for the most comprehensive and transforming vision that your mind can contain and your heart can dream—the vision of the kingdom of God.

Chapter 6 will describe the process that can lead churches and organizations to that comprehensive and compelling vision.

CHAPTER 6

LET US D.A.N.C.E.

Universally, dance is defined as an art form that generally involves body movement in rhythm to music of some kind. Dance can be performed as a mode of social interaction, exercise, or performance. In some forms it is considered non-verbal communication, expressing thoughts, feelings, and emotions—even telling stories. Dance varies from country to country and culture to culture, but it can be traced back as far as the earliest human civilizations. It has become an important part of ceremonies, rituals, celebrations, entertainment, and even worship. Despite the many styles of dance, ranging from interpretive to classical to hip hop, there are two things all forms of dance have in common: flexibility and movement. In order to dance, one needs to be flexible and able to move.

D.A.N.C.E. was chosen as the name for this process because transformation and renewal requires the same. Churches and organizations in need of transformation and renewal must have the ability to be flexible and move. At the heart of transformation is movement—shifting and changing. There are all kinds of movement: walking, running, swimming, biking, and so on, but dancing is different from them all. As alluded to above, dancing is a creative form of expression; dance can tell a story. It can

communicate and conjure thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The process of transformation, too, is about a story—the story of a people who as a collective are trying to move from one place to another. The process also conjures thoughts, feelings, and emotions, woven and moving together to achieve a certain direction and goal.

D.A.N.C.E. in this context is an acronym for the five steps of the transformation and renewal process: Discovery, Analysis, Navigation, Choreography and Execution. This chapter will describe each step of the process in detail and how it is intended to produce transformation for those organizations, like the PNBC, that choose to engage it. It will also highlight those critical questions that organizations must ask at each step in the process to ensure they are on the path to renewal.

“Let Us Dance,” the title of this chapter, reflects the notion that transformation like dance is an invitation to be accepted. No one can be forced or made to dance or change. Participants must choose to engage the process in order for the process to be successful. Ideally, churches and organizations are always engaging in some form of self-reflection to ensure they remain on target while making self-correcting adjustments along the journey. But often, many are too busy and overwhelmed with the business and ministry of ministry that they miss opportunities to reassess, readjust, and find themselves forced to transform rather than choosing to transform. They find themselves literally having to change or die. Many often ignore the signs and signals and face extinction before ever entertaining a conversation about change, while others are dead and do not even know it.

Answering the Question: Is the Black Church Dead?

In 2010, Princeton professor Eddie Glaude, Jr. wrote the controversial editorial piece posted on the Huffington Post website proclaiming “The Black Church Is Dead.”¹ His article sparked a firestorm of debate from the academy to the local church parish, as some vehemently defended the vitality of the Black Church, declaring it alive and well. Others, with reluctance and some sadness, concurred with Professor Glaude’s conclusion, yet held out hope for its resurrection. Dr. Glaude’s reasons for making such a declaration have been discussed in detail earlier in this paper. This discussion is meant to answer the question from the author’s perspective and provide a prescription for resurrection.

How one answers the question, “Is the Black Church Dead?” will vary depending on one’s perspective. As a minister working in a local church context, I personally do not believe the Black Church is dead. To say the Church is dead is to say that there is no vitality, no life, no movement, and no function. That is certainly not my experience with the Black Church. I preach and have preached in churches all across the United States and abroad that are very much alive, thriving, and engaging in ministries of empowerment and liberation.

Despite these instances, however, I must also admit that I have preached in churches that are struggling to maintain relevance and impact in communities they no longer recognize, idolizing leaders who have long left or are deceased, utilizing methods of ministry that at the very least fail to maximize their mission. Many of these churches are historic churches with rich legacies of activism and social justice who at some point

¹ Eddie Glaude, “The Black Church Is Dead,” Huffington Post online, February 24, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html (accessed September 15, 2012).

in their history were known as “*the church.*” Consequently, the organizations these churches spawned, like the PNBC, are adversely impacted as well. These organizations are comprised of local churches, all members of one body. As 1 Corinthians 12: 26 teaches, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.” Across denominational lines and despite social locations, far too many Black churches and organizations are struggling. So while I do not believe the Black church collective is dead, it is in need of transformation and renewal. It desperately needs to D.A.N.C.E. The D.A.N.C.E. is a process for organizational transformation and renewal.

Transformation as Discovery

The first step of the D.A.N.C.E. is Discovery. Discovery is best known as a legal term, generally describing the point in a proceeding where opposing parties are allowed to solicit information from one another in an effort to discover what facts may be presented during the trial phase. It has also been used in the field of education as a new method of learning. In this context, the teacher uses an instructional approach that guides and motivates students/learners to explore concepts and information in hopes that they will use their discoveries to construct new ideas, behaviors, and patterns of thinking.

Discovery as transformation seeks to engage in specific activities designed to discover relevant information about the state of an organization and its effectiveness. Five key areas will be presented: identity, ideology, mission, passion, and methodology. Each of these areas is associated with a corresponding question to assist in the process of obtaining the information needed.

Discovery of identity is crucial and necessary in beginning transformation. Churches must ask, Who are we? Or perhaps a better question would be, Who are we now? Discovery of identity provides the necessary starting point to inform how to proceed, as well as what goals and objectives are to be achieved.

Jesus Christ engaged in the first step of discovery as he sought to transform a band of ordinary men from all walks of life into carriers of the kingdom vision. In Matthew 16, he asked the disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” The disciples were eager to share that some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But Jesus continued exploring by reframing the question, now wanting to know, Who do *you* say that I am? Their security in his identity would prove a critical component in solidifying their transformation. It would ground them and help them discover their own identities. Their confidence in their own identities would inform their ideology, mission, passion, and methodology.

Many organizations find themselves operating based on who they think they are, who they should be, or who they were at their zenith, as opposed to who they really are now. This identity crisis can cause a disconnect between organizational leadership and its constituency, which grows deeper as external and internal realities prompting change continue to grow. Organizations must be committed to discovering who people say that they are.

In addition to the need to discover identity is the need to discover ideology. Churches must ask, What do we believe? What do we really believe? Most organizations, churches in particular, have no problem stating unequivocally what they believe. They say it often. But true ideology is not a doctrine or a statement of beliefs.

True ideology is discovered by observing what an organization does. Organizations state what they think; they live and practice what they believe. Discovering true ideology is necessary because what one believes informs actions.

