

“All We Had Was God and Each Other”:

How the Transformational Leadership of Black Clergywomen Disrupts Male Dominance and Patriarchal Normativity in the Black Church

by

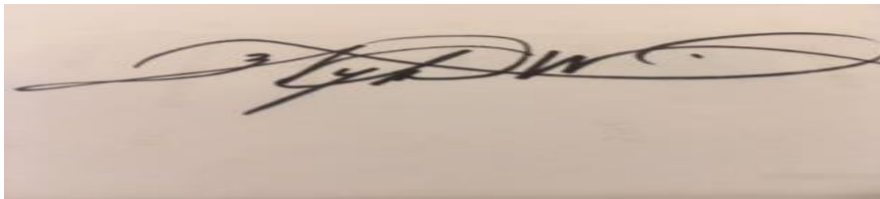
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in the Divinity School of Duke University

2022

ABSTRACT

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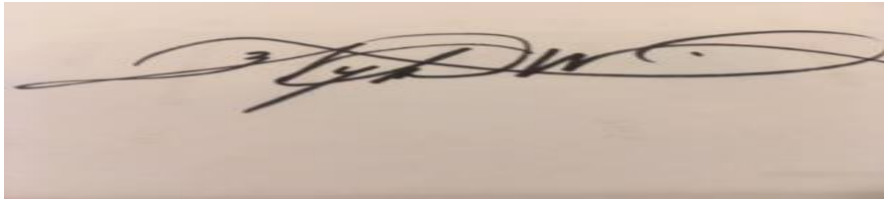
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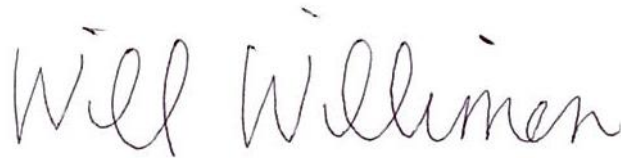
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Abstract

Despite the significant contributions made by African American women since the Black Church's founding, titles like pastor, bishop, and reverend for centuries have been freely awarded to men while being restricted to women. The leadership of black clergywomen in these roles traditionally held by men helps to challenge the stereotypes of what it means to be a leader. Black clergywomen's contributions to religious institutions like the Black Church are frequently only remembered through the prism of deconstruction. In an effort to not only deconstruct but also reconstruct the church into a more equitable organization, this study explores how the ministries of black clergywomen from the early 19th to the late 20th century undermine male domination and patriarchal normativity within Christianity. Using memoirs, interviews, sermons, and lectures, assumes that black clergywomen's transformative leadership is disruptive epistemologically, politically, and anthropologically. This study will demonstrate how different leadership avenues were altered or established as a result of the experiences of these African American preaching women by evaluating their lives and ministerial work. This essay intends to demonstrate how black clergywomen's ministries challenge orthodox beliefs, rituals, and theologies, opening up new avenues of leadership for themselves and others.

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1. Introduction

Black Protestant denominations discovered their separate locus in the American religious scene when the Civil War began to close.¹ After the end of the Civil War in 1865, black women were crucial players in helping to rebuild the American economy while weaving together the social fabric of networks that formed their immediate communities.² From the eras of Reconstruction to Post-Reconstruction, members of the African American community began having cultural deliberations about the authority women should hold spiritually, socially, and politically.³ Black women's livelihoods in America quickly developed into a multilayered, intersecting reality. This situation exemplifies intersectionality, defined as the interaction of race, gender, and class to form the various aspects of African American women's experiences.⁴

While the 19th century has often been referred to as the age when women's public voices came to life in America, it was also during the 19th and 20th centuries when black women's leadership within religious and social spaces began to take shape in a variety of ways.⁵ Womanist ethicist and theologian Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon once said, "When independent African American denominations began to appear, Christian women engaged in ministries of teaching and works of charity, and they also participated in the witnessing tradition of itinerant preachers,

¹ Besheer Mohamed et al., "A Brief Overview of Black Religious History in the U.S.," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, February 16, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/02/16/a-brief-overview-of-black-religious-history-in-the-u-s/>.

² Anna Boot, "Reconstruction," Women & the American Story, n.d., <https://wams.nyhistory.org/a-nation-divided/reconstruction/>; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 2003), 3.

³ Martha S. Jones, "After Reconstruction, Black Women Found Opportunity for Revolt in Church," Literary Hub, September 10, 2020, <https://lithub.com/after-reconstruction-black-women-found-opportunity-for-revolt-in-church/>; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 8.

⁴ Debora Jackson, *Meant for Good: Fundamentals of Womanist Leadership* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 2020), 14.

⁵ Williams, Delores S. "Visions, Inner Voices, Apparitions, and Defiance in Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Narratives." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 1/2 (1993): 81–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003875>.

missionaries and evangelists.”⁶ For many black women, the African American or Black Church has been a source of spiritual sustenance, a haven of solace in a cruel world, but it has also far too frequently been harmful and destructive.⁷ Due to what has been referred to as the "stained-glass ceiling," African American women are consigned to the peripheries of churches, unfathomable chasms of biblical politics, and specialized positions of limited power. The term “stained glass” ceiling, similar to the corporate expression of “glass” ceiling, prohibits black women within church structures from effectively exercising their callings and utilizing their gifts.⁸ The “stained glass” ceiling represents the barriers that bar women from ascending to leadership positions, keeping them in lower-level roles and struggling congregations.⁹ “Black women break out of the constricting grip of the Black church by realizing that their call to ministry and preaching is not limited to the concrete walls and stained glass buildings...they are redefining what it means to be a ‘minister,’ refusing to be limited by traditionalism.”¹⁰

With the grim statistics, prejudices, and critiques surrounding the very existence of black women in the United States, the question Yolanda Pierce raised in her piece, *In My Grandmother’s House*, continues to echo through time... “Does God love Black Women?”¹¹ It is possible that the very creator of everything that is known and all of which is not known, seeing what these women have, are, and will endure in the name of calling and purpose, I find myself

⁶ Cannon, Katie. “In Celebration of African American Women’s Religious Activism”. *The Journal of African American History*. Vol. 96 (3) p. 351.

⁷ Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York, Ny: Perennial, 2004), 276.

⁸ Vashti M McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 42.

⁹ Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura, Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, and Kimberly Williams-Gegner. "Tempered Radicals: Black Women's Leadership in the Church and Community," 86.

¹⁰ Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura, Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, and Kimberly Williams-Gegner. "Tempered Radicals: Black Women's Leadership in the Church and Community." *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 5, no. 2 (04, 2012): 99.

¹¹ Yolanda Nicole Pierce, *In My Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021), 93.

proposing a similar question. Is God's love enough to liberate black women? Even though this may sound antithetical or even heretical to normalized Christian values, I would answer the question with the colorful timbre of no. That God's love is not enough for black women to be free, for black clergywomen, in particular, to be released from the chains of religious oppression and suppression. From the pulpit to the pew, black women, black preaching women who bring their burdens to alters housed in sanctuaries across America, have had to be active participants and radical vanguards in their quest for total liberation. One way this has been done is through the revolutionary act of disruption.

In this thesis, I argue that the disruption caused by black clergywomen honoring their divine call to preach, minister, lead and exist has forced the institution of the church to be reshaped epistemologically, politically, and anthropologically. Four chapters make up this essay. The first recounts the experiences of early black preaching women, or "foremothers," whose work paved the path for modern black clergywomen to be leaders. These stories have served as the foundation upon which others have built their understanding of what it means to be a black female ministerial leader while tearing down the monuments that misogyny, patriarchy, and male dominance have made within the confines of the Christian church. Their personal stories serve as a living text which informs their preaching, teaching, and interaction. "As a means of giving voice to marginalized groups, feminist scholars have often treated narratives as an antidote to the invisibility and silencing that accompany race, class and gender domination."¹²

¹² Wilkins, Amy C. "Becoming Black Women: Intimate Stories and Intersectional Identities." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2012): 173-196. Accessed February 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41722473>.

The second chapter elaborates on the epistemic disruption caused by the leadership of African American women clergy. Their presence as pastors and preachers altered existing paradigms of understanding in their denominations and communities. The third discusses political upheaval and how the introduction of black women preachers to the larger clerical leadership structure directly affects the church's power dynamics. The fourth and last chapter discusses the anthropological disruption caused by black preaching women. It details how their efforts, theologies, and testimony demonstrate that the Spirit of God moves within and for black women. For instance, the Pentecost story in Acts 2 indicates that anybody can be used by the Holy Spirit, irrespective of gender. The ultimate goal is to show how black clergywomen's transformative leadership and ministries have helped to shift the paradigm known as the Black Church for the better.

2. Disruptive Black Preaching Women of 19th and 20th centuries

2.1 First Wave

The transformative leadership of early black women preachers disrupted the patriarchal normativity that can be seen within traditional African American church cultures. According to Dr. Mary Miller, “When a leader is intentionally transformational, there are specific behaviors that evidence mutuality in the interpersonal relationship between the leader and others.”¹³ Being the kind of leader who brings about lasting change requires one to exhibit certain personal qualities as well as specific interpersonal skills. Leadership is not restricted or defined by a particular title. A clear distinction between transformational and transactional leadership is made in the paper “Transformational Leaders in Bureaucratic Environments: A Juxtaposition of Assessment Leadership.” According to author Anne Marie Tryjankowski, transactional leadership entails transfers of benefits and penalties from a strong leader to people who report to them.¹⁴ On the other hand she suggests that “Transformational leadership is necessary to assure inequities in educational and social systems are overcome.”¹⁵ For change to occur, oppressions that impede a particular system must be removed, which is what transformational leadership means. I propose that black clergywomen are transformational leaders in multiple systems, notably in the local church context, due to the work of Miller and Tryjankowski. I argue that transformative leadership is the dominant leadership style among black clergywomen who have challenged and are challenging patriarchal norms present in African American church culture.

¹³ Miller, Mary. “Transformational Leadership and Mutuality.” *Transformation* 24, no. 3/4 (2007): 180–92. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052709>.

¹⁴ Tryjankowski, Anne Marie. “Transformational Leaders in Bureaucratic Environments: A Juxtaposition of Assessment Leadership.” *Counterpoints* 409 (2011): 165. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981304>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

As a part of a 2021 Pew Research Center study, several black pastors were interviewed and spoke about the difficulty women face when ascending to pastoral leadership. “It is rare for women to be the senior pastor at predominantly Black churches, especially large ones, according to the clergy interviewed.”¹⁶ Men still heavily dominate significant roles such as pastor and preacher within African American faith communities.¹⁷ “While women commonly manage church committees and take on other important roles, only a small minority of senior pastors at predominantly Black churches are women, they said.”¹⁸ The historical foundations built by the sacrifices and perseverance of early black women preachers helped to establish a more straightforward pathway through the wilderness of religion that modern black clergywomen still travel despite the current obstacles to ministerial leadership that remain.

This chapter's main objective is to draw attention to three waves of African American preaching women who lived from the early 19th to the late 20th centuries. As Vashti M. McKenzie states, “Our foremothers’ preaching, seeking ordination, and planting churches represent extraordinary examples of courage and perseverance under fire.”¹⁹ Through their ministries, these women opposed the dominance of men in the Black Church and gave modern African American female clergy the tools they needed to lead revolutionary efforts despite the “stained-glass ceiling.” Theologians like Barbara Savage, Henry Mitchell, and Daphne Wiggins provide different descriptions of the term “Black Church.” Typically an organization of churches having an essential heritage rooted in the African Diaspora is referred to as the “Black

¹⁶ Besheer Mohamed et al., “9. Interviews with Black Pastors,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, February 16, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/interviews-with-black-pastors/>.

¹⁷ Green, TeResa. “A Gendered Spirit: Race, Class, and Sex in the African American Church.” *Race, Gender & Class* 10, no. 1 (2003): 116. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675063>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Vashti M McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 30.

Church.”²⁰ These include the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), the National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), the National Baptist Convention USA (NBC USA), the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC).²¹

The first wave of preaching women or the “black foremothers” represents those whose ministerial contributions to the Black Church and their social activism expanded throughout the 1800s, a period when burgeoning Black denominations were becoming prominent entities in the lives of African Americans.²² In the 19th century, the first wave of denominationally affirmed black clergywomen like Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth, whose leadership publicly challenged the male dominance and patriarchal normativity ingrained in the Black Christian context, quickly rose to the forefront. It was indeed a perilous feat for black clergywomen to speak aloud and declare the word of God. As womanist theologian Delores S. Williams once stated, “The urge to speak publicly about God and to defy those who interfered came from the empowering visions they had, the voices they heard, and the apparitions they saw.”²³ The critical evaluation of these narratives will ultimately display how black women attained principal roles of authority that assisted in deconstructing male dominance in the Black Church, shaping it into the institution that is seen in modern times.

²⁰ Henry H. Mitchell. “The African Roots of the African American Church,” in *Black Church Beginnings: the Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 21-22.

²¹ Daphne C. Wiggins, *Righteous Content: Black Women’s Perspectives of Church and Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 203.

²² Besheer Mohamed et al., “A Brief Overview of Black Religious History in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, February 16, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/02/16/a-brief-overview-of-black-religious-history-in-the-u-s/>.

²³ Williams, Delores S. “Visions, Inner Voices, Apparitions, and Defiance in Nineteenth-Century Black Women’s Narratives.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 1/2 (1993): 81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003875>.

Jarena Lee, born in 1783 in Cape May, New Jersey recounted hearing a Presbyterian missionary read from the Book of Psalms; it was in this specific moment that she realized her sinfulness and shortly after was “driven by satan (*sic*) to destroy herself.”²⁴ As she tussled with accepting the divine assignment given to her by Christ, she would be simultaneously combating demonic ideations that were incessantly trying to force her to end her life. For quite some time, her efforts determining where she belonged denominationally seemed to render no fruit as she had been acquainted with other faith practices such as Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism.²⁵

However, it wasn’t until she heard Rev. Richard Allen. He later became the presiding bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and she found solace amongst those in the Methodist circle. A few years after what she considered her sanctification, she heard a formidable voice that proclaimed, “*Go! Preach the gospel!!*”²⁶ After this, she quickly wanted to address the matter with Rev. Allen, informing him that God was ordering her to be a proclaimer of the word. Allen then explicitly shared with her that women could not occupy the position of a preacher and should operate in the gift of exhortation as others successfully had. She did not sway from her position that women could also be vessels for God’s proclamation. In her journal, Lee articulated:

I now told him, that the Lord has revealed it to me, that I must preach the gospel. He replied by asking, in what sphere I wished to move in? I said, among the Methodist. He then replied, that a Mrs. Cook, a Methodist lady, had some time before requested the same privilege; who it was believed, had done much good in the way of exhortation, and holding prayer meetings; and who had been permitted to do so by the verbal license of the preacher in charge at the time. But as to women preaching, he said that our Discipline knew nothing at all about it—that it did not call for

²⁴ William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 28.

²⁵ Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: Giving An Account Of her Call To Preach The Gospel* (Pantianos Classics, 1836) iv-v.

²⁶ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 35.

women preachers...For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God. And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper, for a woman to preach? Seeing the Saviour (*sic*) died for the woman as well as the man. If a man may preach, because the Saviour (*sic*) died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also.²⁷

Several years later, after her encounter with Rev. Allen, Jarena was allowed to hold small prayer gatherings in a home, which garnered her notoriety in her community and incredible success in helping people accept Christ.²⁸ It wasn't until one day at Bethel Church, where Rev. Richard Williams struggled to deliver a sermon he had prepared from the Book of Jonah, that Jarena's true gift was able to shine publicly and be accepted by Bishop Allen. In that particular service, she stood to her feet after Williams seemed to have "lost spirit" and began to proclaim her message.²⁹ Once she was finished, she feared what would happen to her. However, when the bishop arose, Lee realized that her speaking was not in vain, that even the prominent male denominational leader agreed regarding her call. She stated, "he now as much believed that I was called to that work, as any of the preachers present."³⁰ Even with her public confirmation, it was still not easy to continue her calling. "Whereas Lee's introduction to Methodism through the Second Great Awakening had assured her of her rightful place as a preacher of the gospel, social norms that limited women's roles to the domestic made it difficult for her to fulfill this role."³¹ This public moment of disruption leads to not only the reaffirmation of Lee's calling but to shifting male-centered denominational frameworks.

²⁷ Ibid, 36.

²⁸ Ibid, 45.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 62.

The lives of black clergywomen like Jarena Lee display how the disruption caused by their presence within a religious context has been happening for centuries. Lee's story shows how even when threatened with silencing and ostracization by those male leaders in power, she continued to feel the spirit of God within and was persistent in fulfilling her ministry. In her memoir, Jarena Lee retells an occurrence where the interactions between the spirit of God and the persons in her congregation paralleled that of the story of Pentecost seen in Acts 2. She stated that while listening to the gospel, she became greatly compelled to speak but was hesitant to do so in the church. When she left the building, she went to the home of a woman named Anderson, who opened her doors so that Lee could hold a house meeting for those nearby.³² As she read, sang, preached, and prayed the persons who had gathered to hear her began to cry. "Accordingly I went, and God made manifest his power among the people. Some wept, while others shouted for joy."³³ She went on to say, "One whole seat of females, by the power of God, as the rushing of a wind, were all bowed to the floor at once, and screamed out."³⁴

Jarena Lee shared how her ministry would attract persons from various spaces, even those who did not believe in God. She once said, "With others who had come for curiosity to hear the coloured (*sic*) woman preacher an old man, who was a deist, and who said he did not believed the coloured (*sic*) people had any souls...yet there went an arrow from the bent bow of the gospel, and fastened in his till then obdurate heart."³⁵ In her memoir it states that after she had delivered the word, the same man who did hold these strong beliefs now became a witness of her ministry. He

³² William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 45.