In the case of the Church, ideology informs ministry. Many churches that are struggling with identity find there is incongruence between what they say and what they do. There is often a chasm between what the leadership believes and what the members believe. Discovering ideology provides opportunity for an organization to bridge the gap, merge beliefs, and streamline the message so that everyone is truly thinking, speaking, and believing in one accord. In Matthew 5, one discovers some of the ideologies that the people held by reading the Sermon on the Mount and subsequent teachings. From his sermon Jesus shows the reader where the people were ideologically and theologically. The poor were not considered blessed. The persecuted were not considered blessed. The humble and the peacemakers were believed to be forgotten by God. There was no perceived benefit for being pure in heart, hungry, thirsty, or in mourning. Jesus came and transformed their understanding and introduced a new, alternative ideological and theological reality. But he first had to learn where the people were.

Following identity and ideology, churches must discover their mission. They must ask, What are we called to do? Most churches and religious organizations would cite Matthew 28:18-20 as their mission. But when looking at their ministries, very little reflects the mandate of this text. Others may find they are stronger in one area than another. Historic Black churches and organizations often find themselves engaging in activities they feel they “should” be doing as opposed to what they may be called or best equipped to do. Discovering one’s mission involves asking the questions that assist in

determining one's spiritual and social location. These questions include: Where is God now? What are we naturally graced and gifted to do? What are we doing that is not yielding any fruit?

It requires an honest engagement of identity and ideology to determine if a church is on mission or repeatedly engaging in mission impossible. Jesus was clear about his mission when he announced his ministry call in the synagogue before the people in Luke 4. Transformation and renewal requires that organizations are equally clear.

The next phase of discovery is passion. Churches must ask, Why do we do this? Once the true mission is discovered, one must discover and identify the drivers (or passions) that will push the mission. Once interest starts to wane or external factors change, passion continues to ignite and reignite so that the mission will be accomplished. Organizations must be able to identify why they do what they do if their vitality is to remain. In historic institutions, so many actions and behaviors are continued based on tradition. Often, many are unable to articulate the source, origin, or significance of these traditions. In a generation that ascribes moral authority to other entities besides the Church, the Church must clear about the why. When the why is lost, also lost is the sense that this particular ministry or ministry focus is important. It is not enough just to know what one believes; it is critical to know why.

The last area of discovery is methodology. It answers the question, How are we going to best accomplish our mission? Discovery of methodology is necessary to ascertain if present methods reflect highest and best use with maximum impact in the organization's current context. Often churches have powerful, penetrating messages and ministries that are bottle-necked and limited in scope and impact due to antiquated

methods of delivery. In a society driven by technology and social media, organizations must be willing to examine if and how they use various methods of communicating ministry. The apostle Paul demonstrates the power of multiple methodologies when he shares in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 how he has lived as a Jew, as a Gentile, and even as one who is weak; in this way he finds common ground with everyone so that by doing so he may win some.

The first step of discovery provides organizations with the opportunity to convene and survey various constituencies to “discover” where they are now and begin discerning as a collective where they would like to go. In the second half of the passage in Matthew 16, Jesus responds to Peter’s declaration with revelation. Jesus surmises that flesh and blood did not reveal that truth to Peter but rather God the Father in heaven. What follows is a complete transformation in the ministry of the disciples. Simon’s identity is changed along with the disciples’ ideology, mission, passion, and methodology when Jesus says in verses 18 and 19, “Now I say to you that you are Peter [which means rock], and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” Transformation and renewal begin when an organization begins to explore and discover who they are, what they believe, what they should be doing, and why.

Transformation as Analysis

The second step of the dance is analysis. Analysis is the process of taking all of the information ascertained through the discovery process, and reviewing it and dividing

it into functional, actionable parts. Analysis requires being able to assess the information received in light of an organization's current context, in order to determine what role, if any, this new information can and should play in process of transformation. In the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah served as cupbearer to the king when he discovered the state of his homeland. His desire was to serve as prophetic agent of its transformation, but in order to do so, he had to assess and review the information for himself. Nehemiah explains, "After dark I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's well, and over the Dung gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates" (Nehemiah 2:13). The purpose of analysis in this context is not just to know for knowledge's sake, but to interpret the information for the purpose of proposing and implementing a subsequent action. During the second step of analysis, there is another set of questions that must be asked.

The first analysis question is: How did we get here? Once an organization has learned of its current state through the process of discovery, its members must begin to identify those key factors that have contributed to its current location. Those factors are generally varied and can be external and/or internal. But without identifying these factors, they are left without significant data to ensure the success of necessary changes. In Nehemiah's case, he was clear that the key contributing factor to the condition of the walls and the gates was spiritual. Nehemiah acknowledges that the entire nation including himself and his family had sinned by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations given through Moses. This knowledge suggests that the process of transformation and renewal for Jerusalem could not just be a rebuilding of the walls and

reconstruction of the gates, but must include the repairing of the breach that existed between a people and their God.

The second question of analysis is: How are we impacted? The question seeks to discern what have been the results of operating in our current state and also provides insight into the urgency with which transformation and change need to take place. Often organizations are resistant to change because they fail to see the real impact key contributing factors have had on their current state. Moreover, they fail to see what lasting impact no change will have of the future viability of the organization. Being able to see current and potential impact is critical in motivating the change process. For Nehemiah the current impact was clear, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace” (verse 3). However, the potential future impact was greater. As long as the gates and the walls remained in disrepair, the city and its inhabitants remained open to physical attack by their enemies, and would never be able to regain any sense of community and communal life as a people called of God. The impact demanded a swift and decisive response and plan of action. The components of this plan are formulated through analysis of the last question.

The final analysis question is: How will we respond? In other words, Now that the information and impact has been received, what are going to do about it? This question allows an organization to identify the opportunities, challenges, and barriers to transformation and renewal in their setting and begin formulating a plan of action. Nehemiah decided to rebuild the walls, but he was keenly aware that much more than his passion, desire, and decision were needed if the effort was to be successful. He would

need the collective effort of many entities throughout the entire process. Transformation and renewal does not happen in a vacuum. It involves and impacts every facet of the organization from the leadership to the constituency. Therefore the decision to respond and how must take into consideration each of these entities. Compiling this information and developing a plan in some arenas is considered a science and is approached scientifically.

Transformation as Navigation

The third step of the D.A.N.C.E. is navigation, the science of finding one's way. The professional field of navigation encompasses the science, the technology, and the practice of getting from point A to point B on land, in the air, on seas and rivers, and in space. In this process, navigation is comprised of the activities an organization employs to get from where they are to where God would have them be. Once an organization has completed steps one and two, it has amassed a significant amount of data. Navigation allows the organization to determine how it will process all it has discovered.

When seeking a spokesperson to the people, the prophet Isaiah heard the voice of Lord ask, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" These are the questions an organization must consider during this third step of the D.A.N.C.E. The third step of navigation requires navigators. Navigators are key stakeholders and members of the organization, who form teams to guide the process, chart the journey, advise the leadership, and stay the course. Navigators are keenly aware of the organization's location at all times during the process. Areas of responsibilities for navigators will vary by organization depending on what is uncovered during the process of discovery.

However, in this process, navigators are formed around the five areas of discovery discussed above: identity, ideology, mission, passion, and methodology.

Jesus, when beginning his earthly ministry, formed a team of navigators commonly known as the twelve disciples. Although Jesus came to humanity, he had no intention of staying in earthly form. He needed key stakeholders who would complete the process of transformation and renewal he initiated via his earthly ministry. His responsibility as leader was to cast the vision of an alternative future that the navigators could understand, take ownership of, and work to create even in his absence. But there were significant contributing factors to their success. The success of navigators is dependent on three critical factors: intentional identification and selection, public empowerment and affirmation, and freedom to access and engage.

The success of any organizational transformation and renewal process requires constituency buy-in. Intentional identification and selection of team members is strategic method of ensuring that buy-in. Team members should be identified and selected by both leadership and membership. All affected entities of the process should feel the teams are diverse and comprised of persons who would adequately reflect and be sensitive to their issues and concerns.

Once these teams are formed, they must be empowered and affirmed publicly. Often transformational teams are not able to effectively serve and accomplish their goals because they have not been empowered or affirmed by the leadership of the organization. They are viewed as renegade and attempting a process not supported by the leadership, and as a result they are not embraced by the leadership. Successful transformation and

renewal requires teams to be actively viewed as a viable part of the organization, operating with the approval and authority of the leadership.

Lastly, transformational teams must be free to access and engage the constituency and leadership, to acquire information, and perform necessary functions of the process.

Change in any form is often resisted by many organizations and members.

Transformational leaders and members are often left feeling as if they are forcing a process or trying to implement undesired changes and plans. Their work is relegated to a particular area or level of ministry. However total systemic transformation requires access to every area of the organization. No area can be off limits or restricted.

During the ministry of Jesus, he sent out the disciples ahead of him to prepare the way for his ministry. They had already been intentionally selected as key transformational leaders. The disciples were empowered to drive out evil spirits and heal every kind of disease and illness. They were given freedom to access and engage the people in the community and present them with an invitation to be transformed and renewed. These key factors allowed them to utilize the information they discovered during their encounters and develop a plan of transformation specific for their situation. This is the task of navigation.

Transformation as Choreography

The fourth step of the D.A.N.C.E. is choreography. This step answers the questions: How does it all come together? How will five key transformational teams work in concert to produce a desired outcome? Although the word *choreography* is most famously linked to the field of dance, by definition it can be applied across many fields.

For this process, choreography is the art of managing and coordinating movement to create an environment conducive for transformation and renewal.

With multiple teams working parallel and in tandem, opportunities for chaos and disruption are numerous without deliberate coordination. Most processes of change assert that change leaders must be identified. Change leaders are then responsible for supervising every aspect of the change process. Change leaders can decide what events and activities to do. But what is missing from most change processes is the “how.” Choreography attempts to provide this piece, assuring that leaders will oversee “how” change will take place. In the D.A.N.C.E., choreography of transformation and renewal activities are coordinated and managed by principles, not persons. At this stage of the process, the principles that will guide how the five teams will work must be identified and articulated. These principles will center and ground the process in a manner that transcends any changes to people involved in the process.

Guiding principles are any precepts or principles that guide an organization throughout its transformation and renewal process irrespective of changes in goals, strategies, mission, vision, leadership, or staff. These are the standards that will inform how decisions are made and directions determined. These are the standards upon which actions are based and norms are established. Each organization must decide for itself what principles will guide how its members do their work. But for this process, there are seven guiding principles that are characterized by the life and ministry of Jesus; if employed, they create an environment for transformational success.

The first guiding principle is inclusion. The process must be inclusive, open to and embracing diverse opinions, ideas, and approaches to the process. The second

guiding principle is transparency. The process must be conducted in a manner in which transformational activities are open, visible, and easy for one to access. The third guiding principle is integrity. In May 2005, the African American Leadership Cohort Doctor of Ministry class at Fuller Seminary defined integrity as “to think, live, and act compassionately, informed by principles that guide and determine how individuals, groups, and organizations make decisions in every aspect of their lives on order to be wholesome, honest, and just.”² The process must be characterized by integrity to ensure receptivity to the process. The fourth guiding principle is teamwork. Participants must be committed to the notion of working in collaboration with other individuals in order to achieve a common goal. The fifth guiding principle is stewardship. The participants in the process must see themselves as stewards, caretakers, and protectors of the process and not owners. The sixth guiding principle is accountability. Participants must take personal responsibility for the role they are expected to fulfill in the process. They must see themselves as interconnected with their part as a critical piece of the whole. The seventh and final guiding principle is divine partnership. The process of transformation and renewal for churches and faith based organizations is not just a “follow the step by step” endeavor. Transformation and renewal is inspired, God-breathed. Participants must remember they are working in partnership with God to bring about that which serves the purposes of God and God’s people. This requires that participants remain actively connect to God and open to receiving divine guidance and revelation.

² William Epps and Warren H. Stewart, Lecture from “Integrity in Leadership,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 17 May 2005.

These guiding principles must remain at the center of the transformation and renewal process. They ensure the unity and continuity of the process. Leaders may change. Goals and objectives may change. But how an organization effectively carries out its mission and vision should be guided by principles that stand the test of time.

Transformation as Execution

The key to the success of any goal, objective, or plan is execution. At some point the organization must decide to carry out and put into effect the desired course of action. Without execution, the plans are simply pieces of paper the desire for transformation, and wishful thinking. The question to be answered during this step is: What to do next? At this point, the organization has been through the process of discovery—discovering not just its current state but also its preferred state. Its members have processed the information discovered in light of their current context through analysis. The organization has identified the navigators, forming key transformational teams around critical areas. And finally, the organization has decided on the guiding principles that must inform the process. At this point, the members must now do something.

Bookstores and libraries are full of “how to” books regarding organizational change and transformation. Some read as cookbooks, suggesting that if one just follows the recipe, change will just happen. In reality, transformation and renewal is a complex process that once executed soon takes on a life of its own; its results must be managed, but certainly they cannot be controlled. Complexities are even greater for faith-based organizations and churches. They are not in the business of producing widgets or making money. They involve the most complex entity ever created; people; they are in the

business of transforming and renewing the lives of people. Therefore, when looking at the process of execution, one must analyze the execution plan of one of the greatest transformation leaders to ever live. In looking at the life and ministry of Jesus as a whole, one will find five major actions that led to the success of God's transformation and renewal plan for humanity.