³³ Andrews, 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

said, “that my preaching might seem a small thing, yet he believed I had the worth of souls at heart.”³⁶ Lee’s ministerial headship was able to combat masculine privilege which was undergirded by faulty biblical justification.³⁷ It was in these house meetings that she was able to even disrupt the racial divides within her community, declaring the gospel in front of former slaveholders and magistrates.³⁸ In her article “Testimony and Prophecy in The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee” Susan J. Hubert notes that, “Lee preached to black, mixed and even white congregations. In one year she traveled 2,325 miles, mostly on foot, and preached 178 sermons.”³⁹ It was by way of her ministry that she was able to disrupt and dislodge patriarchal norms. Jarena Lee ultimately became the first woman to be acknowledged as a preacher in the AME tradition even though she was never ordained.⁴⁰

In 1797 Isabella Bomefree also known as Isabella Van Wagenen was born in the state of New York as a slave to a rural Dutch family.⁴¹ On June 1, 1843, when she began her traveling ministry, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth.⁴² She became another pioneering black clergywoman of the 19th century whose communication style and stature disrupted spaces inundated by men which allowed her to cross over into the socio-political arena. It was during the 1820s and 1830s when Truth became acquainted with several different spiritual disciplines such as Primitive Methodism, Ultraism, and Perfectionism, which connected her to persons like

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Patterson, Robert J. “A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation: Womanist Theology and Gendered-Racial Protest in the Writings of Jarena Lee, Frances E.W. Harper, and Harriet Jacobs.” *Religion & Literature* 45, no. 2 (2013): 55–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24397780>.

³⁸ Ibid, 47.

³⁹ Hubert, Susan J. "Testimony and Prophecy in the Life and Religious-Experience of Jarena Lee." *Journal of Religious Thought* 54/55, no. 2 (Spring, 1998): 45-52. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/testimony-prophecy-life-religious-experience/docview/222072342/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 49.

⁴¹ Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 12.

⁴² Painter, Neil Irvin. “Representing truth: Sojourner Truth’s knowing and becoming known.” *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (September, 1994): 461.

James La Tourette who offered her opportunities to speak publicly by preaching at his meetings.⁴³ Truth's congregational efforts in New York also stretched amongst the African Methodists which lead to the forming of a new denomination called the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ).⁴⁴ However, it was how she spoke in and outside of the Black Church context that allowed her to make an indelible impact. Sojourner Truth who also was a religious mystic had a distinct way of engaging others with lived experience and words that granted her the power to command audiences. In *Sojourner Truth's America*, author Margaret Washington says this about Truth's revolutionary stylistics:

She cultivated and wielded well other tools of the new measures trade: mannerisms, movements, gesticulations, shifting of voice from shouts to whispers, and visual and auditory sensations that roused the audience. She began committing biblical passages to memory and debating with ministers. She merged scriptural parables with life, and presented her message in a vernacular style that was especially appealing to rural folk of the hinterland. Isabella was a mystic before becoming a Methodist, and her "gifts" went beyond new measures. She directly connected spirituality with cosmology and combined Africanity with Christianity. Mysticism prepared her as a messenger.⁴⁵

The defining movement that displayed how Sojourner Truth's leadership and style disrupted male dominance and patriarchy politically occurred in 1851 at Ohio Women's Rights Convention which was held in a church in Akron. Sojourner sat on the steps of the pulpit surrounded by clergymen who were in opposition to the movement, supporting the superiority of men.⁴⁶ While states like New Jersey recognized the ability for women to vote as early as 1797, it wasn't until legislation was introduced in 1806 that acknowledges that this right only belonged to those who were white, free, and male.⁴⁷ Although many states like Wyoming and California

⁴³ Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, 85-86.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 89.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 87.

⁴⁶ Ritter, E. Jay. "Sojourner Truth." *Negro History Bulletin* 26, no. 8 (1963): 254-254.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44176197>.

⁴⁷ "Women's Suffrage in the U.S. By State," tag.rutgers.edu, 2014, <https://tag.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/suffrage-by-state.pdf>.

began to grant voting rights to women in the late 1800s and 1900s, most southern states withheld until the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was ratified on August 18, 1920, which officially stated that women were allowed to vote.⁴⁸ On that day May 29th Truth offered one of the most compelling speeches in history.⁴⁹ In the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* article that was published a month later stated this about the speech, “It is impossible to transfer to paper, or convey any adequate idea of the effect it produced on the audience. Those only can appreciate it who saw her powerful form, her whole-souled, earnest gestures and listened to her strong truthful tones.”⁵⁰ To social radicals like Frances Dana Gage this acclaimed speech was “a stick to beat antisuffragists with” while for Gage, Truth herself became the embodiment of women’s strength.⁵¹

Truth was able to travel about the country giving speeches about political issues and preaching sermons to those who longed to hear her. Even though she was unable to read, she memorized portions of the bible. “When I preaches (*sic*),” she said, “I has just one text to preach from, an’ I always preaches (*sic*) from this one. My text is, “When I found Jesus.”⁵² At a camp meeting that Sojourner Truth was attending in Northampton, a rally of men became unruly and began threatening those who had gathered with violence and the burning of their tents.⁵³ Truth made the decision to emerge from her hiding place as the evening’s preacher shook in the pulpit. She then stepped on top of a tiny mound of earth and started singing a hymn with such zeal and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Malea Walker, “Sojourner Truth’s Most Famous Speech | Headlines and Heroes,” blogs.loc.gov, April 7, 2021, <https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2021/04/sojourner-truths-most-famous-speech/>.

⁵⁰ F.D. Gage, “Anti-Slavery Bugle. [Volume] (New-Lisbon, Ohio) 1845-1861, June 21, 1851, Image 4,” *Loc.gov*, no. 1851/06/21 (2019): 160, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035487/1851-06-21/ed-1/seq-4/>

⁵¹ Painter, Nell Irvin. “Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth’s Knowing and Becoming Known.” *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 461–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2081168>.

⁵² Jacob’s Well NJ, “Sojourner Truth - When I Found Jesus,” Jacob’s Well, NJ, 2012, https://www.jacobswellnj.org/articles/post/sojourner-truth---when-i-found-jesus#_ftn10.

⁵³ Sojourner Truth, “The Narrative of Sojourner Truth.,” digital.library.upenn.edu, 1850, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/truth/1850/1850.html#29>.

enthusiasm that the men stopped being terrorists and surrounded her.⁵⁴ “Sing to us, old woman,’ cries one. ‘Talk to us, old woman,’ says another. ‘Pray, old woman,’ says a third. ‘Tell us your experience,’ says a fourth.”⁵⁵ At that moment she made the men who caused such tension promise to leave after she sang the hymns they so longed to hear. “Well, there are two congregations on this ground. It is written that there shall be a separation, and the sheep shall be separated from the goats. The other preachers have the sheep, *I* have the goats. And I have a few sheep among my goats, but they are *very* ragged.”⁵⁶ After Truth had sung and spoken the word of God, the mob had dispersed. It was on this small patch of grass where Sojourner Truth disrupted the agendas of men who desired to cause harm and dysfunction. Her presence was so impactful that those who listened would forever be changed. “All who have ever heard her sing this hymn will probably remember it as long as they remember her.”⁵⁷

Through the work which they embodied in their leadership, ministry, and activism, early black clergywomen like Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth were able to disrupt agendas and sexist ideals that push minority women away from the margins. These foremothers' experiences assisted in forming the foundational principles which can be seen in the radicalization of black female ministry leadership in 21st century America. As the 1800s came to an end, the second wave of disruptive, transformative leaders began to emerge not only in the church but also crossing over into the fields of education and social justice.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

2.2 Second Wave

Women like Mary McLeod Bethune and Prathia Hall, who made significant changes at the intersections of socioreligious frameworks, their influence stretched to not only in the Black Church or political action but also to the academy, make up the second wave of disruptors. From the early 1900s to the late-1970s Bethune and Hall's labor was dedicated to support persons who were marginalized as a result of unfair practices including sexism and injustice. These two women challenged the patriarchal gaze of male dominance and normativity that deeply saturated the black community.

Mary McLeod Bethune was the daughter of former slaves born in 1875 as one of seventeen children in Maysville, South Carolina.⁵⁸ Being formally educated at a Presbyterian missionary school allowed her to continue on to places such as Scotia Seminary and the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, where she discovered she had strengths in music and in public speaking.⁵⁹ Being heavily influenced by the Presbyterian Church, Bethune had a deep desire to be a missionary in Africa, after being denied a post she soon discovered her passion for education.⁶⁰ She was inspired to start the Daytona Educational and Industrial School for Negro Girls by women like Lucy Craft Laney who believed that "Christian moralism reflected the deep religiosity of Black Americans wedded to an educational and social agenda."⁶¹ Bethune was a fierce advocate for the leadership of African American women and was never ashamed to speak about her faith. In 1933 Bethune wrote these remarks about the *Sacrifices and Achievements of*

⁵⁸ Brewer, William M. "Mary McLeod Bethune." *Negro History Bulletin* 19, no. 2 (1955): 48–36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44212916>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Mary McLeod Bethune, Audrey Thomas McCluskey, and Elaine M. Smith, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building A Better World: Essays and Selected Documents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) .

⁶¹ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. "'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: Black Women School Founders and Their Mission.'" *Signs* 22, no. 2 (1997): 403–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175282>.

African American women in the field of higher education. In this manuscript, she acknowledged how pivotal black womanhood was in structuring the Black Church, she stated:

In no field of modern social relationship has the hand of service and the influence of the Negro woman been felt more distinctly than in the Negro orthodox church. It may be safely said that the chief sustaining force in support of the pulpit and the various stages of missionary enterprise has been the feminine element of the membership. The development of the Negro church since the Civil War has been another of the modern miracles. Throughout its growth the untiring effort, the unflagging enthusiasm, the sacrificial contribution of time, effort, and cash earnings of the black woman have been the most significant factors, without which the modern Negro church would have no history worth the writing.⁶²

While Mary McLeod Bethune was well known for being the founder of the Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida, it was her work with women that displayed how her leadership shifted definitive lines educationally and spiritually. Even though she received support from various persons and establishments, it was in the black and religious communities where she found support for her causes.⁶³ Women's departments and missionary boards in the church gave black women influential power outside the pulpit. At the same time, other social organizations also received an influx of black ingenuity from women leaders. The first nationwide black organization was the National Association of Colored Women, founded in 1896.⁶⁴ Several years later, in 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune, a frontrunner for the second wave of disruptive black preaching women, started the National Council of Negro Women, which focused on fighting for the advancement of black women.⁶⁵ These types of associations helped enable black women like Ida B. Wells and Harriet Tubman to become the recognizable leaders they continue to be across the United States. In the Black Church, African American

⁶² Bethune, Mary McLeod. "The Sacrifices and Achievements of African-American Women." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 32 (2001): 35–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2678758>.

⁶³ Mary McLeod Bethune, Audrey Thomas McCluskey, and Elaine M. Smith, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building A Better World: Essays and Selected Documents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) 9.

⁶⁴ <https://www.nacwc.com/history>

⁶⁵ <https://ncnw.org/ncnw/our-history>

clergywomen are more welcomed to function in supportive roles like pulpit associates rather than senior positions; alternative leadership roles both inside the church and in other social spheres offered black women opportunities to operate in authority while helping their communities in a myriad of ways.⁶⁶

In the memoir *Building A Better World*, Bethune spoke about her calling to build institutions of learning for African American people especially black women that extended beyond the normal narratives. She stated:

I must open the doors to fuller life—I must open many of them—as I pass this way, so that there may be greater realities and varieties for the people who come after me. With this type of spiritual interpretation, I am strongly *inter*-denominational, *inter*-racial, and *inter*-national. From this kind of prompting came by my desire to untie all of the Negro organizations of women. The National Council of Negro Women purports to blend the energies, the faiths, the aspirations, the abilities and powers of all the Negro women in order that those who have leadership gifts may use them for the good of the whole. Through this organization we hope to make and further relationships with other groups of women throughout the world. We extend the collective hand and add beauty and force to our voices as we plan together and work together with courage, self-reliance and heroism. My spiritual philosophy provides a full life for me. I give my best at all times and accept without complaint the results. I expect the best.⁶⁷

Mary McLeod Bethune had strong ties to The United Methodist Church and was an active part in helping the denomination restructure. In the 1930s, Bethune was key in arguing for the elimination of the central jurisdiction which tried to keep segregation within the church.⁶⁸ She represented the UMC as a delegate at the General Conference to advocate for this matter in an effort to make the UMC a more inclusive denomination.⁶⁹ She was a ferocious supporter of educational and religious equality.

⁶⁶ Debora Jackson, *Meant for Good: Fundamentals of Womanist Leadership* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2020), 44.

⁶⁷ Bethune, Thomas-McCluskey, and Smith, *Building A Better World*, 55.

⁶⁸ “Bethune, Mary McLeod (1875-1955) – Methodist Mission Bicentennial,” [methodistmission200.org](https://methodistmission200.org/bethune-mary-mcleod-1875-1955/), accessed July 13, 2022, <https://methodistmission200.org/bethune-mary-mcleod-1875-1955/>.

⁶⁹ Ask the UMC, “Who Are Black Women Pioneers in US Methodism?,” *United Methodist Insight*, February 17, 2022, <https://um-insight.net/in-the-world/advocating-justice/who-are-black-women-pioneers-in-us-methodism/>.

Prathia Hall was a prominent activist during the era of Civil Rights, her involvement with the movement helped her to affirm her call to ministry leading her to become one of the first black Baptist women to be ordained by the American Baptist Churches USA in 1977.⁷⁰ As the daughter of a pastor, Hall became adamant about speaking out against various systems and oppressions like sexism, heterosexism, and denominationalism especially those centered in the Black Church.⁷¹ Even on large conference platforms filled with her male counterparts Hall was known to strongly denounced issues that heavily affected women including clergy and laywomen. She once stated to a room of over 200 ministers, “You can’t be a disciple of Jesus and harbor sexism in your heart.”⁷²

As Prathia Hall continued her educational pursuits for ministry while fervently being involved in organizations such as the National Council for Negro Women like Bethune as well as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Black Women Leadership, eventually becoming the first female member of the Baptist Ministers Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity.⁷³ In a 1982 interview Hall describes her experience while attending a local revival filled with male clergy, when the preacher asked for all of the “brother” ministers to stand, Prathia decided to stand with them. “Because when I stood I stood as I am. I stood in the total authenticity of my being—black, preacher, Baptist, woman. For the same God who made

⁷⁰ Courtney Pace, *Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2021) 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷² Waddle, Ray. "Black Churches Harbor Sexism, Minister Says: [CITY Edition]." *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct 31, 1992. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/black-churches-harbor-sexism-minister-says/docview/262925382/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁷³ Pace, *Freedom Faith*, 115.

me a preacher is the same God who made me a woman.”⁷⁴ Bold actions such as these allowed her to be a woman to interrupt normative patterns in the Black Church as well as in the academic community. Even her preaching was invigorating, so much so that her words influenced one of the greatest social leaders of the Black Church Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during a prayer service held in Georgia in 1962 to write his famous “I Have A Dream” speech.⁷⁵

Even though Hall’s own leadership helped in disrupting the patriarchy found within her context, she always considered the voices of the marginalized and oppressed within the African American religious community like black women. In response to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Hall wrote:

My own suspicion is that many of these women leaders felt as called to the ministry as I do today. Their speeches would easily qualify as sermons. But because of patriarchal suppression of even the thought of female Baptist clergy, they had to work out their call by marrying ministers and becoming involved in their husband's ministries, or by devoting themselves to the "women's work" of their denomination, as defined by men. For this reason, I would characterize them as secular evangelists...that many of these women would have been clergy if ordination had been open to them.⁷⁶

On March 29, 1998, at Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall preached a sermon called “A Nightmare in Broad Daylight” from Ephesians 4:1-10. In the video, Hall proclaims how those persons who were shackled while being filed in a line on a television program she was watching noticed that those who were bound by chains were very young.⁷⁷ Standing in the pulpit of a church that was behind what was the Black Panthers East

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Pace, *Freedom Faith*, 1.

⁷⁶ Prathia Hall Wynn. Review of *Called but Not Chosen*, by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *The Women’s Review of Books* 11, no. 12 (1994): 31–32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4021955>.

⁷⁷ “A Nightmare in Broad Daylight (Sermon) - Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall,” www.youtube.com, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSuC15uLlAA>.

Oakland headquarters, Hall belted out a question to those sitting in the pews.⁷⁸ “Who are these captive youth to you and who are you to them?”⁷⁹ As she continues to preach, moving from the social ill of incarceration of youth to her own social location as a black woman, to the efforts that stem from the labor of black women. “I am an African American teaching, preaching woman, the historical work of African American women has been survival of the race...Just check the record, wherever the race is in trouble black women spring into action and will take on every demon in hell to protect our children and preserve the race.”⁸⁰ She goes on to say, “We inspire African American men to take on the same struggle and we partner in the struggle.”⁸¹ Hall goes back and forth between the words found in the epistle to the Ephesians to what was being experienced in black life. She spoke about how Christ came to set the captive free but he also gave the church the responsibility to remove chains of oppression. She states:

All of the captives are not outside the church, we cannot do the work of chain removal because we are too busy clinging to captivity in the church. We can't remove chains outside the church because we are stepping over too many captives in the church. Captives of sexism, racism, ageism, and all of these -isms that demean God's people. Colorism, heterosexism... every one of those chains have already been broken...stand up and free yourselves. If Jesus Christ has taken captivity captive that he also ascended, that's the same one who descended, that means that now there is no unconquered space!...No matter where we go, captivity is captive...Thanks be to God!⁸²

It was in this sermon like many others that Hall brought together the issues of justice, black women, and the liberating power of Jesus Christ in spaces that were male-dominated. Hall up until her death took tremendous pride in consistently advocating for black clergywomen using

⁷⁸ Martha C. Taylor, “History,” www.allen-temple.org, accessed July 4, 2022, <https://www.allen-temple.org/about-atbc/history>.

⁷⁹ “A Nightmare in Broad Daylight (Sermon) - Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall,” www.youtube.com, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSuC15uLlAA>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

key opportunities to speak to the patriarchal biases that affect black women but also calling for men and women to be co-laborers in the faith.⁸³

2.3 Third Wave

During the late 20th century the third wave of black female ministers who pushed against patriarchal paradigms seen in the African American Christian faith came clearly into view. From leadership confirmation to identity affirmation, the lived experiences of these women caused significant rifts in the heteronormative structure of black faith communities. The third wave of clergywomen like Bishop Vashti McKenzie and Bishop Yvette Flunder helped to address the issues that surrounded gender and sexuality. The leadership of McKenzie and Flunder has aided in shaping the foundation from which the Black denominations are systematized and operate.