The first major action that Jesus performed was public announcement of the transformational vision. In Luke 4, Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and announced to the hearers the compelling vision and purpose that would signal transformation for their lives. Like Ezekiel, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and had anointed him to transform bad news to good news, broken hearts to healed hearts, captivity to freedom, blindness to vision, oppression to liberty, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. It was for the achievement of this end that every other action and activity was geared. The first step to transformation as execution is the public announcement of a compelling vision. Organizations must be able to effectively communicate their preferred alternative future in a manner that causes hearers to picture where they are headed and be excited about the journey. While Luke 4 records the official announcement, Jesus repeatedly reinforced this message to the people throughout his life and ministry.

The second major action Jesus initiated in the process of transformation and renewal was to provide opportunities for transformational experiences. Transformation and renewal does not involve actions that are performed but rather actions that are experienced. He reinforced the announcement of a new time of renewal by providing experiences of renewal. The poor in spirit experienced enrichment through preaching.

The sick and diseased were transformed through the experience of healing. The purposeless and directionless were transformed by the experience of ministry callings. Those who were confused about the possibility of transformation or who had difficulty seeing the vision experienced transformation through teaching and training. It was the renewing experiences and transforming encounters that produced sustainable changes in the lives of people. In the same manner the Historic Black Church and the PNBC must be committed to providing opportunities for their constituencies, not just to hear about change but to experience the change they speak of. This is true for every aspect of the organizations, from operational processes to worship. Transformation that lasts is one that is experienced by impacting how one thinks.

The third major action Jesus initiated in the execution phase of his transformation plan was modeling operational behaviors of preferred future. Jesus did more than talk the talk; he walked the walk. His personal behavior as a leader set the standard for what was expected of other organizational leaders and members. He modeled through his lifestyle and personal interaction with his leaders and constituencies the new operational behaviors that were expected to characterize the change. Themes of forgiveness, loving one's enemies, compassion, and radical love were evident in how Jesus conducted his life and ministry, and they became a model for other key transformational leaders (disciples) who were expected to eventually take the transformational reigns and run. In like manner, members must begin to see transformational expectations modeled, not just in what an organization does, but in how it does what it does. There must also be consistency. It is not enough to say that one is open to using technology as a medium to attracting a different demographic, and yet lack a web presence and be opposed to the

incorporation of social media into an organizational marketing strategy. Inconsistency in messages and behavior is a transformation and renewal killer.

The fourth major action Jesus initiated was extensive organizational and leadership learning. Jesus spent a considerable amount of time ensuring that key leaders and members were deeply entrenched in transformational learning modules. Whether by lectures, one-on-one coaching, group mentoring, life shadowing, or synagogue sermons, continual learning for disciples was the order of the day. Specific themes were those key to transforming one's idea of the Kingdom of God, achieving the compelling vision announced earlier, and producing lasting institutional change. A radical organizational motto was introduced that embodied the full vision, mission, and purpose of the ministry: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself." Organizations must be committed to leadership development and training if organizational transformation is to take place and be sustained. Organizational learning provides opportunities for members to become champions of the process and of the new direction the organization desires to take.

The fifth major action that Jesus undertook critical to execution was to plan for and address resistance directly. The ugly truth of transformation and renewal is that not everyone will desire it, embrace it, or support it. There are even those who will actively work against the process in hopes that things will just stay the same. There are those who believe they benefit from the stagnancy of others. Resistance to transformation should come as no surprise, but it often takes many organizations by surprise because it is never anticipated or planned for. Jesus was always prepared to address and answer criticisms and challenges to the transformation plan. In the same manner, organizations need a

resistance plan. Some actions include opportunities for education, participation, and negotiation with resistant stakeholders. Resistance must be anticipated and plans must be put in place to address it in a manner that reflects the guiding principles and values of the organization. Resistance can either serve as a unifying force or a hindering one.

Execution of the process is as critical as the process itself. How an organization endeavors to carry out the process of transformation and renewal is a key factor in its viability and sustainability. One major benefit in ensuring smooth execution is identifying potential roadblocks before they present themselves. One of the major roadblocks that can stall and even stop the process of transformation and renewal is the organizational environment, commonly referred to as organizational culture. Before proceeding to Chapter 7 to discuss how the D.A.N.C.E. would look for the PNBC, there needs to be a brief reflection on the importance of organizational culture.

A Word about Culture

Every organization has a culture, and this includes churches. Many business analysts believe that the most successful for-profit companies that exist in world today are not successful because of technological advances, market presence, or corporate strategy, but rather they had discovered how to develop and maintain a unique corporate culture. Strong, healthy corporate cultures reduce uncertainties, and they create social order and continuity. A unique corporate culture assists in establishing a collective identity; it generates commitment and the energy to move companies forward.

In the Church, this notion of culture is even more critical when undertaking change. Pastoral leader and author Samuel Chand believes that culture, not vision or

strategy, is the most important factor in any organization. Culture determines receptivity to new ideas, it unleashes or dampens creativity, and it encourages deep pride or deep discouragement. He states, “Vision and strategy usually focuses on products, services and outcomes but culture is about people—the most valuable asset in the organization.”³

While culture usually goes unnoticed, unspoken, and unexamined, it has the ability to affect individual morale, teamwork, effectiveness, and outcomes. Culture is often difficult to define but known to all. An organization's culture is comprised of the set of values, beliefs, assumptions, principles, myths, legends, heroes, and norms that define how people actually think, decide, and perform. Edgar Schien, in his book, *Organizational Culture & Leadership*, defines culture as “a basic set of assumptions that defines for us what we pay attention to, what things mean, and how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations.”⁴ Schien suggests that any organization considering transformation or any radical departure from the norm will need to be intentional about influencing and eventually changing the organization’s culture.

Culture determines how people respond to vision and strategy. A toxic culture can destroy any opportunity for transformation and renewal. Since the entire process of the D.A.N.C.E. relies heavily on the interrogative, some questions to consider in attempting to ascertain the culture are: Who are the organizational heroes? What stories are often repeated? How is leadership selection determined? Who are the non-

³ Samuel Chand, *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision and Inspiration* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2010), 4.

⁴ Edgar Schien, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 1992), 22.

institutional power brokers? What rituals and artifacts are important to the organization?
Who is rewarded and how?

In the Historic Black Church and even PNBC, some of the answers to these questions are universal. This chapter began addressing Glaude's question, Is the Black Church Dead? The answer is unequivocally no, but the Black Church is in desperate need of transformation and renewal. The D.A.N.C.E. is offered as a process to be used for its transformation and renewal, but like dancing, it is an invitation that must be accepted and engaged. The final chapter of this work will discuss what D.A.N.C.E. (ing) would look like, specifically for the PNBC, should the organization choose to accept the invitation.

CHAPTER 7

RHYTHM AND BLUES: A STRATEGY FOR APPLICATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Need for Organizational Relevance

Relevance seems to be the buzz word tossed around in conversations related to transformation, renewal, and change in organizations. Across all the lines that separate and divide the Church collective, relevance is cited as the most urgent need of the Church. However, *relevance* is a loaded term that means different things to different groups. While it is a laudable goal to desire to have impact on culture, generally the word *relevance* is used to copy culture rather than counteract or transcend. This causes attempts at change to be surface and superficial. In an effort to be relevant, the Historic Black Church and related organizations are replacing defining hallmarks and traditions with ministry activities that are mere responses to generational preferences. Praise and worship songs are replacing standard church hymns. Contemporary gospel is replacing choral music and spirituals. Challenging messages of conviction are being swapped out for “feel good” messages that “speak to the needs of the people.” Traditional sanctuaries are now pew-less worship centers, easily transformed spaces for multi-use.

While it is a positive step that churches are attempting to design worship experiences and messages that attract and appeal to the multigenerational church and un-church, these changes do not produce systemic, sustainable transformation and renewal, nor do they produce relevance. Relevance requires a clear understanding and commitment to the fresh revelation of one's organizational identity, ideology, mission, vision, and methodology. The D.A.N.C.E. positions the Historic Black Church and organizations like the PNBC to receive this revelation and re-establish relevance by providing an opportunity to revisit and reframe, if necessary, their organizational identity and mission.

D.A.N.C.E. with the Stars

The D.A.N.C.E. process for the PNBC begins with identifying and selecting key participants. The PNBC is a multi-tiered, multi-layered organization of churches with a hierarchical structure, including a national cabinet of President, 1st and 2nd Vice President, General Secretary, and several national department heads. The convention is divided into five regions: Southwest, South, Midwest, East, and International. Within each region there are regional, state, and district officers. Although Baptist polity affirms the autonomy of each church, member churches participate with the convention under this structure. There is no ecclesiastical authority exercised by officers, but rather churches choose to affiliate based on history, tradition, and mission. A successful transformation and renewal process for the organization requires the active participation of national leaders and eventually regional and state leaders.

These leaders are the faces and personality of the organization. They are the organizational “stars” as they each have significant influence within their respective contexts. As leaders they must serve as the catalysts for initiating the change process to ensure the collective buy-in of the membership and minimize resistance to the process. The PNBC would need to identify and select members from their leadership cabinet members to serve as the national transformational and renewal team.

This team will serve as the identifiable and responsible change leaders of the organization. This is the group that will be trained and guided through the steps of the D.A.N.C.E. process to be replicated on the regional and state levels. A sample transformation and renewal team for the PNBC would consist of either the 1st or 2nd Vice president, General Secretary, and representatives from each of the national departments, which include laymen and women, young adult women and men, ushers, Christian education ministers, and youth. In addition, there should be several available positions for non-officers. Non-leaders of the organization provide a different perspective than leaders, who are often vested in the current structure and challenged by the notion of change.

The transformation and renewal team must be large enough to ensure cross-sectional representation, but small enough to avoid becoming a bureaucracy itself. This is the team that will provide leadership and management to the process of discovery, analysis, navigation, choreography, and execution for the PNBC. While the D.A.N.C.E. provides the process, the specific activities and tools associated with each step must be determined by each organization, informed by its context.

The national transformation and renewal team is based on the notion of coalitional leadership as opposed to the single-leader concept that has traditionally characterized the Historic Black Church and the PNBC. This team concept is critical to success because no one person can initiate, manage, and sustain organization-wide change. Coalitional leadership provides several vital benefits for the process. The team broadens the base of support for the process. They assist in mitigating the barriers to change that have been discussed earlier. The team also models the behavior that will lead to changes in organizational culture as they execute the process. The team model increases the chances of transformation becoming institutionalized.

The members of the team should reflect a balance of several characteristics. First, there should be several members who are currently organizational leaders in order to ensure the forward movement of the process. Second, the members should have organizational credibility. Team members that are well-respected are able to generate trust and support of the process. Third, some members should provide historical perspective. Members who have some longevity and history with the organization can help preserve the integrity of the process and provide perspective on potential resistance. Finally, the team must be diverse. Team members should include individuals across age and gender lines, especially since to date there are no female leaders serving in senior leadership positions within the PNBC.

The Invitation to D.A.N.C.E: Presenting the Need for Change

As suggested throughout the project, transformation and renewal is an invitation to be accepted. Organizations and churches cannot be forced or made to change. Many

organizations and leaders may know they need to change but resist it because they are not sure how or when. The leaders of the organization must be positioned to see the need for change. They must see transformation and renewal as beneficial and believe that this process can actually produce transformation. This positioning process should be organic and achieved through an organizational learning and reflection activity.

What was proposed and accepted by the PNBC was a three-day leadership discernment process. As of the date of this writing, the retreat is scheduled for October 12-14, 2012 in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The proposed agenda is included in Appendix A. This discernment retreat is designed to assess organizational readiness and receptivity. By the end of this retreat, the organization will know if transformation and renewal is needed and if they are willing to accept the invitation extended via the appreciative inquiry process.

Learning To D.A.N.C.E: Introducing and Engaging the Process

Once the invitation is accepted, and once the pre-process steps of organizational discernment and selection of key leaders is complete, team learning begins. The transformation and renewal team must learn the D.A.N.C.E. through engagement in it in order to effectively lead the PNBC membership through the process. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr define team learning as “the process of enabling a team to produce results far beyond its combined capabilities as individuals.”¹ As a result of engaging the D.A.N.C.E., the team will have developed a comprehensive plan for engaging the membership. The major action for the

¹ Herrington, Bonem and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 128.

transformation and renewal team will be deciding how they will engage the larger membership in the process of discovery around the five areas of needed information.

The key to effectively introducing the process is a clear and decisive communication plan. Until this point in the process, conversations and discussions have been occurring at a localized level amongst a microcosm of the organization. The larger body must be introduced to and engaged in the process through deliberate and intentional national communication. It is believed that lack of communication is one of the most common mistakes made by organizations initiating a change process. The PNBC would need a communication plan to the larger membership body that includes three areas: purpose, process, and plan. Member churches and leaders at each level will need to know why this process is being engaged; what the process will consist of, and how the process will move forward; any and all expectations of the members should be highlighted.

In *Leading Congregational Change*, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr also provide some communication advice that can serve as “rules of engagement.” When considering a communication strategy, organizations must consider the multi-dimensional nature of its membership. Communication must consider pace, personality, and priority. Pace speaks to the rate at which information is shared. The rate in which new information can be absorbed and retain will vary. A successful communication plan will be multi-faceted and repeated over time to ensure saturation and understanding. Personality refers to different ways people learn. Various communication tools should be employed to ensure that the strategy is effective. Priority considers what is most important and must be communicated as opposed to sharing every single detail. Often sharing too much information or impertinent information is just as detrimental as under-communication. These rules of engagement mirror the pattern of

Jesus, the Master communicator, who used parables, sermons, public demonstrations, personal actions, and prophecies to communicate the message of the kingdom repeatedly and over time.