As stated previously, Jarena Lee became the first female preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the early 1800s, it wasn't until the year 2000 that the AME denomination would elect the first black clergywoman to become a bishop in its then 213-year history.⁸⁴ Her leadership would extend across international borders to places such as Mozambique and Botswana disrupting the denominational structure which prioritized men for these preeminent positions.⁸⁵ Even though she had a myriad of experiences in areas such as broadcasting and modeling, McKenzie knew she was being called into the gospel ministry while being a member of Bethel AME and officially became a minister in 1982.⁸⁶ In Baltimore she was

⁸³ Pace, *Freedom Faith*, 202.

⁸⁴ "First Female Bishop Vashti McKenzie: Baltimore Pastor Makes History by Shattering the Stained Glass Ceiling.: [FINAL Edition]." *The Sun*, Jul 13, 2000. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/newspapers/first-female-bishop-vashti-mckenzie-baltimore/docview/406452911/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ McCraven, Marilyn. "'A Modern-Day Esther': Minister: A Rising Star in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Vashti McKenzie could Become the First Female Bishop of Her Denomination.: [FINAL Edition]." *The*

appointed over two churches until she formally became the pastor of Payne Memorial. Her being elevated to a respected congregation that caused turbulence amongst members, Bishop H. H. Brookins stated “he had to explain his selection of McKenzie to church members who were in an uproar over a woman being named to one of the denomination’s most venerable churches.”⁸⁷ Her governance was able to confront the idea that a male-focused leadership model was not the only way in which the AME church could operate.

Vashti McKenzie who was born in 1947 and became an ordained deacon in 1984 was pivotal in directing successful initiatives like the welfare-to-work program, an economic development program as well as the Collective Banking Group of Baltimore.⁸⁸ McKenzie’s tenure as pastor to bishop helped to display how the leadership of black clergywomen is not monolithic and is a layered experience that began with early female ministers like Jarena Lee, Julia Foote, and Zilpha Elaw. In a 2008 article recording McKenzie’s new appointment to the office of bishop, the author wrote these words:

Upon her election, she reportedly said, “I stand here tonight on the shoulders of the unordained (*sic*) women who served without affirmation or appointment. I don’t stand here alone, but there is a cloud of witnesses who sacrificed, died and gave their best.” Her ascension as bishop cleared a way for other women to rise to prominent positions in other denominations. Not only has McKenzie been a role model for women-in and out of the ministry-but her presence also affirms a validation among women that they can have a family and a career at the same time. She has also stated that it is all right to be womanly beautiful, intelligent and successful, and not have to choose between a career in the ministry and her family.⁸⁹

Sun, Jul 15, 1997. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/modern-day-esther-minister-rising-star-african/docview/406976222/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Simmonds, Yussuf J. "Bishop Vashti McKenzie." *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Apr, 2008. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/bishop-vashti-mckenzie/docview/369364491/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Vashti McKenzie assisted in showing how black clergywomen during the late 1900s were able to break through denominational barriers which form what she called the “stained glass ceiling.”⁹⁰ It is due to her work and witness within the African Methodist Episcopal Church that black religious spaces can see how necessary the leadership of black clergywomen is to the survival of the Black Church.

The last key figure in the third wave of disruptive black preaching women who challenged the heteronormativity of the Black Church is Bishop Yvette Flunder who was raised in the black Pentecostal church and eventually left the denomination due to its conservative theology.⁹¹ Since her early years Flunder has made firm stances on the inequity found in the Black Church dynamic. Even though she was a third-generation preacher and started ministering at 18 years old, she removed herself from her family’s particular faith tradition over their stance of not allowing women to be ordained ministers.⁹²

In 1991, Flunder founded the United Church of Christ City of Refuge in Oakland, California, serving as the senior pastor.⁹³ It wasn’t until 2000 that she founded the historic Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, “a trans-denominational coalition of Christian churches,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ White, Evelyn C. "Critics Say It Is Out Of Touch / Identity Crisis for the Black Church: [FINAL Edition]." *San Francisco Chronicle (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Jan 12, 1994. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/critics-say-is-out-touch-identity-crisis-black/docview/303259208/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁹² Fernandez, Elizabeth. "A Pastor's Rousing Call to S.F. Rev. Yvette Flunder Formed Her Church on a Simple Premise: To Open the Doors to Everyone. BLACK HISTORY MONTH: [SECOND Edition]." *San Francisco Examiner*, Feb 01, 1996. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/pastors-rousing-call-s-f-rev-yvette-flunder/docview/270419208/se-2?accountid=10598>.

⁹³ Alanez, Tonya. "Bishop Flunder Receives Open Door Award." *Boston Globe*, Jun 14, 2021. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/bishop-flunder-receives-open-door-award/docview/2540435723/se-2?accountid=10598>.

nationally and internationally, seeking to “celebrate and proclaim the radically inclusive love of Jesus Christ.” She is the fellowship’s bishop.”⁹⁴ Flunder identifies herself as a same-gender loving woman who believes that her queerness is a gift from God.⁹⁵ Bishop Yvette has been able to curate spaces for marginalized people, confidently minister in her own her way as a member of the LGBTQ+ community despite traditionalist views. As a product of the Black Church, Bishop Flunder embodies with boldness the very things that are still rarely spoken about. However, her sermons are laced with both boldness and calls to action for those who sit in the pews. At the Canadian Memorial United Church in 2017, Flunder preached a sermon called “Our God Does Not Discriminate.” She said, “A voice willing to confess the use of religion as oppression has never been and is not the will of God. It does not matter who is preaching it, they are still wrong!”⁹⁶

At a small Baptist college Bishop Flunder spoke about those black clergymen who, after she had married her wife, called her a “travesty of the highest order.”⁹⁷ Growing up in the Pentecostal denomination, Flunder believes who she is as a person challenges the patriarchal norms that are found in the Black Church.⁹⁸ “It’s one of the last bastions of power that a lot of my brothers feel like they have, and I represent everything that flies in the face of it...I am a woman. I am woman clergy and I’m a same-gender-loving woman.”⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “Bishop Yvette Flunder - ‘Our God Does Not Discriminate,’” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykGJS-y4ULA&t=365s), 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykGJS-y4ULA&t=365s>.

⁹⁷ Adelle M. Banks, “Black Lesbian Bishop Yvette Flunder Is ‘Using My Energy to Find Peace,’” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2015, sec. National, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/black-lesbian-bishop-yvette-flunder-is-using-my-energy-to-find-peace/2015/03/20/51d60158-cf28-11e4-8730-4f473416e759_story.html.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Throughout her ministry, Bishop Flunder has made significant contributions to community initiatives such as building a senior center for the elderly,¹⁰⁰ assisting with providing shelter for gay youth,¹⁰¹ to being on the frontlines helping to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic.¹⁰² Her spiritual background and leadership has charged the Black Church to have more meaningful conversations around sexuality, identity, and true evangelism.

It is imperative to critically evaluate the early foundations which have shaped the experiences of the first wave of black foremothers and preaching women to those of the third wave. The timeline offered by this chapter displays how their leadership as black women ministers has disrupted the historical theological narratives of sexism and patriarchy that center male experiences as the norm. The narratives of these clergywomen show how the leadership of black female clerics in the 21st century can cause transformative leadership as a tactic for revolutionary disruption. Breaking the compacted grounds of structural heteronormativity and combat the problems of patriarchy that find residence in the Black Church community.

¹⁰⁰ "Bishop Flunder, City of Refuge Church Dedicate New Senior Center." *Oakland Post*, Dec, 2010. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/bishop-flunder-city-refuge-church-dedicate-new/docview/847081556/se-2?accountid=10598>.

¹⁰¹ Sarkar, Pia. "Shelter for Gay Homeless Hits a Wall no One Welcomes Ark of Refuge in their Neighborhood, Not Even the Ca Stro: [FIRST Edition]." *San Francisco Examiner*, Aug 24, 2000. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/shelter-gay-homeless-hits-wall-no-one-welcomes/docview/270498977/se-2?accountid=10598>.

¹⁰² "e *Oakland Post*, Nov 15, 2000. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/gospel-music-artists-join-fight-against-hiv-aids/docview/367362467/se-2?accountid=10598>.

3. Epistemological Disruption

Understanding how belief systems develop is essential in order to envision how black clergywomen caused disruption epistemologically, especially inside organizations like the church. Learning how knowledge is initially acquired and then used can show how Christianity came to be the dominant force it is today. It is essential to read the writings of the early European philosophers to understand how the western worldview affected Christianity's understanding of God. Understanding the origins of conventional forms of knowledge and how the presence of black clergywomen contributes to the formation of new knowledge chasms requires an understanding of René Descartes's concept of human reasoning. Exploring sources that are culturally very different epistemologically, according to Linda E. Thomas, can lead to an “inclusive construction of knowledge.”¹⁰³ Evaluating the theology of black conservative preachers like Dr. Tony Evans shows how belief systems can be crafted by figures of authority negatively. The lives of African American preaching women like Julia A. Foote and Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon demonstrate how, both inside and outside of the church; the black female body epistemologically undermines centuries of tradition in a matter of seconds. Opening doors to innovative possibilities and inclusive, productive styles of thought.

3.1 Defining the Epistemological

"The study of the nature of knowledge and justification," according to Paul K. Moser, "in particular, the study of (a) the defining components, (b) the substantive conditions or sources,

¹⁰³Linda E. Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm,” *CrossCurrents* 48, no. 4 (1998): 496, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24461012>.

and (c) the limits of knowledge and justification.”¹⁰⁴ According to Moser, there have been diverse conflicts surrounding several different forms of knowledge. For instance, propositional knowledge is something that is a known verifiable truth, while nonempirical knowledge is simply information acquired by one’s proximity of awareness.¹⁰⁵ How knowledge is acquired and applied determines the different types of knowing. Immanuel Kant and Plato are among the philosophers who discuss human reasoning. A justified true belief, also known as propositional knowledge, is one of the significant views epistemologists have explored. One of the primary viewpoints epistemologists have considered is information that is accompanied by proof.¹⁰⁶ Knowledge must be linked to a verifiable truth for information to be deemed as justifiable. “Knowledge is not just true belief. Some true beliefs are supported merely by lucky guesswork and thus are not knowledge.”¹⁰⁷ What has been generated is nothing more than a fallacy that is not tied to what is true. “Knowledge requires that the satisfaction of its belief condition be “appropriately related” to the satisfaction of its truth condition.”¹⁰⁸

Moser describes traditional foundationalism in his article, which has dominated the debate over epistemic justification. He claims that Aristotle and Descartes, among other foundational thinkers, settled on the premise that “foundational beliefs need not be indubitable or infallible.”¹⁰⁹ Epistemic coherentism is a counterargument to foundationalism, which maintains that “the justification of any belief depends on that belief’s having evidential support from some

¹⁰⁴ Paul K. Moser, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 3-24, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Moser, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Moser, 5.

other belief.”¹¹⁰ The individual who possesses certain thinking, knowledge, or belief is an active participant in validating the information in this theory. “A belief is justified for you so long as it either best explains, or is best explained by, some member of the system of beliefs that has maximal explanatory power for you,” according to Moser.¹¹¹ As a result, for information to become a belief, a person must be persuaded by another person or the system itself. According to the theory of epistemic coherentism, people in positions of authority, such as pastors or preachers, have the power to consolidate an individual's conviction. “Contemporary epistemic coherentism is holistic; it finds the ultimate source of justification in a system of interconnected beliefs or potential beliefs.” For example, if an authoritative figure explains the information received from reading a specific text, it can be justified epistemologically. While obtaining knowledge within a religious institution such as a church has aided in obtaining data, it has also harmed when approved individuals with prejudices validate the information. As a result, those in positions of authority can directly impact how people know or learn, either favorably or poorly.

3.2 René Descartes's Philosophy of Doubt & Truth

Historically the scholarship of white male Europeans has been prevalent in epistemology for centuries. René Descartes, a French philosopher, and mathematician is well known for his iconic statement, "I think. Therefore I am," which became a catchphrase in epistemology.¹¹² He would advance algebraic equations significantly along with his ideas about knowledge, doubt, and even God's existence.¹¹³ Shai Frogel elaborates on the logical philosophy of Descartes in his

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Forrest E. Baird, *Philosophic Classics from Plato to Derrida* (New York, NY: ROUTLEDGE, 2016), 374.

¹¹³ Justin Skirry, “Descartes, Rene | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d., <https://iep.utm.edu/rene-descartes/>.

paper "Descartes: Truth and Self-deception." "Descartes is well aware of the fact that our personal psychology determines our beliefs no less than our thinking."¹¹⁴ The hyperbolic doubt theory comes into play in this situation. "It takes us from the actual to the possible. It employs our capacity for imagining speculative possibilities in order to cast doubt on our actual beliefs."¹¹⁵ In his pursuit of what might be regarded as the truth, Descartes employs hyperbolic doubt, as the author makes clear. He states:

When our only goal is not imagining we know what we do not know, it is reasonable to use hyperbolic doubt, without being troubled by the possibility that this doubt may cause us to imagine that we do not know what we actually know; when our goal lies in one direction (not taking the false to be true), we are not concerned about the other direction (taking the true to be false)...Apparently, Descartes assumes that true belief is stronger than any doubt.¹¹⁶

For Descartes, the ability to doubt, understand, deny, affirm, will, reject, and imagine is the essence of what makes one a thinking being.¹¹⁷ If human beings can think and doubt, they can also construct the belief systems from which they operate. The individual plays a vital role in acquiring what is true and what is a fallacy. However, some factors can hinder this attainment, such as the human will over and against human intellect. "It is our will not our intellect that is responsible for our wrong judgements."¹¹⁸ Frogel explains how René Descartes views the severity of the will to the point that it can manipulate information into becoming whatever that individual desires it to be. He states:

By means of the intellect, he claims, we conceive ideas but we do not judge them as true or false. Only with the cooperation of the will which holds the power to affirm and deny, we make judgments. In other words, wrong judgments are not a fallacy of our faculty of understanding (i.e. the intellect) but a result of our manipulative use of our own will. Yet, although the will is more expansive than the intellect and therefore enables wrong judgments, the intellect, according to Descartes, is stronger than the will...In these cases, our intellect does not guide our will and, therefore, the will moves indifferently between given alternatives. Its choices can lead arbitrarily

¹¹⁴ Frogel, Shai. "Descartes: Truth and Self-Deception." *Philosophy* 91, no. 355 (2016): 93–108.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26419250>.

¹¹⁵ Frogel, 95.

¹¹⁶ Frogel, 99.

¹¹⁷ Frogel, 102.

¹¹⁸ Frogel, 104.

to truth or falsity, to good or bad, and it is vulnerable to manipulation. Descartes illustrates our capacity to manipulate our will, which means, in effect, to manipulate ourselves.¹¹⁹

Human beings have the power to manipulate their own beliefs due to their own will.¹²⁰

This leaves every aspect of life, including institutions like the church, susceptible to thwarted thinking created by the other's volition. Following Descartes's theory, this can cause people to put their faith in something that isn't logical or true due to their will. This leaves the notion of human reasoning and beliefs on the precarious ground upon which many have built their faith and understanding of God. According to Frogel, Descartes's foolproof method for avoiding a premature fallacy or what he called a "false certainty" one must be able to keep their will within the limits of their intellect.¹²¹ By using Descartes' method, it is easy to suspect that the knowledge given within faith contexts has been directly influenced by the individual's will, causing persons to believe something with no truth.

3.3 The Masculinization of Knowledge from the Pulpit to the Pew

The pulpit has been a place where male patriarchy has masculinized both scripture and social issues by manipulating information in such a way that causes extreme harm and negatively alters the beliefs of their parishioners. Dr. Tony Evans is a national African American evangelical preacher who pastors Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. His ministry spans over 130 countries, he has written over 100 books, and his sermons can be heard on over 1,400 radio stations.¹²² There are approximately 10,000 members who attend his church regularly.¹²³ On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court handed down the decision that Roe v. Wade

¹¹⁹ Frogel, 105.

¹²⁰ Frogel, 106.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² "Dr. Tony Evans | Tony Evans," tonyevans.org, n.d., <https://tonyevans.org/about/tony-evans>.

¹²³ Ibid.

would be overturned, which gave women and other persons who can conceive the right to terminate a pregnancy.¹²⁴ The news of the undoing of this legislation which has been in place since 1973, Dr. Tony Evans released on June 25th a statement on his personal Twitter page:

I join with countless voices heard today, as well as those yet to be heard someday—those who will now have the opportunity to do so through the gift of life, in giving God glory for His sovereign hand in this historical decision by our Supreme Court. Christians everywhere ought to humbly celebrate this decision to overturn the 1973 ruling of *Roe v. Wade*. This decision removes the federal constitutional right to an abortion and returns abortion laws to the states, some of which plan to restrict or ban abortion altogether.

In addition to the saving countless lives of our collective humanity, this decision also positions us more fully to intercede on behalf of God’s mercy on our nation in order to reverse the crime epidemic. This is so because Scripture states that when innocent blood is shed, we can expect more innocent blood in society to be shed through violence and oppression (Psalm 106:36-42, Joel 3:19). Thus, a decrease in the number of abortions can lead to a decrease in violent crime. At the heart of the abortion debate stands the *imago Dei*. Attacking the unborn is tantamount to attacking God since life is created in His image (Genesis 1:26-28), including the life developing in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16).

While celebrating and giving God praise for His movement in this momentous space in time, we must also not lose sight of the fact that the *imago Dei* equally applies to protecting the dignity of people once they are born (James 3:9, Psalm 8:4-5). Therefore, anything that demeans the value of people’s lives must be addressed with the same fervor and passion that has been given to preserving the life of the unborn. All forms of the denial of justice and human dignity whether racism, classism or degradation of any kind, must be viewed and addressed in terms of, and with respect to, the image of God.

It is time for God’s people to lead the way in promoting a “Whole Life Agenda,” from the womb to the tomb, as we simultaneously proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and the gift of forgiveness. He offers to all who come to Him for it. While doing so, may we never forget to show compassion to those who have experienced abortion as well as kindness to those who believe differently than we do on this issue, or any other issue. Lastly, men, my statement to you remains as it has always been: You are to live responsible lives in your actions and decisions. Men should be held personally and financially accountable for the children they help to produce, whether planned or unplanned. But most importantly, women should never have to bear the challenges of an unplanned pregnancy on their own. We, as the body of Christ, should come alongside those in need through spiritual and tangible support.¹²⁵

This type of rhetoric from persons who have spiritual authority can be extraordinarily dangerous. In this statement, Dr. Tony Evans does a horrible job at proof-texting scriptures like

¹²⁴ “*Roe v. Wade*,” Center for Reproductive Rights, n.d., <https://reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/>.

¹²⁵ Tony Evans, “<https://twitter.com/Drtonyevans/status/1540739426116059142>,” Twitter, 2022, https://twitter.com/drtonyevans/status/1540739426116059142?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ct_wgr%5Etweet.

Psalm 106 to support his frayed argument. Psalm 106: 36-42 speaks about the children of God worshipping idols to the point where they were so ensnared that they began sacrificing their children to demons and idols that were built in the land of Canaan.¹²⁶ In this portion of the scripture, there is no reference that there would be a shedding of more innocent blood, nor does this text speak about any instance of abortion. The bible has often been used as a weapon of oppression and discrimination against women and other minorities.¹²⁷ Those like Dr. Tony Evans, who have direct influence over thousands of people by way of religious power, have the ability to manipulate the knowledge and beliefs of those by using sacred text.

3.4 Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and Reconstructed Knowledge

Epistemology is a branch of study that has gained popularity thanks to opinions held primarily by white men like Rene Descartes. For centuries, a Europeanized perspective has been applied to how people acquire knowledge and use it in their everyday lives. The cultural ramifications of white patriarchal epistemic viewpoints have a direct impact on how black women function in society. As a result, womanist theologians started to create their own epistemology. In “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm” Linda E. Thomas shares how Womanist Theology helps to deconstruct the perspectives provided by male authority figures which also reconstructs ways of knowing culturally for black women in America. She says, “Human beings acquire knowledge through culture, most often obtaining it through the culture into which we are born...It is a conscious and unconscious process that

¹²⁶ “Bible Gateway Passage: Psalm 106 - New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition,” Bible Gateway, accessed July 16, 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+106&version=NRSVUE>.

¹²⁷ Mojola, Aloo Osotsi. 2019. “The Power of Bible Translation.” *Priscilla Papers* 33 (2): 3–7. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI00V190527001095&site=ehost-live&scope=site>; Angela N Parker, *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?: Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 1.

systematically and deliberately pervades our minds and senses.”¹²⁸ It is the nature of humanity to ascertain information from a variety of sources. Gaining knowledge from prominent perspectives often leaves out other voices in society. Thomas states that:

The knowledge we acquire from formal institutions derives from the ideas, philosophies, and histories of the privileged; more specifically, it is information about people who wrote down their histories and their ideas. Chroniclers of the human historical record did not consider people with oral traditions to be essential for cultivating the Western mind set. Even when non-western people had written texts, such as the Aztecs, they were ignored. Thus, the knowledge that we have gained is knowledge by and about the privileged.¹²⁹

While the dominant understandings of human reasoning and knowledge have been given majorly by men, Thomas suggests that Womanist Theology is curating a very difference space that provides a more inclusive framing of knowledge. “Consequently a radical shift must take place in our thinking because monovocal myth is being dislodged and a truth of inclusivity is being restored.”¹³⁰ The destabilization of conventional reasoning gives way to new frameworks not bound by patriarchy, racism, sexism, etc. “Reconstructing knowledge means tearing down myths that have paralyzed communities, and recreating truths which have been buried in annals that contain vast sources of knowledge.”¹³¹ Moving away from harmful structures of knowledge is paramount for the success of African American women. The leadership of black clergywomen helps to shift these paradigms for other women who operate within the Christian context.

However, there is an unlearning that must take place. Thomas states:

Our knowledge base has been exclusionary and now the building that houses our knowledge is being meticulously dismantled, a dynamic which will eventually fashion a more diversified and inclusive edifice, even if it takes several generations... Thus, scholars adhering to a transformation and reconstruction of knowledge paradigm are discovering and accenting those marginalized ways

¹²⁸ Thomas, Linda E. “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm.” *CrossCurrents* 48, no. 4 (1998): 488–99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24461012>.

¹²⁹ Thomas, 494-495.

¹³⁰ Thomas, 495.

¹³¹ Thomas, 496.

of knowing which have been suppressed and dominated by the discourses which govern societies.¹³²

3.5 Julia Foote's Testament of Learning & Sanctification

In her autobiographical sketch called *A Brand Plucked From The Fire*, Julia A. Foote, a foremother of the AME denomination, speaks about her coming to a certain level of knowledge by way strong desire to learn the bible for herself and sharing the gospel with others. She tells of how an accident caused her to lose vision in her eye, leading to her falling into a deep, dark, and depressive state.¹³³ As she searched for knowledge about God and her situation, those around her informed her that these were issues she would always struggle with and that heaven would be the only place of ease. However, Foote refused to believe such nonsensical thinking; even the words given by her spiritual leader did not speak to what she knew was true. “What a delusion! However, I believed my minister was too good and too wise not to know what was right.”¹³⁴ For Foote, not believing in those things which were given to her by persons who were in positions of power displays how in the early 19th century, black women were causing epistemological disruption and restructuring knowledge within communities of faith.

Acquiring a deeper understanding of the faith led Julia Foote on a quest to seek more knowledge. “I believed that, if I were educated, God could make me understand what I needed; for, in spite of what others said, it would come to me, now and then, that I needed something more than what I had.”¹³⁵ When she was pretty young she had an undeniable sensation of becoming “sanctified.” However, she was met with roadblocks of misinformation from those

¹³² Thomas, 495.

¹³³ William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 182.

¹³⁴ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 183.

¹³⁵ Andrews, 184.

within her community. “They told me sanctification was for the aged and persons about to die, and not for one like me.”¹³⁶ Instead of letting her desire fall by the wayside, Foote could not allow her passion for sanctification go and later found others who supported her goal. After she had finally become sanctified, she began sharing the knowledge of God that she had attained. She was met with opposition due to her age. “To the glory of God some did believe and were saved, but many were too wise to be taught by a child—too good to be made better.”¹³⁷ Those within Foote’s community tried to deter her from what she came to know as accurate because it went against what had been normalized. To the point where they began to believe that she had been influenced by evil. “Saying I did not know what I was talking about—that there was no such thing as sanctification and holiness in this life—and that the devil had deluded me into self-righteousness.”¹³⁸ At this moment, Julia Foote did not waiver from her beliefs even if they were contrary to what others thought to be accurate; her ministry challenged the reasoning in which many had constructed their faith.

In this memoir, she recounts having had several visions and encounters that solidified her feeling God was beckoning her to preach. She writes, “When called of God, on a particular occasion, to an actual work, I said, “No, Lord, not me...Day by day I was more impressed that God would have me work in his vineyard.”¹³⁹ This brought Foote’s gender biases to the forefront, recognizing that she did not always agree with women being considered heralds of the gospel message. Whether it was from what she was told or discovered for herself in her time of

¹³⁶ Andrews, 185.

¹³⁷ Andrews, 187.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 200.

study, her prior knowledge about who could hold the office of a preacher did not include those who looked like her. She stated, “I had always been opposed to women's preaching and had spoken against it, though, I acknowledge, without foundation.”¹⁴⁰ It wasn't until after she had a visitation from an angel that her thinking finally began to shift, causing her to accept her spiritual assignment despite not having the proper credentials. “I began to reason thus: ‘I am elected to preach the gospel without the requisite qualifications.’”¹⁴¹ Yet, she held great authority by teaching and preaching inside house churches within her community. Before Foote received official recognition from her church as a denominational leader, she would experience the ills of gender-based oppression like many clergywomen did through public shunning and ex-communication.¹⁴² This story of Julia Foote's life serves as an illustration of how black clergywomen have disrupted power structures and ways of knowing in predominantly black religious settings, enabling them to accept their callings as ministry leaders.

3.6 Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon's Speech at Princeton Theological Seminary

In 2017 at Princeton Theological Seminary, Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon gave a keynote entitled “Thinking with Our Hearts and Feeling with Our Brains.” She began by sharing how the moral wisdom from the women in her own family equipped her to deal with the necessary tools to deconstruct and disrupt. “Let us affirm the women in our lives, the women who debunk, the women who unmask, the women who disentangle religiously inscribed justified injustice, morning by morning and day by day.”¹⁴³ In this lecture, Dr. Cannon recounts when one

¹⁴⁰ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 201.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 202.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁴³ “2017 Women in Ministry Conference | Keynote Address: Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8rOCHJFvH4), 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8rOCHJFvH4>.

of her professors, during her graduate studies in New York, completely defiled her research paper. He told her, “How dare you write a paper that causes me to feel? There should be no sensation, no titillation, no stimulation when I read your work.”¹⁴⁴ She continues to discuss how the paper in which she presented was not devoid of academic phrases or critique, but it ushered a level of discomfort that caused a significant disturbance within her instructor. “What makes humanizing knowledge so terribly wretched and awfully despicable, what’s so wrong with uniting our heads with our hearts, why is it unsound for us to blend usable wisdom from our heart with rigorous practical intellect?”¹⁴⁵

As she continues to speak, Dr. Cannon fills her lecture with information from her lineage while acknowledging the ills that slavery and Jim Crow caused in the lives of Black Americans. “My great grandmother knew that the enslaved and the enslaver could not serve the same God.”¹⁴⁶ This period introduced a new way of thinking for enslaved persons and their descendants that continue to stretch forward. It was during slavery that “we had to learn how to think with our bodies amid devastating terror, horror, and brutality.”¹⁴⁷ Slavery, racism, prejudices, and biases all shifted the ways of knowing for African Americans. What was good or bad, divine or evil, all were affected by the social location and imminent harm to persons of color. Cannon stated, “Instead, black people looked at wickedness through the lens of the epistemological privilege of the oppressed.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Dr. Cannon began moving seamlessly back and forth from her family history to the harsh moment of critique from her graduate professor, weaving together how the lessons from the women in her family gave her an embodied knowledge or tools that aided her in standing against the traditionalism of an institution. She started to go into detail in her speech about how her great-grandmother had to trek from plantation to plantation once she was emancipated in order to find her children and put her family back together after slavery had torn it apart. She notes that this type of determination that rested in her maternal lineage has now found its way inside her, and she knew this as she spoke with her instructor about her work. She stated:

I used that same kind of living faith of instinctive investigative determination to try to figure out why my research paper was an abomination, what made my paper so flawed that the professor said that he could not even flunk it. So I began thinking maybe in some form or fashion my conflation of mind and body, my fusion of head and heart throughout my research paper triggered a shift in the professor's register of epistemological hierarchy or maybe I appeared to be a potential threat to this man's personhood...Or maybe just maybe what troubled the professor is my style of writing is nonmonolithic. Thus, the professor's verbal putdown gave me the impression that my research represents some kind of dislodging of his aristocratic intellectual monopoly by exposing his unjustly discriminating practices.¹⁴⁹

In her talk, Dr. Cannon emphasizes how the academic hierarchy—which was established as the standard by people like her professor—was disrupted by her work and by the fact that she was a Black female scholar. She stated how she had to rewrite her research, redacting names and information until it mimicked a white Eurocentric view of scholarship. She notes that when dealing in spaces where minorities are restricted to the sphere of “otherness,” they are often forced to acquiesce. She states:

It is important for us to focus on those specific experiences of negotiating with persons situated at the top of institutions of power. Because what I am sharing with you is not isolated experiences of assembly line meanness but the pervasive damage messages embedded in this type of complex grid of antagonistic qualifications are replicated time and time again with routine occurrences. For so many women in the church, in the academy, and throughout large segments of contemporary society...The truth is by coming to terms with these types of painful, contestable struggles and by confronting prevailing norms of disrespectful exchanges of male stream indoctrination, all of us

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

need to be aware of how the rubrics of mass-market analytics and straitjacket heteropatriarchal conformity is far too often taken for granted as normal, as natural and neutral. When the reality, heteropatriarchy conformity is not normal, is not natural nor is it neutral.¹⁵⁰

Although this experience led her to change the direction of her research to fit what was considered acceptable by academics at the time, the epistemological disruption her work generated in academia has had a lasting impact on how black women's theology is shaped today. Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon was the first African American woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1974 and was known for her womanist scholarship, which focused on the livelihoods of black women.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ www.upsem.edu, n.d., <https://www.upsem.edu/cw/>.

4. Political Disruption

Memoirs, personal narratives, journal entries, and interviews by figures as diverse as Sojourner Truth to Mother Elsie Shaw serve as realistic models for black women in clerical leadership. Their activism and ministries have fueled social movements and shifted power structures within African American religious life. The leadership of these women has thrown a kink in the machine of epistemic and political power dynamics. The lives of Rev. Prathia Hall and Rev. Traci Blackmon demonstrate how black clergywomen might cause political upheaval in both the ecclesiastical and social sectors. This chapter examines how the term "political" is defined, as well as how the activism of black clergywomen has challenged the power of established structures such as the church. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins emphasizes that, "Black women's organizational style within predominately Black organizations reveals much about how many U.S. Black women exercise power."¹⁵² Gender-based biases and male supremacy have been accepted due to the masculinization of locations inside the church, such as the pulpit. When their leadership and call were met with tremendous hostility by dominating male leaders in the past, many black clergywomen were forced to become radical nonconformists.¹⁵³ Despite this, many religious institutions continue to exist because of the contributions of these women.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Patricia Hill Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 218.

¹⁵³ Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura, Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, and Kimberly Williams-Gegner. "Tempered Radicals: Black Women's Leadership in the Church and Community." *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 5, no. 2 (04, 2012): 84-109. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/tempered-radicals-black-womens-leadership-church/docview/1017885552/se-2>.

¹⁵⁴ Cummings, Melbourne S., and Judi Moore Latta. "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories." *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010): 666-82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648534>.

4.1 Defining the Political

In “A Definition of Political Stability,” Claude Ake describes the political as “the alteration or maintenance of patterns of the distribution of power to make decisions for the society.”¹⁵⁵ The political is influenced by three major factors: conduct, power, and society. When it is based on intentional engagement rather than spontaneous occurrences or actions, Ake believes that all human behavior has the potential to be political.¹⁵⁶ He also defines political activity as a type of human interaction.¹⁵⁷ “Political behavior” is defined as “any act by any member of a society that influences the allocation of power to make decisions for that community,” according to him. It is assumed that people intentionally interacting with one another in the same situation will have similar expectations.¹⁵⁸ According to Ake, power may be influenced or destroyed within a social entity like a congregation by the intentional interactions of individuals who function inside it. For example, a small group of clergywomen has the power to drastically affect the patterns of ministerial authority by their political action. When these people act in ways that aren't in line with the group's standards, they are breaking the law and defying authority.¹⁵⁹ The direct challenging of these authorities not only jeopardizes the maintenance of the existing power, but consistent violations can also lead to the deterioration of the system.¹⁶⁰ Direct challenges to these authorities not only threaten the maintenance of existing power but can also lead to the system's degeneration if repeated violations occur.¹⁶¹ As a result, this type of engagement inside of a society or system is political.

¹⁵⁵ Ake, Claude. “A Definition of Political Stability.” *Comparative Politics* 7, no. 2 (1975): 271–83.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/421552>.

¹⁵⁶ Ake, 272.

¹⁵⁷ Ake, 271.

¹⁵⁸ Ake, 272.

¹⁵⁹ Ake, 271.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Ake elaborates on how one's conduct and collective expectations might shape an individual's place in society in this 1975 paper. "The network of political roles in a given society forms that society's political structure."¹⁶² As a result, the political actions of those who engage in a society determine the positions that a person can occupy and the institution's long-term viability. Institutions that rely on authoritative hierarchies depend on people adhering to the entity's norms and regulations; anything that goes against this is considered abnormal. These political behaviors are divided into two categories by Ake: regular and irregular. "Political behavior or act or exchange is regular if it does not violate the system (or pattern) of political exchanges; it is irregular if it violates that pattern."¹⁶³ The power within a specific entity will swing as a result of the actions of individuals who are now acting within the system. Subsequently, the execution and impact of one's political behavior is multiplicitous. In a church environment, for example, political acts occur when members of the system refuse to conform; when disruption occurs that trend is broken. Thus, the transformative leadership of black clergywomen becomes politically disruptive when persons willingly combat hierarchal power.

A complex power dynamic that exists within the political system has the capacity to completely alter an organization. In "On The Concept of Political Power," Talcott Parsons states this about defining this term, "a core of complex of its meaning, having to do with the capacity of persons and collectives "to get things done" effectively, in particular when their goals are obstructed by some kind of human resistance or opposition."¹⁶⁴ The works of Parsons is a

¹⁶² Ake, 272.

¹⁶³ Ake, 273.

¹⁶⁴ Parsons, Talcott. "On the Concept of Political Power." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 3 (1963): 232–62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985582>.

testament that true political power is not established unless there is an opposing force. When taken into the context involving black clergywomen, to preach sermons in spaces that were historically patriarchal or to occupy leadership roles and other positions that were previously denied to them because of gender, in essence, is a witness to their own unique political power.

Parson presents three specific ways in which power is wielded by the individual or groups who have access to it. The three aspects are to: treat money or direct influence as a form of power, to put into place coercive sanctions or voluntary cooperation, and the third aspect, which is the zero-sum phenomenon that only allows for a fixed quantity of power in a system.¹⁶⁵ With the theory that Parson presents with the zero-sum phenomenon suggests that if an individual holds a certain level of power that decreases the amount of power that others are able to have access to.¹⁶⁶ According to the zero-sum given by Parson, if black clergywomen have access to power, that begins to shift the amount of influence away from those like black male ministers who have held on to significant sums of power in African American religious spaces. Thus wielding power for women clergy becomes a very political and disruptive act.