Dancing to a New Rhythm: Strategies for Sustainability

Global leadership expert Ken Blanchard notes that approximately 70 percent of change efforts fail.² This alarming statistic illuminates the need for clear, identifiable strategies to sustain the transformation and renewal process and results. Seven strategies should be implemented to secure sustainability.

The first strategy is to manage resistance. Not every member of leader will be open to the process. Organizations generally are challenged in the process of change by failing to adequately anticipate and address resistance in a manner that supports the process.

Transformation and renewal takes place with people, and those people have thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Loss of personal position and power, lack of understanding of the process, or failing to see the need are just a few of the sources of resistance. The PNBC needs a plan to recognize and address the sources and pockets of resistance in a manner that is affirming and in a manner which models who they desire to become.

The second strategy is to provide multiple opportunities for feedback. Much of the process happens at the leadership level before it ever reaches the general membership. Feelings of isolation and lack of inclusion are bound to cause concern for those members who wish to make their voices and opinions known. A strategy for sustainability must provide

² Ken Blanchard, "Leadership Strategies for Making Change Stick," http://www.kenblanchard.com/Business_Leadership/Effective_Leadership_White_Papers/leadership_strategies_for_making_change_stick (accessed October 3, 2012).

varied methods and opportunities for leaders and general members to share their suggestions, thoughts, and feelings about the process and desired outcomes. This models behavior that encourages a culture of openness and dialogue. Without opportunities for meaningful feedback, members can feel like transformation is something being done to them rather than with them. Feedback keeps the process open and dynamic.

The third strategy is to have a clear measurement of transformation and renewal. A strategy of sustainability must provide clear determinants of marked change. Members and leaders should be able to identify and articulate how the organization is being transformed and renewed based on communicated markers. This prevents frustration amongst members who may feel nothing is happening. It also underscores the notion that transformation and renewal is a process and not an event.

The fourth strategy is that organizational leaders and key transformation and renewal members speak with the same voice. Sustainable change cannot occur with a single leader. It requires a broad based collaboration of like-minded individuals committed to the goal. In addition to being like-minded, they should also speak with one voice. Conflicting voices around the mission, goals, vision, and process can cause dissention amongst the team and the organization; such dissention can eventually derail the process. Consistent, unified messages from those involved in leading the process can minimize confusion and create the picture of strength and unity. Leadership that is unified engenders confidence in the ability of leaders and the efficacy of the process.

The fifth strategy is to have a focus that is organizational rather than presidential. The word *presidential* could be substituted with both *pastoral* and *personal*. One of the challenges of the PNBC is the lack of an organizational agenda. The focus and activities are driven by

the agenda of whatever president is in office and changes every four years. One of the goals of the process is to keep it as objective as possible. It is a process that benefits the organization and not the platform of a person. This assists in minimizing resistance based on personality and personal preferences.

The sixth strategy is to keep asking why. One of the challenges of a transformation process is losing the sense of purpose. Once the process begins, it is critical that the reason for engagement is constantly revisited and reinforced. When people are constantly reminded of why the process is needed, it keeps them focused on engaging and completing the process. It generates excitement, encouragement, and anticipation. When people lose sight of the why, it becomes just another program being implemented.

The seventh strategy is to seek divine guidance and revelation throughout the change process. There are hundreds if not thousands of books on organizational change, as well as many models and processes that are available for implementation.

Transformation and renewal for the Historic Black Church and the PNBC is divine. The D.A.N.C.E. is not just meant to be another change model, but rather a Spirit-led, Spirit-breathed, theologically informed and driven process that is rooted in the reality of a living God who invites people to change. Scripture is clear. The book of Proverbs states, “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:1-3). Another proverb is, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand” (Proverbs 19:21). The prophet Jeremiah also writes, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a

hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). The wisdom and counsel of God is needed throughout the process to maintain scriptural and spiritual integrity. The Spirit of the Lord transforms, renews, restores, and revives. The practice of spiritual disciplines must be an active and visible part of the process so that all will know and be able to say, “This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:23).

How Long, Lord?

Transformation and renewal are part of a process. Sustainable change does not happen overnight. The timeframe allotted for the process will depend on the organization’s readiness and ability to absorb and enact change. The D.A.N.C.E. process can be completed over the course of six months or twelve months. The evaluation process should take an additional three months. Twelve months is the recommended timeframe for the PNBC. They meet as a national body once a year in August, and leadership convenes three times a year. For example, between August 2012 and August 2013, each state, region, and district will meet as well. This process can be replicated on various levels and aided through use of technology and social media. Given the PNBC’s decision to begin the discernment process in October 2012, a potential process timeline is provided in table 1.

Table 1. Timeline for Implementing D.A.N.C.E. within the PNBC

D.A.N.C.E. Timeline for PNBC, Inc. (Sample Overview)				
Activity			Strategies	Timeframe
Organizational Discernment Process				October 2012
Decision to Engage in Transformation and Renewal Process				January 2013 (Mid-Winter Board Meeting)
Formation of National Transformation and Renewal Team, Introduction and Training on the DANCE Process				February 2013/March 2013
Process of Discovery			Surveys, Focus Groups, Key Stakeholder Discussions, and Interviews (utilizing both traditional and social media information outlets)	April-May 2013
Process of Analysis				May-June 2013
Process of Navigation			Identification and Selection of Key Navigators	June-July 2013
Process of Choreography				July 2013
Process of Execution				August 2013 and ongoing
Review and Evaluation				August-October 2013

D.A.N.C.E. Review: Assessing the Process

Evaluation of the process is a critical component of the change process. At some point, an organization and its stakeholders will ask, “Is this working?” and “How do we know?” Process-based, outcome-based, quantitative, and qualitative are just a few of the

many evaluation methodologies utilized by organizations in attempting to determine effectiveness and performance. Evaluation can be formative or summative. It can inform decisions, increase accountability, and foster functional improvement. But at the heart of transformation and renewal are people. Organizations will not change unless the people who comprise them change. There is a well-known gospel song titled, “I Know I Been Changed,” and the refrain says, “Because the angels in heaven done signed my name.” In determining a method of evaluation of the D.A.N.C.E., one must consider how the PNBC and organizations that engage the process will know they have been changed. What criteria will they use to make that assessment?

On the surface, the answer to these questions would be simple. The organization has been changed when it achieves the goals and objectives set during the discernment and discovery process. However it is possible to achieve particular goals—like rewriting the mission, rebranding the organization, or increasing the use of technology and social media—yet still not be transformed or renewed as an organization.