4.2 The Masculinization of Power & Authority

Within religious systems such as primarily Black Christian denominations, ministerial responsibilities of power such as pastor, preacher, or deacon have been seen as important offices for generations. These titles have sparked heated debates regarding equitable representation in the media as a result of the damage that patriarchy and gender discrimination have caused.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Parson, 232-233.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Hoegeman, Catherine. "Job Status of Women Head Clergy: Findings from the National Congregations Study, 1998, 2006, and 2012." *Religions* 8, no. 8 (August 2017): 1–16. [doi:10.3390/rel8080154](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8080154).

Black clergywomen's experiences demonstrate how their political action has generated rifts in the fabric of authority in ministerial leadership. Black clergywomen have called on males in positions of power to change their minds about spiritual authority. Many spiritual leaders, however, still refuse to believe that women can ever have power or authority over men in the Christian church in the twenty-first century. The positions of evangelical pastor Josh Buice and Pennsylvania pastor Gino Jennings demonstrate how power and authority inside the church continue to favor men over women. Relegating women to the confines of the home or teaching adolescents. In their sermons and writings, they also show how biblical passages can be used to uphold the church's historic political structure, keeping the power disbursed amongst those who are male.

Josh Buice is the pastor of Pray's Mill Baptist Church and the president of G3 Ministries, which has been one of the country's largest evangelical conferences since 2013.¹⁶⁸ He elaborates on his thoughts that women should only be allowed to teach specific groups of people like other women and small children in his 2018 post, "Why Women Should Not Teach The Bible To Men." "The Church understood their roles and responsibilities in regard to women teaching and exercising authority over men for nearly two millennia," he writes, "and it wasn't until the militant feminist movement of the 1960s that people seriously questioned the boundaries of God—even among conservative evangelical circles."¹⁶⁹ Buice says that God is a God of order, and that he purposefully created man (Adam) first rather than woman (Eve) using the Genesis creation narratives. According to him, it was at the edge of the fall that Satan shifted the power

¹⁶⁸ "History," G3 Ministries, 2022, <https://g3min.org/about/history/>.

¹⁶⁹ Josh Buice, "Why Women Should Not Teach the Bible to Men," G3 Ministries, April 19, 2018, <https://g3min.org/why-women-should-not-teach-the-bible-to-men/>.

dynamics in the garden. That it was at that time where a woman's perceptions of her place in the divine hierarchy became altered. "It is, in essence, the first role reversal, and it resulted in sin entering the world and bringing death to God's creation" (Rom. 5:12). In the Garden of Eden, the egalitarian perspective was born."¹⁷⁰

Throughout his article, Buice stresses that women have a specific role that makes them subordinate and submissive to men; anything in opposition to that is destructive. "Historically, the liberals have embraced women's liberation theology as a means of elevating women to their rightful position among men in the church. Such theology does much damage to God's design for the home and the church."¹⁷¹ He uses New Testament scriptures to legitimize why women within the local church should not teach or wield authority over and above men. While he affirms that women should teach, he lifts the words of the apostle Paul as the voice that solidifies that they should not be elevated beyond that. When it comes to women, for Buice, "to capitulate on any area of headship in the family or leadership in the church is a grave mistake."¹⁷²

In a short YouTube video of scriptures being read, Gino Jennings, pastor of First Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ Inc., cries out emphatically. "Loving The Truth" was the title of his sermon. He threatens listeners with damnation if they accept anything contrary to what was said while his aide scrolls through the bible reciting random scriptures. "You've got to love it," he says, "and if you don't, you know where you're going!"¹⁷³ One scripture that was read was from

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ "Gino Jennings Women Should Not Preach," www.youtube.com, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kN_AH1IROCc.

Paul to his protégé Timothy, *But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to assume power over a male, but I do permit her to stay silent*, as 1 Timothy 2:12 says. This scripture is used by Jennings to explain why women preachers should be removed from the pulpit because they were delusional and despised the truth. To bolster his claim, he quotes 2 Thessalonians 2:11, *And for this cause, God shall give them great delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness.*

When Jennings says that “women in pulpits was an unrighteous act,” the congregation can be heard yelling “hallelujah” and a hearty “amen” as he continues to talk.¹⁷⁴ Throughout this small sermonic clip, he is heard shouting words of criticism and damnation against women preachers and pastors. Ultimately calling their licenses “artificial.”¹⁷⁵ For Jennings labels himself as a “warner” as a chosen person by God to tell the truth and handle the holiest of messages. As his assistant is flipping from passage to passage, Jennings continues to holler about the penalties of going against scripture, unbelief, and hate for the truth.

My experience is that the views of people like Buice and Jennings on women's roles are not uncommon, but they are well-known blips on the Christian chronological timeline. Their pestilential beliefs are still all too often prevalent in American churches. For generations in the United States, the question of women assuming positions of responsibility in ministerial leadership has remained. Even in 21st-century church culture, it is a subject of contention among various denominations and ethnic groupings. The promotion of men as ideal candidates for church leadership continues and the masculinization of authority has resulted in women's

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

exclusion. The sexist rhetoric that is spewed from male figures like Buice and Jennings, has caused serious damage to the church and has kept believers who were granted an abundant life as Christ promised in John 10:10, to continue to remain in this entanglement of religious bondage.¹⁷⁶

In the article “Tempered Radicals: Black Women’s Leadership in the Church and Community,” Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, and Kimberly Williams-Gegner examined the experiences of black churchwomen in the United States. Their research revealed that black women were dedicated to carrying on the tradition of the black preaching foremothers by accosting the patriarchal problems of the “stained glass ceiling.”¹⁷⁷ “Black women ministers confront the same socio-cultural and exegetical-hermeneutic arguments their predecessors faced, intended to keep them from the pulpit.”¹⁷⁸ The ostracization of black clergywomen and how this particular space of the church has become problematically male-dominated is memorialized by the masculinization of the pulpit. The presence and activities of black female preachers, on the other hand, have disrupted pulpit politics.

The authors of "Tempered Radicals" highlight how these women's tenacity has aided in the development of tempered radicalism strategies that allow other black clergywomen to lead in places like the Black Church.¹⁷⁹ These women are referred to as “tempered radicals.”¹⁸⁰ African

¹⁷⁶ John 10:10, *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* (New Revised Standard Version).

¹⁷⁷ Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura, Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, and Kimberly Williams-Gegner. "Tempered Radicals: Black Women's Leadership in the Church and Community." *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 5, no. 2 (04, 2012): 84-109. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/tempered-radicals-black-womens-leadership-church/docview/1017885552/se-2>.

¹⁷⁸ Tempered Radicals, 85.

¹⁷⁹ Tempered Radicals, 85.

¹⁸⁰ Tempered, Radicals, 87.

American female preachers have had a huge impact on Christian culture as a result of their non-conformity, despite the objections and threats to their rise to leadership positions. “Black women preachers of the 19th century often did not receive formal recognition as clergy; they were influential preachers and leaders, authoritative in their proclamations and prophetic voice.”¹⁸¹ This kind of radicalism, as exhibited by black clergywomen, has been critical in shifting the needle toward a more just church. It encourages these women to do the political disruption work in their local communities and churches using an intersectional lens.¹⁸² “Tempered radicals seek authenticity, even as they live with the duality of a commitment to the institution along with an abiding disagreement with the organization’s values and/or ideology.”¹⁸³

While male dominance attempted to keep women out of the pulpit, the persistence of black clergywomen, in particular, contributed to transforming political paradigms inside the church and even opened up new leadership opportunities. Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes described how women filled roles such as church mothers, evangelists, missionaries, prayer band leaders, deaconesses, and teachers in historically black denominations where women could not become elders, pastors, or bishops in her book *If It Wasn't For The Women*.¹⁸⁴ Women’s councils, community and civil rights organizations, and church micro-groups like mothers, missionaries, and deaconesses boards became hubs for black clergywomen to honor their callings and advocate for their communities.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura, Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, and Kimberly Williams-Gegner. "Tempered Radicals: Black Women's Leadership in the Church and Community." *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 5, no. 2 (04, 2012): 84-109. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/tempered-radicals-black-womens-leadership-church/docview/1017885552/se-2>.

¹⁸² Tempered Radicals, 87.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, 46.

¹⁸⁵ Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes, *"If It Wasn't for the Women ...": Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

Within the framework of the Black Church, these alternate leadership roles provided important support in order to these sustain religious organizations, that did not always offer the same in return for the black women who gave of their resources. These roles outside of the pulpit in the Sanctified Church, as Townsend-Gilkes refers to them, nonetheless had a high amount of authority, allowing women to have enormous favor with powerful males, enabling them to indirectly govern. Nonetheless, via their unconventional and extreme leadership, they shifted customary conventions through spiritual militancy, establishing the "double pulpit," as she puts it.¹⁸⁶ Where patriarchal customs attempted to keep women away from the sacred desk, it was by way of the double pulpit where women were nevertheless free to stand and speak.¹⁸⁷ Though many women from other denominations, such as Baptist and Methodist, joined the Sanctified Church to be allowed to use their skills publicly, this "double pulpit" is seen as a witness of the political disruption that occurs within the Black Church.¹⁸⁸ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes makes this unique distinction about the significance of these micro-groups like the women's department within the sanctified church that provided black women space to minister. She explains how the leadership and authority of the women in these positions still had a considerable amount of influence in the church despite the partiality of male leadership. She states:

Women leaders include those called to the ministry and denied access to pastoral positions, women who prefer the role of evangelist to that of a pastor, women who actually have charge of churches in the absence of a pastor, and women who are Spirit-filled religious activists and congregational leaders. The political skill of the early Women's Department of the Church of God in Christ was such that nearly all women's roles, including that of "laywoman," were eventually included in that denomination's official definition of ministry. The term "layman" was not so included. Thus the avenues of social mobility for women in the church branched out and were officially recognized. The diversity of roles allowed women to exercise influence beyond their congregations, which laypeople were not organized to do. Women's Departments today retain unparalleled power in matters of policy and practice for all laywomen and continue to provide ladders of career mobility.

¹⁸⁶ Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, 46.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

They communicate both to the women of the church and to the male leadership and, regardless of restrictions, determine the role models available to churchwomen. This means that the choice of heroines of the Women's Department, and thus the church as a whole, reflects churchwomen's values and view of reality.¹⁸⁹

Patriarchal beliefs have spread like cancer, destroying institutional, cultural, and theological perspectives to the point where black women's servitude is considered biblically acceptable. The result is that religious groups that officially prohibit women's access to particular ministerial responsibilities have a loose coupling between regulation and practice regarding women's roles.¹⁹⁰ The fact that black clergywomen exerted collective power without holding official titles or credentials threw black religious spaces' normativity into chaos. Their labor, callings, and presence have been able to cause political institutions to alter indefinitely. Because black clergywomen were not given locations of authority like the pulpit, they were able to construct alternate roles that allowed them to lead people and have a direct influence in the same places where they were shut out. As a result of this Townsend-Gilkes' suggests that the "double pulpit" was born. Despite the clear disruption that black clergywomen have brought to this particular area, the fight against unfairness continues in many religious contexts.

In spite of the fact that African American preaching women have had an important part in shaping the leadership of many different religious spaces in America, gender biases still exist in how they can lead within their local congregations. Unfortunately, women face greater criticism for utilizing the same authoritative leadership methods as their male colleagues in the churches they pastor, highlighting how deeply religious institutions are prejudiced against women's leadership. Todd Ferguson investigated how role congruity theory predicts that female leaders

¹⁸⁹ Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, 48-49.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

will face greater prejudices since the role of a leader correlates with what is generally thought to be a male position in his essay "Female Leadership and Role Congruity within the Clergy" published in 2017.¹⁹¹ Only 15% of minority congregations had a female pastor, accounting for around 6% of the overall number of attendance, according to a survey of participants from 255 congregations.¹⁹² Ferguson also discovered that female leaders were regarded as highly as their male colleagues, but that they were limited to using specific behavioral tactics. According to the findings of the study:

Women using an agentic leadership style experienced a severe penalty in terms of how their congregants viewed them. Compared to all other leaders, they were the least likely to have their members view them as a good fit with the congregation. Men were freer to operate within both the agentic and non-agentic modes. When they did use an agentic style, men only experienced a 3-point drop in the probability that their congregants would view them positively. This was not the case for women religious leaders. Female clergy were penalized a 15-point difference in the probability of being seen as a good fit for "taking charge" in their congregational leadership. These findings have implications for a wide range of professions which are historically and culturally male-oriented but may have communal aspects. For instance, women leading in the fields of healthcare, higher education, and even sports (e.g., coaching) are serving in often male-dominated sectors which have aspects of commonality within them. These occupational sectors may be ideal settings for women in leadership where they may experience reduced levels of prejudice. However, even within a context like religious congregations, women still were restricted in the ways in which they led. This has practical implications for denominational leaders and theological seminaries who are in charge of training a future generation of clergy. These leaders must be aware that their female seminarians and junior clergy may not be able to use all leadership styles available to them without negative consequences. Women who cross traditional gender roles and lead with an agentic style may be sanctioned more heavily.¹⁹³

Ferguson's research highlighted how women spiritual leaders are still not treated equally to males, facing the brunt of the consequences of embracing leadership styles that aren't generally given to female leaders. Surprisingly, the setting in which they lead is critical to the

¹⁹¹ Ferguson, Todd W. "Female Leadership and Role Congruity within the Clergy: Communal Leaders Experience no Gender Differences Yet Agentic Women Continue to Suffer Backlash." *Sex Roles* 78, no. 5-6 (03, 2018): 409-422. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0803-6>.

<https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/female-leadership-role-congruity-within-clergy/docview/2002038595/se-2?accountid=10598>.

¹⁹² Ibid, 416

¹⁹³ Ibid, 420

power they hold. Paradoxically, the environment in which they lead has a significant impact on the authority they wield. According to Ferguson's research, female leaders continue to experience bias when they operate in stereotypically masculine ways.¹⁹⁴ As a result, while women can lead in traditional religious settings, their authority by those whom they lead is often routinely questioned.

4.3 Civil Rights and the Political Disruption of Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall

While the pulpit has historically been a center of masculinization in the African American Christian context when it comes to the marginalization of black women, there have been analogous occurrences in social movements as well. The church, like politics, has been a place where black clergywomen have challenged the current status quo in order to advocate for justice and equality. For example, from the 1950s through the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States grew into a vast movement of social demonstrations.¹⁹⁵ During the time of slavery and Jim Crow, Black Americans were subjected to abuses that sparked public protests for justice and equality. The Civil Rights Movement was a system that was organized to battle societal evils such as racism against oppressed groups, but it also was masculinized in its own right. Men's leadership was considered as the key to the organization's success.¹⁹⁶ The Civil Rights Movement is an example of how circumstances that call for change still adhere to patriarchal standards by downplaying women's contributions. "A broader pattern of pedagogy relegates women's participation to the sidelines of politics and history."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Library of Congress, "Civil Rights Era (1950–1963) - the Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom | Exhibitions - Library of Congress," Loc.gov (Library of Congress, 2010), <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/civil-rights-era.html>.

¹⁹⁶ Cooperman, Rosalyn, Melina Patterson, and Jess Rigelhaupt. "Teaching Race and Revolution: Doing Justice to Women's Roles in the Struggle for Civil Rights." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49, no. 3 (2016): 558–61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24771768>.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

While popular characters such as John Lewis, Medgar Evers, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were prominent, many women also contributed to the movement's success. In the 1950s and 1960s, male religious figures were at the vanguard of the civil rights movement; at the same time, most of the work was structured based on gender, leaving black women in key strategic positions locally.¹⁹⁸ Rev. Prathia Hall, a young black clergywoman who ascended to become one of the most prominent female leaders of the Civil Rights Movement as a result of her work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).¹⁹⁹ Black preaching women like Hall, exhibited political behavior within social demonstrations that disrupted traditional frameworks of power and authority. “Like most in SNCC, she could feel change in the air as a teenager. With her father’s support, she began studying nonviolence in the 1950s, frequenting workshops on nonviolent direct action.”²⁰⁰ Hall soon became a driving force for the movement in the South.

Prathia Hall and other leaders of the civil rights movement were arrested on January 11, 1964, for staging a sit-in in a segregated motel in Atlanta, Georgia.²⁰¹ She continued to demonstrate with members of the SNCC, NAACP, and SCLC after she was released. Hall's actions resulted in her being charged and imprisoned. Judge Durwood T. Pye, who was known for his discriminatory methods, presided over her case. While Pye was slapping demonstrators and groups with fines and high bonds as a Georgia State official, Hall was held on a \$4,500 bail.²⁰² The organization's counsel was able to uncover gaps involving federal jurisdiction,

¹⁹⁸ “Women in the Civil Rights Movement Historic Context Statement and AACRN Listing Guidance (African American Civil Rights Network) (U.S. National Park Service),” [www.nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov/articles/women-in-the-civil-rights-movement-historic-context-statement-and-aacrn-listing-guidance-african-american-civil-rights-network.htm), August 6, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/women-in-the-civil-rights-movement-historic-context-statement-and-aacrn-listing-guidance-african-american-civil-rights-network.htm>.

¹⁹⁹ Courtney Pace, *Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall* (Athens, GA: UNIV OF GEORGIA PRESS, 2021), 2.

²⁰⁰ “Prathia Hall,” SNCC Digital Gateway, n.d., <https://snccdigital.org/people/prathia-hall/>.

²⁰¹ Pace, *Freedom Faith*, 91.

²⁰² Pace, 94.

allowing people like Prathia Hall to be removed from Judge Pye's supervision. Hall would not be released until March 24th owing this to the interference of U.S. Marshals on a \$1,000 bail as the motions and restraining orders continued to be filed. The legal battle between state and federal courts for Hall and other civil rights leaders went down in history because the act itself was a rare series of events.

Parthia Hall's public speaking ability rapidly made her a popular figure in the Civil Rights Movement. Following her release from a Georgia jail, she delivered speeches on the issue of justice to Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, and other religious organizations. Those who had gathered to hear her speak were impressed by her statements on equal rights for African Americans and faith. Author Courtney Pace describes how, in 1964, a Washington co-organizer, Dr. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, admired Hall, who had just finished picketing before speaking to those in attendance, in her book *Freedom Faith*.²⁰³ Hall stood before the people and said, "I have come tonight not to entertain you, but to trouble you."²⁰⁴ As a leader, she was able to create a disturbance that transformed political dynamics in the court system, as well as in the church. She also became the first female member of the Baptist Ministers Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity in 1982, while pursuing her doctoral studies at Princeton Theological Seminary.²⁰⁵

In *Freedom Faith*, Courtney Pace recounts an interview Hall had for *Ebony* magazine; she stated to the interviewer, "Because, when I stood, I stood as I am. I stood in the total authenticity of my being—black, preacher, Baptist woman. For the same God who made me a

²⁰³ Pace, 97.