Transformation in the D.A.N.C.E. process seeks to affect three areas: intellectual, behavioral, and responsive. Transformation is measured by assessing changes in how one thinks, behaves, and responds as a result of engaging the process. Therefore, an evaluation methodology must be designed to measure impact. The “Most Significant Change” (hereafter, MSC) technique, described by Rick Davies and Jesse Dart, is a participatory evaluation tool that collects data and provides systematic analysis of significant changes achieved through program impact.³ Specifically, it collects stories of impact and change from

³ Rick Davies and Jess Dart, *MSC Technique: A Guide to Its Use* (United Kingdom: self-published, 2005), <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf> (accessed October 3, 2012).

various levels of those participating in the process. The information is generated by asking, What has been the most significant change you can identify? These responses are analyzed by organizational stakeholders to assess the impact of the process.

Davies and Dart have formulated ten implementation steps that can be adapted and modified as needed. These include: 1) identifying stakeholders for analysis; 2) defining domains of change; 3) establishing a reporting period; 4) collecting significant change stories; 5) selecting the most significant stories; 6) reporting feedback regarding the selection process; 7) verifying the stories, if needed; 8) quantifying the stories; 9) obtaining secondary analysis; and 10) meta-monitoring and revising the system.⁴ The steps employed can be altered based on the needs of the organization and desired outcomes. Steps two through six as well as step eight would prove most useful in evaluating the D.A.N.C.E. as a process of transformation and renewal.

Step two is “defining domains of change.” Domains of change are broad categories of measurements of change used for organizing change stories. Examples of domains include level of participation or personal behavior. Each organization has to decide what its domains of change will be. But all of the domains assist in making analysis manageable and track whether or not stated transformation objectives are being achieved.

Step three is “establishing a reporting period.” Establishing a reporting period determines the level of frequency at which MSC stories will be collected and shared. The authors recommend that this takes place quarterly to ensure that significant impact is being captured as it occurs.

⁴ Ibid.

Step four is “collecting significant change stories.” Collecting significant change stories is the process of gathering impact on feedback by asking, “What is the most significant change you have noticed or experienced?” This information can be obtained via a series of tools that are best determined by the organization, but include surveys, focus groups, interviews, and written transcriptions of the stories themselves. The goal is to capture any themes or trends reflective of change such as common experiences, triggering events, and memorable activities. Stories are selected after stakeholder analysis.

Step six is “reporting feedback regarding the selection process.” Reporting feedback regarding the selection process is a critical step in preserving the integrity of the process. Members need to know that there are universal selection criteria that are not based on personality or personal preferences of stakeholders. In addition, it also creates opportunities for dialogue regarding what is considered significant change. Although the MSC technique is a qualitative process, it has potential for quantitative analysis as well. Numbers of participants, experiences, and specific types of changes can all be quantified through analyzing the stories.

It is the act of gathering stories that makes the MSC technique a powerful and useful evaluation method for the PNBC and the Historic Black Church. It is reflective of the rich storytelling tradition of the Black community. Through storytelling, questions are answered, history is conveyed, and life lessons are taught and learned. Culture was transmitted and identity was established in the United States through the storytelling of slaves. Black teaching, spirituals, and other religious traditions found in Black churches are narrative in nature meant to illustrate eternal truth. While storytelling is a valued tradition, organizational

change leaders have affirmed the power of storytelling as an effective method for sparking and measuring change. Leadership expert Steve Denning notes,

Narrative is the natural instrument of change, because it draws on the active, living participation of individuals. It dwells in the experience of the people who act, think, talk, discuss, chat, joke, complain, dream, agonize and exult together, and collectively make up the organization. By contrast, conventional management focuses on lifeless elements—mission statements, formal strategies, programs, procedures, processes, systems, budgets, assets—the dead artifacts of the organization.⁵

This method does not preclude the use of other traditional methods of evaluation that measure whether or not stated goals were achieved. However, this evaluation method allows the PNBC to capture unexpected change as well as assess the quality of members' experiences with the convention, levels of participation, and changes in personal and corporate behavior. With this information, the transformation process can be adjusted or revamped to fit the desired outcomes based on the impact of the process.

The remaining lyrics of gospel song referenced above tell a story of transformation. The writer shares, "If you don't believe that I've been redeemed, then follow me down to Old Jordan stream. . . . I stepped in the water and the water was cold. It chilled my body but not my soul. . . . Angels in heaven done signed my name."⁶ The evaluation process ends where it began, with people and the stories of impact from people. These people, rather than staying the same and risking stagnation, have heard the music of change and have decided to D.A.N.C.E.

⁵ Steve Denning, "Why Storytelling Is Important," October 8, 2005, http://stevedenning.typepad.com/steve_denning/2005/10/why_storytellin.html (accessed October 3, 2012).

⁶ LaShun Pace, *I Know I've Been Changed*, <http://www.higherpraise.com/lyrics/praisethelord/praisethelord0024.htm> (accessed October 3, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This project and subject matter is personal for a number of reasons. First, I am a product of the PNBC. I grew up in a church that was and is still an active member of the convention, and whose pastor served as a national president of the convention. I remember being selected as a youth delegate and attending national conventions and meeting other young people from all across the country. It was the first time I traveled out of the state, and the first time I had experienced worship within a convention center setting. I remember the visits from prospective Presidential candidates. I remember seeing and hearing from the living legends of the Civil Rights Movement. I remember being exposed to and hearing preachers who were considered some of the greatest religious thinkers of our day. In retrospect, my convention experiences caused me to make theological connections that became a formative part of my spiritual growth.

First, it illuminated my understanding of the “body” of Christ. Simply attending my local assembly and other assemblies gave me a great overview of church and churches. But attending and being in active in convention life helped me understand that Christianity was much larger than church or churches. Rather, there were people from all over the country and world who believed and valued what I was taught, and convening provided an opportunity for like-minded individuals to connect for greater impact.

In addition, these experiences expanded my understanding of the purpose of my local church. I no longer felt that we were just a lonely ship on the water, sailing to some distant land in the by and by. But my local church was a part of a greater assembly of people who were all working together in their various contexts to influence the world around us. The

work of the local church was now important to me. We had to do our part so that we did not let the rest of the body down.

Finally, it demonstrated for me the power of true connection. The mere act of gathering and interfacing with leaders whose memberships represented hundreds of thousands of people illustrated a real picture of power. This power was not just positional power that had historically been used to oppress, but it was relational power. When galvanized around a particular issue or concern, the convention, as a body, was able to make its presence and power known and to bring it to bear for change. It was a wonderful experience for me. As my life's journey continued, filled with graduations and later ministry callings and cross-country moves, I wanted the youth I served as youth pastor to have such experiences as well. I was excited to take my kids to the PNBC convention so they too could have their own memories and encounters that would feed their faith.

As my ministry expanded and responsibilities increased, my attendance at the convention decreased and eventually stopped. I returned for the first time in 2010. It was time of mixed emotions. There was excitement and comfort around returning to the familiar and yet nervousness and discomfort with how familiar the familiar still was. My nostalgic haze soon cleared and gave cause for concern. I knew I had changed. I was far from my teenage years and now actively engaged in ordained ministry, but the convention I held so dear had not changed. I saw the phrase, "The more things change, the more they stay the same," in a new light.

It was certainly a homecoming, but not one I expected. Seminary colleagues who were now pastors of churches in the convention expressed their frustrations. Others shared their contemplation of ending their affiliation in favor of more "relevant" associations. They

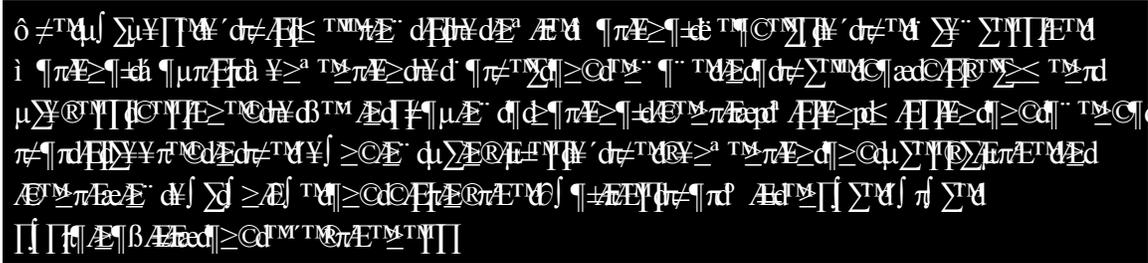
enjoyed the opportunities to fellowship and spend time with colleagues from across the country, and this alone was the highlight of the experience. My process of inquiry began. I asked myself, What did they mean by “relevant”? How were these other associations more relevant than the convention that many of their churches had become stalwarts in? As lobby and lunch conversations continued, there emerged a trend amongst the questions raised and comments shared. My colleagues wanted to know, How does affiliating with this convention help me become a better pastor at my local church? How do I benefit by remaining connected? What does my congregation gain by remaining a part? The subversive theological radical that secretly resides in me wanted to stand on my Dr. Cornel West soapbox and begin my lecture on how they had been deceived and unduly influenced by the spirit of rugged individualism and nihilism that has become prized in our society and even our churches. But what their questions really reflected was a desire for a connection, a need to be equipped and empowered, and a fresh revelation of why the PNBC exists and what it means for these pastors and the world around us. What difference does it make?

This experience illuminated the great disconnect that exists between the denomination and many of its Joshua-generation constituents. I suggest that this disconnect also exists in many of the historic Black churches that comprise the convention and church collective. It is this disconnect that caused Dr. Eddie Glaude to declare the Black Church dead. But in Acts 20, after Eutychus falls out of the window to the ground, Paul says to the people, “Don’t worry, his life is still in him.” I believe the life of the PNBC is still in it, and the many challenges—external and internal—are God’s invitation to be transformed and renewed. The D.A.N.C.E. process presented here is simply a vehicle through which the invitation can be accepted and the journey can begin.

By engaging the D.A.N.C.E. process, the PNBC and the Historic Black Church can re-establish their relevance in the lives of a post-civil rights, post-modern, post-Joshua generation. Relevance is about more than being popular or catering to the preferences of a particular group. Relevance is deeper than choreographed worship and contemporary praise. Relevance is established when people are able to connect with the identity, ideology, mission, passion, and methodology of an organization and church. It is when one knows what the organization is about, that one can see himself or herself as a part of it. It is when one can articulate the organization's purpose that this individual is able to hone and define his or her personal purpose. It is when an organization's passion is felt, that it ignites passion in others. It is how the organization chooses to deliver its message of identity, mission, passion, and ideology that determines who they reach. The D.A.N.C.E. process provides an opportunity for the PNBC, the Historic Black Church, and other organizations to re-examine, reflect, and reframe, if necessary, all of these areas in a manner that expands their reach and impact.

The invitation has been extended. Should one accept, he or she can do so knowing that "the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs" as you D.A.N.C.E. (Zephaniah 3:17).

Discernment Process



The discernment process is a process of discovery. It is important to establish at this level, who should be there; what should they be doing in order to achieve the desired outcome; what should be different as a result of their gathering and what should we be left with. The following is a meeting agenda designed to begin that process of discovery.

Proposed Meeting Agenda

Wednesday Evening Sessions

- Working Dinner/Table Talk – Participants would arrive in time to share in the first activity, a facilitated discussion around a specific set of questions regarding the participants experience in PNBC – a designated note taker and reporter would be identified. (5:30 – 7 p.m.)
- Session One – Purpose of the Gathering/Report Out/Overview of Discernment Process/Introduction of Facilitators/Brief PNBC History (7:30 – 9 p.m.)

Thursday Sessions

- Session Two – The Who, What, When, Where and How of PNBC – Challenges and Opportunities. This session is designed to be a full scale overview of the state of PNBC – our identity, our values, our vision and our mission – our effectiveness, relevance and ability to impact our surroundings in our current format. What’s working? What’s not working? Where are our areas of improvement? (9am – 12 p.m.)
- Lunch

- Session Three – Small Group Breakout: Founding Principles - Participants would be divided into small groups around each of the founding principles to further drill down into the ways in which the convention through its offerings exhibits this principle or not as well discuss strategies to ensure they are reflected nationally. Participants would be challenged to identify what these principles meant historically and what they mean today in light of challenges facing the community the convention serves. Each small group session ideally would be facilitated by a familiar and emerging voice as a pair. (i.e – Dr. Otis Moss and Dr. Jawanza Colvin; Dr. Ralph Canty and Rev. Kip Banks - these pairings are cited as examples) (1:30 – 3:30 p.m.)
- Session Four – Session Report Out (3:30 p.m. – 5:30)
- Session Five - Dream Session – This session is designed to tap into what Walter Brueggemann calls the Prophetic Imagination of PNBC leaders. What is our dream for the convention today and beyond? How will we work to achieve the dream? (7:30 – 9:30 p.m.)

Friday Session

- Session Six – Closeout and next steps (9am – 12noon)

The proposed gathering is actually the natural step two to the process already begun with the Presidential Summit Meeting with Dr. Gardner Taylor. The goals or outcome are many and varied based on proposed next steps. Possible Outcomes will be outlined next.

Proposed Meeting Outcomes

1. Develop a report to submit to Mid-Winter/Parent Body meeting for consideration and action.
 - Mission, Vision, Convention Structure, Convention Format and Organizational Review of Boards, Agencies, Committees and Commissions
2. Plan for regions to replicate the discernment process at their level and submit results and findings before 2013 National Meeting

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