²⁰⁴ Pace, 96.

²⁰⁵ Pace, 115

preacher is the same God who made me a woman.”²⁰⁶ Hall was a clergywoman who held firm in her convictions, acknowledging that she was both called by God and a woman. Hall was able to destabilize power and authority structures in both the religious and secular spheres.

4.4 Ferguson & the Contemporary Political Disruption of Rev. Traci Blackmon

Rev. Traci Blackmon, like Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall, has shattered political paradigms as a black clergywoman through her work in social justice and within the Christian church. Rev. Traci Blackmon is the United Church of Christ’s Associate General Minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries and the former Senior Pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant, Missouri.²⁰⁷ She immediately gained national prominence for her pursuit of justice after the 2014 murder of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri. “We found ourselves as a church on the front line fighting for justice for people in our community,” Rev. Blackmon said in a 2018 sermon at Old South Church in Boston, reflecting on the struggle and anguish brought on by the killing of this innocent black man.”²⁰⁸ Rev. Blackmon became the pastor of a new social movement fighting for individuals who are disenfranchised and oppressed after an article emphasizing her work against structural injustice. In the *Columbia Missourian*, Blackmon is quoted saying, “When Michael Brown died, I went from the classroom to the street corner...I went from being behind the podium to standing in front of police barricades.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ “Meet Our Officers,” United Church of Christ, 2022, https://www.ucc.org/domestic-policy/ourfaithourvote_about/about-us_meet-our-officers/.

²⁰⁸“Rev. Traci Blackmon Guest Preaching at Old South Church,” www.youtube.com, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4l0Bw47M8A>.

²⁰⁹ Daniel Christian, “Ferguson-Area Pastor Preaches, Speaks of Activism in Columbia Sermon,” *Columbia Missourian*, 2015, https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/ferguson-area-pastor-preaches-speaks-of-activism-in-columbia-sermon/article_90ada39c-58f6-11e5-b0f8-d3d9114648ae.html.

“Some people believe the church should not become involved in politics,” she said in an interview with the World Council of Churches, but she believes the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem was “both a holy and political act.”²¹⁰ She utilizes the life of Jesus Christ in this interview to criticize the United States’ treatment of refugees, indigenous peoples, immigrants, and other disadvantaged people. “Jesus has more in common with today’s refugee children than we might like to think.”²¹¹ She emphasized that believers cannot afford to remain silent in times of upheaval and that the church has the means to tackle the social evils that plague contemporary society. Rev. Traci Blackmon states that, “Every generation has to deal with their own fight for social justice, their own fight for racial empathy, and this is the fight of this generation.”²¹² She explained that she feels clerical leadership’s interactions with community members can lead to political upheaval. “Through the church, we can educate the masses who elect our political leadership and have the power in their vote to make changes.”²¹³

Almost four years after the murder of Michael Brown Jr, Rev. Blackmon gives a lecture entitled “Moral Courage: Black Women Facing Down Racism.” As she mounts the stage, sitting in a chair her face quickly goes from a slight smile to a look that reflects the somberness of her spirit. Staring at the crowd she opens with the words from Sojourner Truth’s infamous speech, “Ain’t A Woman.” She says firmly, “Well...children...where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter.”²¹⁴ After sharing the words of Truth, Rev. Blackmon began sharing

²¹⁰ “Rev. Traci Blackmon: People of Faith Must Not Be Silent,” World Council of Churches, 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/rev-traci-blackmon-people-of-faith-must-not-be-silent>.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Daniel Christian, “Ferguson-Area Pastor Preaches, Speaks of Activism in Columbia Sermon,” Columbia Missourian, 2015, https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/ferguson-area-pastor-preaches-speaks-of-activism-in-columbia-sermon/article_90ada39c-58f6-11e5-b0f8-d3d9114648ae.html.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “Moral Courage: Black Women Facing down Racism - Rev Traci Blackmon,” www.youtube.com, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMEtc3Ahgro>.

about the complexities in which black women face, “the weight of sexism that forms patriarchy and the weight of a racism that invades and infects this country.”²¹⁵ She goes on to discuss how black women like Sojourner Truth must have felt when they realized the pressure that came with using their voices. “The determination to take action for moral reasons despite the risk of adverse consequences,” she describes moral courage as exhibited by black women.²¹⁶

From the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century to modern social rallies in the twenty-first, black women have been major activists who have helped to reshape political power. “These distinctive social movements by BIWOC (Black, Indigenous and Women Of Color) developed systemic understandings of oppression and also focused on personal life experiences that privileged an individual and collective identity politics.”²¹⁷ The disruptions generated by black clergywomen’s work and witness are essentially political behavior that has contributed to demasculinizing social movements and the pulpit of the Christian church.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), 84.

5. Anthropological Disruption

This chapter will discuss the anthropological disruption, particularly in the Charismatic Movement that was displayed by black female ministerial leaders. The acknowledgment or demonstration of spiritual gifts, the manifestation, and the embodiment of the Holy Spirit is key in understanding the work of anthropological disruptions. Furthermore, it's important to point out how the patristic writers' account of the Holy Spirit differs from the theologies of marginalized communities. Persons like Pastor Lucy Farrow and Evangelist Joyce Rodgers, two black clergywomen who were a part of Pentecostal/Holiness denominations, were pioneers in helping to shift cultural paradigms to accept that women, too, can be filled with the Holy Spirit. "The principal framework that surrounds and supports womanist notions of the Holy Spirit is Black women's lived experience of suffering and struggle, rooted in slavery and persisting to this day in systemic racism and its deleterious effects."²¹⁸ Their ministries serve as historical evidence that opposes patriarchal conceptions and undermines traditional perspectives that place men and the male body in a more superior position to be used by God.

This chapter will define the Holy Spirit and explore the writings of the early church fathers to demonstrate how Westernized Christianity's conception of the Holy Spirit and the notion of its capacities within the lives of human creation developed. The Pentecost story in Acts 2 shows the Holy Spirit's "indwelling" or "filling." Exegesis of Acts 2 dispels false notions that male bodies are favored and demonstrates the inclusion of God. Supporting the idea that women, and black clergywomen in particular, are also Spirit-bearers because of this text's inclusionary language. These women's bodies are anthropologically disruptive in the male-dominated

²¹⁸ Schaab, *Liberating Pneumatologies*, 114.

religious settings where they preach, teach, and hold leadership positions like the pastorate. This is a revolutionary act, especially in light of white evangelical viewpoints like complementarianism, which tries to divide spiritual gifts into two categories and forces women to only lead over other women or children and never over men. In the 20th century, a modest home gathering that would later develop into the Azusa Street Revivals that took place in Los Angeles, California, brought the Acts 2 story to life. This chapter will explain how the work of black clergywomen has disturbed established gender norms, the history of the Charismatic Movement, and the prevalent doctrines about God's Spirit.

In her essay *The Holy Spirit and Black Women*, Linda E. Thomas makes the case that African American women's experiences of "otherness" or marginalization provide them a unique insight into the influence of the Holy Spirit.²¹⁹ "On the one hand, insight into the Spirit comes through the enduring ways that black women have called on Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be ever-present in their lives. On the other hand, insight comes from African understandings of the Spirit as God present in creation, giving and nourishing all life."²²⁰ Thomas' theology is consistent with the Pentecostal events described in Acts 2, that when the Spirit moved amongst the believers that there was no bias or preference. "The Spirit is present within amid all the personal and political spaces and struggles where black women find themselves."²²¹

In addition to enabling black women to have a connection with God in the midst of their marginalization, the sacred knowledge that is given to them by the Spirit enables them to be

²¹⁹ Linda E. Thomas, "The Holy Spirit and Black Women," in *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice*. The US. Kindle Edition, 73.

²²⁰ Thomas, *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice*, 75.

²²¹ Ibid.

change-makers. As Linda Thomas states, “The Spirit that authorizes black women to fight against hegemonic dynamisms that debase, devalue, and oppress them simultaneously authorizes them to build open and more just communities.”²²² In Thomas' writings, black women are not just included within the divine's usage; rather, the Spirit of God also endows them with the capacity to serve as agents of justice. “The Spirit gave some women the tenacity to fight for their sacred life even if they would suffer repercussions as a result.”²²³ The pneumatological animates the anthropological. That is, the Holy Spirit works through human beings to secure justice, survival, and the abundance of life that includes African American women. Thus, black clergywomen through the embodiment of the Holy Spirit have the ability to anthropologically disrupt the human religious experience through sermonic discourse, practices, and rituals.

5.1 Defining the Anthropological

“The study of human nature, human society, and the human past” is a common definition of anthropology. It is a scholarly field that tries to describe what it means to be human in the most significant meaning imaginable.”²²⁴ However, depending on the discipline, the frameworks in which this phrase is utilized will differ. Setha M. Low and Sally Engle Merry discuss the necessity of having an anthropological perspective that confronts societal concerns in their paper “Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas.” They argue that anthropology currently demands a rethinking of modes and methods that provides novel approaches to foster collaborative rather than hierarchical workings inside communities.²²⁵ The anthropological takes

²²² Thomas, 80.

²²³ Thomas, 81-82.

²²⁴ Robert H. Lavenda and Emily A. Schultz, *Anthropology: What Does It Mean to Be Human?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 5.

²²⁵ Low, Setha M., and Merry, Sally Engle, “Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas,” *The University of Chicago Press Journals* Vol. 51, No. 52 (October 2010) <https://doi.org/10.1086/653837>

numerous forms depending on how it is applied to a specific subject. “Its focus on the microsocial situation framed by macroeconomic and political forces; its examination of the way social situations are made meaningful through discourse, symbols, and language; and its analysis of the small site’s embeddedness in larger structures of power—is its unique contribution.”²²⁶ In the instance of an institution like a local congregation, sermons, ritual practices, and shared beliefs all help to form the anthropological.

Much of what makes up humanity's experience, such as interactions, behavior, and meaning-making, is anthropological. “In comparison with the growing tendency to understand behavior in broad, comparative, and statistical terms, anthropology insists on the importance of context, history, and particularity.”²²⁷ To engage and cause anthropological disruption, one must have a significant impact on the systems that regulate the human experience within a particular social structure. Low and Merry's viewpoint concerning anthropological practices considers the individual, the institution, and the issue of justice. They state, “Personally, the reason we are interested in engaged anthropology is that we are committed to an anthropological practice that respects the dignity and rights of all humans and has a beneficent effect on the promotion of social justice.”²²⁸ According to the work of scholars like Low and Merry, the anthropological involves the most intricate intersections of human existence; to cause disruption on this level is not only to shift a particular paradigm indefinitely but to alter the human experience. When looking at this form of disruption through a theological lens, the human experience can be

²²⁶ Low and Merry, “Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas.” Page#

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

affected through communication like preaching, signs, teaching, and speaking in tongues which have all contributed to the works of the Holy Spirit.

5.2 The Word, The Work, and The Witness of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Trinity in Christianity is made up of three distinct but equal entities: the Father (God), the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit (Paraclete). This "3 in 1" trinitarian partnership, as shown in Apostle's or Nicene Creeds, spiritual odes, hymns, sacred texts, and other works, highlights theological disparities between the three while celebrating their eternal connection. Within the trinity and with humanity, each unique entity has a very specific function and relationship. While God is frequently portrayed as the ultimate creator and Jesus as the spotless savior, it is the Holy Spirit who embodies the bodily presence of God's being that dwells amongst or within people on a physical and spiritual level.²²⁹

Biblical terminology that defines what or who the Holy Spirit is can be seen all throughout scripture. For instance, the Hebrew term *Ruach* in the Old Testament is synonymous with “wind, breath or God’s spirit.”²³⁰ The very first reference to the Holy Spirit in the Bible can be found in the initial creation narrative of Genesis 1, which displays its activity on the earth and in creation.²³¹ Even the descriptions which have been typical in defining God and God’s Spirit have been masculine which can be problematic in understanding the Spirit altogether. In her book *Womanist Midrash*, Hebrew scholar Wil Gafney states, “Its subject in Genesis, *ruach*, “spirit” (and occasionally “wind”), is feminine...The gendering of God’s Spirit as feminine calls

²²⁹ Greg R. Allison and Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2020), 12.

²³⁰ Allison & Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 9-10.

²³¹ Ibid.

for the feminine pronoun, yet generations of sexist translations have gotten around this by religiously avoiding the pronoun altogether.”²³² Gafney’s scholarship shows how even the Spirit of God includes and does not subordinate or eliminate the feminine. She goes on to say:

She, the Spirit of God, She-who-is-also-God, at the dawn of creation fluttered over the nest of her creation at the same time as He, the more familiar expression of divinity, created all. They, Two-in-One, are the first articulations, self-articulations, of God in (and the God of) the Scriptures. God is female and male, and when God gets around to creating creatures in the divine image, they will be female and male, as God is. Feminine language occurs in the text repeatedly of God; this means that feminists and womanists advocating for inclusive and explicitly feminine God-language are not changing but restoring the text and could be considered biblical literalists.²³³

Elizabeth A. Johnson makes the case that while God is not defined or confined by categories or gender since God is spirit, there are words that are grammatically feminine that are used to define God’s spirit like *ruah* and *shekinah*.²³⁴ She asserts that patriarchal readings that have been regarded as normative do not take into consideration the feminine tense when describing God. These words help to show the Spirit’s active participation in people’s lives.

Johnson states this when describing *shekinah*:

In the Jewish trajectory that developed after the close of the biblical canon, the Spirit of God typically came to be spoken of in the female symbol of the *shekinah*. This feminine grammatical term, derived from the Hebrew verb *shakhan*, “to dwell,” which is used in numerous texts that speak of God’s dwelling among the people (Ex. 25:8; 29:45-46), quite literally means the “dwelling” or “the one who dwells.” It is used in the targums and rabbinic writings as a synonym for divine presence among the people...The *shekinah* is manifest in the symbols of cloud, fire, or radiant light that descend, overshadow, or lead the people...Insofar as *shekinah* is a circumlocution of divine involvement with the tragic state of the world, it also points to divine compassion.²³⁵

The Holy Spirit plays an essentially active role like the other members of the Trinity.

Words like *shekinah* found in the biblical text help to display that. “It signifies no mere feminine

²³² Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 19–20.

²³³ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 20.

²³⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018) 86-88.

²³⁵ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 88-89.

dimension of God but God as She-Who-Dwells-Within, divine presence in compassionate engagement with the conflictual world, source of vitality and consolation in the struggle.”

Johnson’s work solidifies that the Holy Spirit participates in the livelihoods of humanity and that it provides a place of solace amid daily oppressions.

In the New Testament, the Greek expression *Pneuma*, which is the root of words like “pneumatology,” also refers to “breath, wind or soul.”²³⁶ This term is used in the Gospel of Matthew 3 when John was baptizing in the Jordan River. Many scriptures describe the activity and being of the Holy Spirit, which can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. In biblical literature, the Holy Spirit can take on several functions, from the inhabitation of human flesh as seen in Luke 1:41 with Mary’s cousin Elizabeth to the representation of earthly creatures like the dove that was seen during Jesus’ Baptism in Matthew 3:16. In the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit is continuously mentioned, from the life of Jesus Christ to the witness and responsibility of the apostles, to the establishment of the early church communities during an age of imperial persecution. In the gospel accounts, Jesus often names the Holy Spirit as an “advocate” or the “Paraclete” that will be given to those in the world. “The term “Paraclete” comes from the Greek word *parakletos*, which can be translated as comforter, counselor, advocate or defender.”²³⁷ These expressions help us identify the Holy Spirit as an extension of God’s presence and demonstrate that the Holy Spirit’s mission is closely linked to justice and emancipation.

²³⁶ J. T. Vallance, “Pneuma,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics*, March 7, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.5145>.

²³⁷ Schaab, *Liberating Pneumatologies*, 9.

The nature of the Holy Soul is to be a liberating force in humanity's life, eradicating all which strives to oppress the mind, body, and spirit.²³⁸ Daman Wandke states that the process of liberation is twofold. For Wandke, the first occurs when a stereotyped person or group decides to reject the labels placed on them by other people or society at large and so achieves freedom within themselves.²³⁹ The second is when a person or culture that labels others takes the time to examine the labeled individual or group from the inside rather than just from the outside, becoming emancipated in knowledge.²⁴⁰ Therefore, liberation is a multifaceted act.

For instance, despite some of its oppressive practices, the Black Church has long provided a refuge for African Americans. Black congregations in the United States are still seen as sites where special needs and concerns concerning Black people are handled, according to a 2021 Pew Research Center study. They are viewed as havens from racial prejudice, offering well-known rituals and places of worship as well as an ancestral connection to Black history.²⁴¹ The institutional restrictions that have been put in place to prevent black clergywomen have, however, led them to seek out religious leadership in a sectarian way within other primarily black churches like the Sanctified, Holiness, or Pentecostal traditions²⁴² Thus, within social structures like the church, the Holy Spirit's liberating activities are essential. In addition to

²³⁸ Schaab, *Liberating Pneumatologies*, 21.

²³⁹ Daman Wandke, "A Perspective of Liberation | DO-IT," www.washington.edu, n.d., <https://www.washington.edu/doi/perspective-liberation>.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Mohomed, Beersher, Kiana Cox, Jeff Diamant and Claire Gecewicz, "Faith Among Black Americans." *Pew Research Center* (2021) <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/02/16/focus-groups-a-look-at-how-black-americans-talk-about-black-churches/> page 2.

²⁴² Baer, Hans A. "The Limited Empowerment of Women in Black Spiritual Churches: An Alternative Vehicle to Religious Leadership." *Sociology of Religion* 54, no. 1 (1993): 65–82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711842>.

bringing justice, peace, and restoration to the globe, this divine advocate also inspires leaders and religious authorities in a paranormal way.²⁴³

5.3 Trinitarian Doctrine & The Theology of Early Church Fathers

The trinitarian doctrine upheld in Christian communities like the Black Church has been shaped by the literature of the early church fathers. Tertullian, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Basil, and Augustine are a few who provided their thoughts about the functionality of the trinity and, more specifically the personhood of the Holy Spirit. While defining who the Holy Spirit is or what it does with and for creation can be relatively straightforward in scripture, the origin of this third person in relation to God and Christ has been surrounded by debate. Indeed, there has been some consensus around the nature of the Father and the Son; there was a discernable theological division between the patristic writers of the East and the West about the procession of the Holy Spirit; this became known as the “filioque controversy.”²⁴⁴

While Eastern Orthodox Christians held that the Spirit comes from God *through* Jesus Christ, western theologians like Tertullian professed that it was from *out of* the Son that the paraclete came into creation.²⁴⁵ Others like Augustine and even Thomas Aquinas believed in a double procession, in which the Spirit can be brought forth through one action by God (Father) and Jesus (Son).²⁴⁶ The theology provided by the patristic writers reinforces that the ways of the Holy Spirit and how it came about vary depending upon the social locations of the writers. The writings of the early church fathers demonstrate the conflict among them, and even they could

²⁴³ Schaab, *Liberating Pneumatologies*, 8.

²⁴⁴ Schaab, 31.

²⁴⁵ Schaab, 32.

²⁴⁶ Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 260-261.

not reach total consensus over the conception of the Holy Ghost. They were leaving an unsteady foundation for the core of westernized trinitarian doctrine to be built.

Augustine was another early writer who offered his theology about who precisely the Holy Spirit represented. When explaining the trinitarian relationship of the Godhead, Saint Augustine of Hippo focused on the notion of love as the glue that holds this theological framework together. For him, the Holy Spirit was representative of the love between God and Christ.²⁴⁷ In his article “Holy Spirit and Church in The Early Augustine,” Douglas Fin expounds upon Augustine's beliefs around pneumatology, which developed a new construct of ecclesiology. He asserts that Augustine understood the Holy Spirit to be the definition of love itself, that this entity was not like any other corruptible creation but the immutable substance of God.²⁴⁸ As he began to speak about the church, “The Holy Spirit as *caritas* or love... God teaches human beings how to love him and one another.”²⁴⁹

Augustine’s explanation of the Holy Spirit is lengthy compared to the other early writers, yet his perspective did not reign supreme. Others like Basil were open with their search in trying to properly define the nature of the Trinity and the importance of this third person. Before the Council of Nicaea convened to discuss the divinity of Christ, there were those like Arius who vehemently denied the divinity of Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁰ In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil claims that the Holy Spirit is not God but has divinity according to scripture.²⁵¹ Basil

²⁴⁷ Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 260-261.

²⁴⁸ Finn, Douglas. “Holy Spirit and Church in the Early Augustine.” *Augustiniana* 64, no. 1/4 (2014): 175. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44992951>.

²⁴⁹ Fin, 167.

²⁵⁰ Marcellino D'ambrosio, *When the Church Was Young: Voices of the Early Fathers* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2014), 186–87.

²⁵¹ D'ambrosio, 188.

makes striking arguments about divinity, sanctification, and unearthing the meaning behind terms like *ousia* and *hypostasis*. “*Ousia* refers to the one being or nature of God, *hypostasis* refers to the distinctive way that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participate in and express that one divine nature.”²⁵² His work in defining the Holy Spirit was influenced by other writers. “He reveals that the sources of his doctrine about the Spirit are general ideas derived from both the Scriptures and from the “extra-Scriptural tradition of the Fathers.”²⁵³

There is no one particular concrete doctrine that extensively describes the Holy Spirit or its relationship with the Trinity without some rebuttal. The early church fathers could not agree on the procession of how the Holy Spirit, splitting the doctrinal values of those in the east from the west. Thus the filioque controversy came into being. Other well-known writers like Augustine defined the Holy Spirit as a mere feeling, while persons like Basil argues for its divinity within the trinitarian relationship. These writers, in particular, have defined who this entity is and what it does outside of the human body. While they are adamant in making claims about the trinity, more particularly the Holy Spirit within the human experience, there is a gap in the description. Early theologies like these focus more on the spiritual aspects of God linked to the *ruah* instead of the functioning of God as a comforter and defender, which is tied to the term *parakletos*. Even the dwelling nature of the Holy Spirit defined by the *shekinah* is often ignored. Within the African American religious context, the Holy Spirit is directly linked to these tangible manifestations of God within the lives of the believer. Words like survival, liberation, and the ability to embody spirituality are attached to the definition of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the

²⁵² D’ambrosio, 187.

²⁵³ Hanson, R. P. C. “Basil’s Doctrine of Tradition in Relation to the Holy Spirit.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22, no. 4 (1968): 241–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1583217>.

writings of early church fathers are anemic, for they lack the proper language to define who the Holy Spirit is and what it does for minority populations like black women.

5.4 The Holy Spirit, Survival & The Theology of the Black Church

While many churches around the world have been influenced by the trinitarian doctrines purposed by the early theologians, the Black Church has also made significant contributions to pneumatology. In his essay, “The Holy Spirit In African American Theology,” James H. Evans Jr. makes the argument that the Holy Spirit is an influential part of the black religious experience and black existence.²⁵⁴ He suggests that there are three models in which it operates: radicalism, liberation, and survival. “The Holy Spirit is devoted to the maintenance of human life. Evans argues that, for African Americans, the Holy Spirit has historically been associated with the work of survival.”²⁵⁵

Using Evan’s perspective, it is easy to see how the Paraclete works within the anthropological as a spirit of justice that brings about justice but also secures the survival of those who face social oppression like African Americans. In the context of black Christian faith the Spirit of God is a buffer between life and death, freedom and bondage. “The Holy Spirit is redemptive in its capacity to free persons from the strictures of sin, both institutional and personal. But this liberation is also liberation from alienation.”²⁵⁶ James H. Evans Jr. wrote, “In its own way, the black church is a conduit for the continual and historical expression of the Holy

²⁵⁴ James H. Evans Jr. “The Holy Spirit In African American Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, ed. Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 166.

²⁵⁵ Evans, 170.

²⁵⁶ Evans, 170.

Spirit.”²⁵⁷ That black church’s understanding is pivotal to the theology which holds for those African Americans who navigate daily the slippery slopes of a broken society. However, the Spirit of God was seen as an advocate and vindicator. “The Holy Spirit named the conviction that they were meant to live in freedom and dignity, and that they were precious in the sight of God.”²⁵⁸ He suggests:

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that African American Christians saw themselves as being redeemed from internal and external forms of sin. This meant that the Holy Spirit was always leading one away from those things that restricted and constrained life and toward those things that set one free to live in community with oneself and others... This third dimension of the Holy Spirit points to its function as a sustaining purpose. Here it works toward and for the survival of the downtrodden. This is its moral purpose. In African American theology, this dimension of the work of the Spirit has been most clearly evident in the writings of African American women theologians.²⁵⁹

While many theologians like Evans speak extensively about the spirit of God providing liberation to those who are marginalized, for womanist theologians like Delores S. Williams, the spirit’s power was more about one’s survival than absolute freedom. In the book *Sisters In The Wilderness*, Williams uses the story of Hagar to show that God facilitates black women’s survival. “When Hagar and her child were finally cast out of the home of their oppressors and were not given proper resources for survival, God provided Hagar with a resource. God gave her new vision to see survival resources where she had seen none before.”²⁶⁰ For Williams, the struggle of Hager mimicked that of many black women. Even in the harshest conditions, God represented a way of survival against systemic oppression and hardship. God’s involvement in the lives of black women provides a way out of physical bondage. “Many black women have testified that “God helped them make a way out of no way.” According to Williams, they believe

²⁵⁷ Evans, 167.

²⁵⁸ Evans, 169.

²⁵⁹ Evans, 170.

²⁶⁰ Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (p. 4). Orbis. Kindle Edition.

God is involved not only in their survival struggle but that God also supports their struggle for quality of life, which “making a way” suggests.”²⁶¹ “In black consciousness, God's response of survival and quality of life to Hagar is God's response of survival and quality of life to African-American women and mothers of slave descent struggling to sustain their families with God's help.”²⁶² In *Sisters In The Wilderness*, Williams is God's spirit and power is active in the day-to-day lives of black women.

For Evans and Williams, God's work involves liberation and survival. African Americans generally have endured the weight of racism, while African American women have encountered racist and sexist oppressive forces that have not dissipated but continue to rage on. In the nuanced spaces in which black people, specifically black women, find themselves in American society, trust in these attributes of God has been a critical element for their faith. The core of their theology rests on the fact that God makes the difference for the believer. That the spirit of God influences the lives of humanity in such a way that is crucial for their survival. Making the spirit of God not this unattainable essence but a very “ever-present help” in the time of unsettling trouble.

5.5 The Contemporary Issue of Complementarianism

In his paper "The Ordination of Women: Assessing Counter Claims of Complementarianism," Peter Lockwood describes how, in 1987, conservative evangelicals who were passionately opposed to growing feminist works that supported women in clerical leadership developed the "Danvers Statement," a set of eleven affirmations.²⁶³ He claims that two

²⁶¹ Williams, 9.

²⁶² Williams, 5.

²⁶³ Lockwood, Peter F. 2021. “The Ordination of Women: Assessing the Counter Claims of Complementarianism.” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 55 (1): 13–32.

individuals named John Piper and Wayne Grudem, who wrote the controversial book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, were the forerunners in this cause. These affirmations were produced as non-negotiable facts established by the bible and intended to be lived out by the believer.²⁶⁴ This became the birthplace of the concept of complementarianism which some count as a divine doctrine, with others labeling it as Christian patriarchy.

Two prominent perspectives concerning complementarianism are described as maximal and minimal. Maximal Complementarianism involves the authoritative social order according to gender both in the home and church, using scripture as its foundation.²⁶⁵ Minimal Complementarianism maintains the structure of gender identity yet conveys the notion of falsified freedom of personal choice.²⁶⁶ Peter Lockwood describes how, from a maximalist perspective, God's aim is for women and men to have roles that complement each other in church, family, and society.²⁶⁷ Complementarians use scripture to justify that the behaviors exhibited within these specific paradigms are typically based upon male domination and female subordination.

Even when looking at the leadership within the church structure, for this specific group, only men are the ones whom God chooses to lead. Outside of teaching or utilizing spiritual gifts like prophesying, women are discouraged from desiring clerical leadership. For this group,

<https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ordination-women-assessing-counter-claims/docview/2553044041/se-2?accountid=10598>.

²⁶⁴ Lockwood, 13.

²⁶⁵ Jake Meador, "Will Complementarianism Die with the Baby Boomers? | Mere Orthodoxy," Mere Orthodoxy | Christianity, Politics, and Culture, March 5, 2019, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/complementarianism/>.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Lockwood, 15.

according to Lockwood, when it comes to ministry positions, distortions to God's order occur when women fail to employ their skills in appropriate ministries or when their sense of call to public ministry ignores biblical requirements.²⁶⁸ Persons like Biblical Studies professor Denny Burk claims that biblical inerrancy supports the complementarian view. “We must uphold everything that the Bible teaches, no matter where it weighs-in on our doctrinal hierarchy. If you believe the Bible teaches male headship, you are not free to disobey or dishonor that teaching. We must always speak and live as if we believe the Bible to be true. If the Bible is God’s word (and it is!), then we must honor its teaching in all its particulars.”²⁶⁹

In their 2021 revision of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem discuss how scripture clearly defines men's and women's responsibilities. Their views on women in positions of leadership are conservative, limiting these positions to men solely. “We are persuaded that the Bible teaches that only men should be pastors and elders. That is, men should bear primary responsibility for Christlike leadership and teaching in the church. So it is unbiblical, we believe, and therefore detrimental, for women to assume this role.”²⁷⁰ The writers claim that women must be obedient to men, even when partaking in religious activities, because they are creatures intended to serve. “Woman, however, even when prophesying or praying in public, must not only honor God but also honor man. Indeed, she honors God when she honors the specific task of “helper” for which God made her.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Lockwood, 16.

²⁶⁹ Denny Burk, “Complementarianism as a Second Order Doctrine,” Denny Burk, January 24, 2022, <https://www.dennyburk.com/complementarianism-as-a-second-order-doctrine/>.

²⁷⁰ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (Revised Edition)* (p. 74). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

²⁷¹ Piper and Grudem, 299.

While Piper and Grudem's work makes it apparent that women are subservient to men, this sexist discourse blurs regarding the trinity, specifically the Holy Spirit. When it comes to the Holy Spirit, complementarianism acknowledges that the Spirit indwells both men and women and that it bestows certain heavenly gifts.²⁷² The spirit of God does not discriminate based on gender; while women are permitted to have gifts, they are not allowed to hold spiritual offices.²⁷³ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* demonstrates how males are preferred for leadership positions, despite the Holy Spirit equally influencing women.

In a 2013 blog, Adrian Warnock speaks about the infamous evangelical pastor John MacArthur who vehemently spoke against the Charismatic Movement. MacArthur is quoted saying, “The Holy Spirit has been under massive assault for decades and decades, and I’ve been asking the question ‘where are the people rising up in protest against the abuse and the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?’”²⁷⁴ MacArthur who also identifies heavily with complementarianism, was seen in a video telling well known conservative evangelist Beth Moore to sit down. He said, “there’s no case that can be made biblically for a woman preacher.”²⁷⁵ Evangelist Beth Moore was an advocate for complementarianism when she shook the foundations of the Southern Baptist Convention and all evangelicals alike with her 2021 tweet. She stated, “When you functionally treat complementarianism — a doctrine of MAN — as if it belongs among the matters of 1st importance, yea, as a litmus test for where one stands on

²⁷² Piper and Grudem, 480.

²⁷³ Piper and Grudem, 480-481.

²⁷⁴ Adrian Warnock, “John MacArthur Accuses Half-a-Billion Christians of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,” Adrian Warnock, September 12, 2013, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2013/09/john-macarthur-accuses-half-a-billion-christians-of-blasphemy-against-the-holy-spirit/>.

²⁷⁵ Chris Romine, “John MacArthur & the Poison of Complementarian Theology on Common Ground,” www.cgnychurch.com, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.cgcollective.nyc/blog/john-macarthur-the-poison-of-complementarian-theology>.

inerrancy & authority of Scripture, you are the ones who have misused Scripture. You went too far.”²⁷⁶ While many persons like Moore are starting to turn away from the Complementarianism doctrine, others like MacArthur believe that God has called only one group to hold significant leadership, men.

5.6 Acts 2 as Biblical Evidence of Inhabitation of the Holy Spirit

Pentecost, seen in Acts 2, is one of the most well-known biblical events that emphasize the work and power of the Holy Spirit. In *True to Our Native Land*, Demetrius Williams writes that the writer Luke draws clear structural connections between his gospel and the book of Acts while speaking about the Holy Spirit in the story of Pentecost.²⁷⁷ On the day of Pentecost, those gathered from various places like Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and Asia were suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit. After a sound of rushing wind surrounded them, tongues of fire rested on each of them. At that moment, many thought those in attendance were drunk with new wine. The apostle Peter then arises and quotes the prophet Joel; *“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”*²⁷⁸ Williams states, “The story of Pentecost indicates that the coming of the Holy Spirit represents a new order that is manifested as a leveling power that destroys privilege.”²⁷⁹ The indwelling of the Holy

²⁷⁶ Yonat Shimron and Bob Smietana, “On the Heels of Her Split with Southern Baptists, Beth Moore Apologizes for Supporting a Theology That Restricts Women,” *Washington Post*, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/04/07/beth-moore-women-complementarianism/>.

²⁷⁷ Brian K. Blount and Demetrius K. Williams, “Pentecost: The Democratizations of the Spirit,” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 217-221, 217-218.

²⁷⁸ Acts 2:17-18, New Revised Standard Version.

²⁷⁹ Williams, 218.

Spirit was not a preferential nor exclusive occurrence. This was indicative of the nature of God's spirit that no language, location, race, class, or gender would be a boundary to fulfill the divine will for creation.²⁸⁰

In 1965 John Power wrote an article entitled "Pentecost." He describes the meaning of language and events surrounding the popularized Acts 2 account and making the connection between the Old Testament's Feast of Weeks to the New Testament's Feast of First Fruits, which was directly associated with Pentecost itself, according to Power.²⁸¹ He does not, however speak in great detail about the inclusivity of God by the works of the Holy Spirit as other scholars have. Still, he frequently uses masculine language when referring to God, scripture, or those whom God uses. He states, "God has always entered human history accompanied by simple signs observable and intelligible to men."²⁸² Power's language usage displays how sexism tends to creep into the process of theologizing and how the explicit and implicit biases can be brought by those who peak into the sacred text. This can be extremely harmful. "But all the theophanies of the Old Testament paled before the Incarnation, when God came, "not in the wind," "not in the earthquake," not in the "whistling of a gentle air," but in a man."²⁸³

John Power's language seems to assert that the male body was and is preferential to the movement of the Holy Spirit. "This gift of the Spirit was no transitory transformation of hesitant men into heroes."²⁸⁴ The supernatural work of this spirit, according to Power, turned the flesh of

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Power, John. "Pentecost." *The Furrow* 16, no. 6 (1965): 328. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27658953>.

²⁸² Power, John. "Pentecost." *The Furrow* 16, no. 6 (1965): 328. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27658953>.

²⁸³ Power, 328-329.

²⁸⁴ Power, 330.

men into superhuman forms while women's bodies were ill-begotten. "The Spirit of God comes on the scene always in the giving and diffusing of life; whenever great enterprises of God are launched among men, there is the Spirit."²⁸⁵ The language used in this piece spreads the notion that the Spirit cannot find a place of rest where men are not. The church and the people who belong to it should not tolerate this rhetoric. The terminology used in Power's work supports sexist ideas passed off as biblical and denigrates people of color. "The Spirit comes, not in a restricted or niggardly ration, but in superabundance; He is not doled out but poured out with the abandon of divine generosity."²⁸⁶ This article's framing denigrates those who identify as anything other than male or white. Fixing the Holy Spirit's activity to just one particular set of individuals contradicts what the Book of Acts' Pentecost story demonstrates. Theological viewpoints like those by John Power show how the Acts 2 report can be misinterpreted to benefit males.

Pentecost was one of the most powerful spiritual movements recorded in the Bible. The Holy Spirit's inclusiveness of the indwelling or inhabitation, which extended beyond human delineations, has also served as an important scripture to consider when discussing women in ministry and leadership roles. Even though women had critical roles in the early church, Luke paints women in Acts 2 as more of a supporting force for people like Paul.²⁸⁷ This chapter in the Book of Acts still gives a valuable perspective on the Spirit's inclusiveness and the action that signified God's movement amongst humanity. In *Liberating Pneumatologies*, Gloria Schaab speaks about the significance of even the language seen in Acts; she states:

This is a narrative full of symbolic language: the rushing wind signals a new and unexpected act of God within history (John 3:8); the tongues of fire call to mind the fire of the presence of God in the giving of the covenant on Sinai (Exodus 19:18). With fire, the Christian community now must bear

²⁸⁵ Power, 334.

²⁸⁶ Power, John. "Pentecost." *The Furrow* 16, no. 6 (1965): 327–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27658953>.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

witness to a new covenant in the power of the Spirit, one that reaches to all parts of the world, symbolized by the utterance in different tongues. How did this power of the Spirit manifest itself through the disciples? It enabled them to speak of the mighty deeds of God in language that each one could understand despite the fact that they were Jews from many disparate regions around Jerusalem (2:6-11). It empowered them to testify fearlessly to the wonders and signs that God had worked through Jesus (2:22), to proclaim his resurrection from the dead (2:32), and to call for repentance that those who listened might have their sins forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit (2:38). From this momentous outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost flow the activities of the Spirit in the early Christian community.²⁸⁸

However, some religious entities still find an inclusive and liberative theology concerning the trinity as problematic. The Gospel of Christ is a non-profit organization overseen by an all-male, all-white elder board of the Red Hill Church of Christ in Manchester, Tennessee.²⁸⁹ Their online database called Knowledgebase houses various articles that articulate the organization's religious beliefs.²⁹⁰ In this virtual catalog, there are contentious articles of varying topics, from how men are considered for eldership even if they have stepchildren to how the local church is still scriptural even if no qualified men are available to lead. There are even works that claim there is no evidence of prehistoric people but another that states that dinosaurs were on Noah's Ark. However, in one specific feature, they offer a similar perspective that mirrors complementarianism. They assert that the account of Acts 2 does not give women the power to take on leadership over men and that anything that goes against this is in direct opposition to the Bible.²⁹¹ The words spoken by Peter were considerate of the female prophetesses who may have been present, showing the divide that religious organizations such as The Gospel of Christ create between men and women.²⁹² It is shocking to see that for this religious community, it is easier

²⁸⁸ Schaab, *Liberating Pneumatologies*, 15.

²⁸⁹ "Our Overseers," The Gospel of Christ, accessed July 4, 2022, <https://www.thegospelofchrist.com/overseers>.

²⁹⁰ "Bible Knowledge Base," The Gospel of Christ, accessed July 4, 2022, <https://www.thegospelofchrist.com/knowledge-base>.

²⁹¹ "Does Acts 2:17-21 Contradict 1 Timothy 2:11,12 on the Roles of Men and Women?," The Gospel of Christ, accessed July 4, 2022, <https://www.thegospelofchrist.com/knowledge-base/tgoc--chlz4>.

²⁹² Ibid.

for them to believe that dinosaur pairs could fit on Noah's Ark like the *Argentinosaurus*, which weighed 70-100 tons each, than it is for them to accept the inclusivity that the Holy Spirit released in Acts.²⁹³

Cheryl J. Sanders discusses the understanding of the Holy Spirit within the Black Church context in "The Historiography of the Holy Spirit in Black Church Culture."²⁹⁴ In this article, Sanders analyzes the black church television series by Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. The latter shared his experiences with black faith through this series and in his literary works. She says, "Gates challenges the Black churches as a whole to reconsider the role of the Holy Spirit as an equalizing factor in our modalities of worship and our mission to the world."²⁹⁵ While she recounts Gates' cultural influences from the Pentecostal movement and how his family history plays a broader role in describing the black church experience, Sanders notes something pivotal. "The present impact and future survivability of the Black Church may depend upon its capacity to summon and nurture people of all ages to participate in transformative and sustainable practices of social justice."²⁹⁶ The Holy Spirit has represented much more in black religious life than just an all-loving third part of the divine trinity, which is just mentioned in prayer and scripture. Yet, this Holy Spirit ushers in justice and inclusivity.

The story in Acts 2 is simply one example of the relevance of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in a wide range of believers though many have tried to dispute this. Linda E. Thomas, in the

²⁹³ Laura Geggel, "What's the World's Largest Dinosaur?," Live Science (Live Science, January 27, 2019), <https://www.livescience.com/34278-worlds-largest-dinosaur.html>.

²⁹⁴ Cheryl J. Sanders, "The Historiography of the Holy Spirit in Black Church Culture," [berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu](https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-historiography-of-the-holy-spirit-in-black-church-culture) (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 2021), <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-historiography-of-the-holy-spirit-in-black-church-culture>.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

book *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice*, illustrates the multivocality and oneness of Spirit brought by way of Pentecost, which is the grounding for womanist pneumatology.²⁹⁷ She emphasizes the point that African spirituality and Christianity come together to form black women's perspective and engagement with the Holy Spirit. She argues that "black women have particular insight into the power of the Spirit because their historical radical marginality puts them in the center of myriad realities in which deeply rooted, unacknowledged, and unconventional wisdom dwells."²⁹⁸ It is from their experiences, black clergywomen learn about the functionality of the Holy Spirit within their lives, communities, and faith contexts. African American clergywomen who belonged to predominant black denominations like the Pentecostal and Holiness traditions looked at Acts 2 as biblical justification for their congregational leadership.²⁹⁹ "For black women it meant that the black church could not, on the one hand, argue for racial equality and, on the other hand, deny equal opportunity for women in ministry."³⁰⁰ Thus, via their own bodies, black clergywomen's leadership generated anthropological disruptions in the church context pneumatologically.

5.7 Azusa Street Revivals: The Praxis of Pentecost in a 20th Century Black Faith Context

Author Joe Creech discusses itinerant minister Frank Bartleman's experience with William J. Seymour, an African American holiness pastor, and the gatherings he would curate in Los Angeles in his piece "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecost History." "At a vacant AME mission at 312 Azusa Street, countless Pentecostals received the baptism of the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues—a "Second Pentecost" replicating the first

²⁹⁷ *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice* (p. 78). Palgrave Macmillan US. Kindle Edition.

²⁹⁸ *Christian Doctrines for Global Gender Justice* (p. 73). Palgrave Macmillan US. Kindle Edition.

²⁹⁹ Williams, 218.

³⁰⁰ Williams, 221.

recorded in Acts 2.”³⁰¹ The Holy Spirit's activity in filling and employing all people, regardless of gender or ethnicity, was a vital aspect of this movement. Creech emphasizes the importance of this revival to the history of Pentecostalism. He discusses how people like Frank Bartleman saw these gatherings as a spiritual awakening that helped to educate society's view of the Holy Spirit's presence in people's lives.³⁰²

The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement occurring in the United States in the early 20th century, signaled the rapid growth of groups of individuals who fervently believed in the miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit in the world and a believer's life.³⁰³ Within the African American community “catching” the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost by dancing, shouting, speaking in tongues, etc., has been a prominent factor in black religion in America.³⁰⁴ “Charisma—understood as the anointing of the Holy Spirit—confirmed for the larger religious community that indeed God had called one to the ministry. Charisma was the legitimations of one's authority to function in the prophetic and, because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on men and women, women had access to this authority.”³⁰⁵ From house gatherings, tent meetings, and revivals, being filled with the spirit or power of God has been seen as a divine encounter experienced by humanity. Denominations such as the Pentecostal and Holiness traditions

³⁰¹ Creech, Joe. “Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History.” *Church History* 65, no. 3 (1996): 405. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3169938>.

³⁰² Creech, 405.

³⁰³ Ma, Wonsuk. “‘When the Poor Are Fired Up’: The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission.” *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (2007): 28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052686>.

³⁰⁴ Brown, Dudley. “Holy Spirit and the Trinity in the Black Church.” *Canadian-American Theological Review* 10, no. 1 (2021): 25–38. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIiREM220307000772&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³⁰⁵ Stephenson, Lisa P. “Prophesying Women and Ruling Men: Women's Religious Authority in North American Pentecostalism.” *Religions* 2, no. 3 (2011): 413. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel2030410>. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/prophesying-women-ruling-men-womens-religious/docview/1537382956/se-2>.

strongly emphasize the movement and activity of the Holy Spirit inside of the believer that results in physical manifestations. Historical accounts from events such as the Azusa Street Revivals display how heavily the Holy Spirit's influence was on worship, the livelihood of the believer, and the utilization of spiritual gifts. It is important to note that the headway made in Pentecostalism because of Azusa was mainly due to the works of African American ministers.

The Azusa Street Revivals became an ecumenical location where people might experience what was thought to be the gifts of the Holy Spirit from mid-April 1906 until 1908. Outside the conventional spiritual oratory, those who had gathered there would lift exhortations of spiritual authority and personal piety.³⁰⁶ “But more compelling than the rhetoric and hearty singing and agonized prayers that filled the hours were the gifts of the Holy Spirit in action.”³⁰⁷ It was in these gatherings where persons from various backgrounds and ethnicities came together to have a unique spiritual experience. Keri Day writes about the genesis and spiritual influence of the Azusa Revivals in her article "Politics of Azusa: Transforming Citizenship at the Margins."

She says:

Apostolic Faith Mission was a tiny congregation that would spark the Azusa revival. Beginning on the porch of Ruth and Richard Asberry's house on Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles during the summer of 1906, a small collective of black and white Christian leaders (including an African American itinerant preacher and pastor William Seymour, black washerwomen and domestics, black male janitors, and a few white leaders) would ignite this movement. The Azusa revival certainly included glossolalia and religious practices such as healing, but this community also understood Christian faith to be enacted and lived out through transgressing and subverting the racist and sexist context of American culture and economy at the dawn of the twentieth century. In terms of Azusa's interracial vision, it was Seymour that led and pastored thousands of white Christians at Azusa. This revival was seen as subversive to the dominant racial reasoning of the day.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Blumhofer, Edith L. "Revisiting Azusa Street: A Centennial Retrospect." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 2 (04, 2006): 59-62,64.

[https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/revisiting-azusa-street-centennial-retrospect/docview/216016770/se-2?accountid=10598.](https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/revisiting-azusa-street-centennial-retrospect/docview/216016770/se-2?accountid=10598)

³⁰⁷ Blumhofer, 59.

³⁰⁸ Day, Keri L. 2021. "The Politics of Azusa: Transforming Citizenship at the Margins." *Political Theology* 22 (7): 611–26. doi:10.1080/1462317x.2021.1941651.

The barriers of gender were very briefly overcome at Azusa, which contrasted to much of Baptist and Methodist traditions. Womanist scholar Cheryl Gilkes notes that many Baptist and Methodist women left their denominations and joined holiness and Pentecostal communities because of Azusa's equal treatment of women as legitimate preachers and pastors. To be fair in describing the founding of Azusa, I would argue that a collective of black women guided and birthed Seymour's religious experience of the Spirit, making them equal co-founders of Azusa with him, a womanist/black feminist interpretation I think is important. Although the institutionalization of the Azusa revival gave way to a number of Pentecostal denominations re-inscribing patriarchal logics (i.e., not ordaining women) over time, the early Azusa congregation (that eventually led to the revival) was radically egalitarian in its approach to leadership, allowing women to lead in record numbers.³⁰⁹

The Azusa Revivals became an epicenter for African American religious life. In this place, believers regardless of social identifications, were able to come together under the auspice of the Holy Spirit. The 2009 *Azusa Street Project Movie* retells the story of how on April 9th when William J. Seymour preached to a small gathering from the book of Acts.³¹⁰ It was in that place where a woman named Jennie Moore was baptized in the Holy Spirit. She said, "It seemed as if a vessel broke within me and water surged up through my being which, when it reached my mouth came out in a torrent of speech in languages which God had given me."³¹¹ Black women like Jennie Moore were pivotal in witnessing what the Holy Spirit was doing under the leadership of Seymour.

Allan Anderson speaks about the various international experiences full of rousing prayer, prophesying, and visions, including The Welsh Revivals, which he claims influenced the beginning of the Pentecostal movement before Azusa Street.³¹² In an online biography entitled *Azusa Street Revival Documentary*, several white, male scholars take part in speaking about the

³⁰⁹ Day, Keri L. 2021. "The Politics of Azusa: Transforming Citizenship at the Margins." *Political Theology* 22 (7): 611–26. doi:10.1080/1462317x.2021.1941651.

³¹⁰ Vision Video, "The Azusa Street Project (2009) | Full Movie | Bishop Charles E. Blake, Sr.," *YouTube*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEVn4-vEWjY>.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Anderson, Allan. "The Azusa Street Revival and the Emergence of Pentecostal Missions in the Early Twentieth Century." *Transformation* 23, no. 2 (2006): 107–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43054199>.

infantile beginnings of the Azusa movement that would later become a tool of global witness. In the video, the interviewer asks Dr. Cecil Mel Roebeck why he would devote 15 years of his life studying Azusa Street and the work of William Seymour?³¹³ He responds, “I’ve been reared in the Pentecostal movement all of my life, I have grown up with the story of Azusa Street, I’ve heard many of the things about it, I’ve met a number of people who went there one time or another but I’ve never seen it written anywhere the whole story.”³¹⁴

As the scene moves from Dr. Roebeck to a frame of the main narrator he says these words, “This is a recorded history for all of God’s people. For the next hour, we employ you let us put aside all denominational beliefs, traditions, and barriers. God, the father doesn’t look at one as catholic or Methodist.”³¹⁵ As he finishes speaking, the secondary narrator continues by sharing the tumultuous time when the movement began. He said, “These were the days of the strictest Jim Crow segregation laws.” He then adds, “However what God was offering was so vital that racists or proud whites laid aside their prejudices to worship beside Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics to humbly receive.”³¹⁶ Words like these found in articles or seen on television programming are racial microaggressions that corroborate the erasure of black religious phenomena like the Azusa Street revivals. Morphing them into mainstream media or scholarly events of study slowly changes the faces of those who lead these movements from black to blurred. Defining these historic revivals outside the African American experience or calling for a “laying aside” of what made these gatherings ever the more important to black religion is

³¹³ “Azusa Street Revival Documentary,” www.youtube.com, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1X-uziDC60>.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

harmful. This type of framing presents the anthropological problem of erasure or white-washing predominantly black demonstrations. Though Azusa became a place of ecumenical worship, building the crux of this religious movement's history away from African American influence widens the divide of disassociation of the spirit of God from the black body.

5.8 The Holy Spirit, Azusa Street & The Work of Pastor Lucy Farrow

While men like William J. Seymour are well-known figures in the Azusa Street Revivals, women also had a role in the movement's development. Pastor Lucy Farrow was born into slavery in Norfolk, Virginia, and was the niece of prominent abolitionist Frederick Douglas.³¹⁷ Even though much is still unknown about her life or work as a pastor, these well-known revivals would not have been as influential in the Pentecostal movement without her. For instance, while working as a governess for clergyman Charles Fox Parham, she later became the pastor of a holiness church in Houston, Texas.³¹⁸ While living under segregation and gender biases that were commonplace in the early 1900s, Farrow began attending Parham's gatherings, where he preached about the "biblical evidence" of the Holy Spirit's outpouring through speaking in tongues.³¹⁹ It was in the home of Parham where Farrow was baptized in the Holy Spirit; she became filled to the point where she spoke in tongues.³²⁰ It was Lucy Farrow who exposed Azusa leader William Seymour to the practice of speaking in tongues, also known as *glossolalia*, while pastoring her church.³²¹

³¹⁷ Benjamin Mchie, "Lucy Farrow, Pastor Born," African American Registry, accessed July 3, 2022, <https://aaregistry.org/story/lucy-farrow-pastor-born/>.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Eddie L. Hyatt, "Lucy Farrow: The Forgotten Apostle of Pentecost - Charisma Magazine," Charisma, February 20, 2014, <https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/revival/19805-lucy-farrow-the-forgotten-apostle-of-pentecost>.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Michelle D. Williams, "Why We Can't Forget the Women Leaders of Azusa Street," CBE International, 2021, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/why-we-cant-forget-women-leaders-azusa-street>.

Due to Farrow's work and ministry, she was able to help influence the movement in California. "When the Azusa Street Revival began in LA, Seymour called on his friend Lucy to come and assist. She would be known as the "anointed handmaiden" who laid her hands on many who received the Holy Spirit and the gift of glossolalia. Lucy is often referred to as the "Mother of Pentecostalism."³²² When Seymour couldn't achieve a spiritual breakthrough on his own, he called Lucy, who was reputed to be able to convey the Holy Spirit's baptism to others.³²³ She has a well-known evangelism ministry in which she travels around the United States and Africa sharing the gospel. Hundreds of people were converted to Christianity due to her tremendous work at camp meetings like the ones she organized in Virginia, where people were able to receive "the baptism of the Holy Ghost."³²⁴ Even though not very much is known about her life, Farrow's ministry exemplified women bearing the Holy Spirit and reflecting God's divine nature, as well as displaying the gifts or fruit of the Spirit.

5.9 The Ministry of Evangelist Joyce Rodgers, Pentecostal Traditionalism & The Holy Spirit

Evangelist and author Joyce Rodgers accepted her calling to ministry in the 1980s under the leadership of S.E. Mitchell of Texas.³²⁵ She stated, "I heard the voice of the Lord calling me to another level, but I didn't know what that entailed."³²⁶ Rodgers, also known as a "Cheerleader for the Lord," had a thriving ministry as a preacher and leader for decades before her death in

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Tony Cauchi, "Lucy F. Farrow 1851-1911," www.revival-library.org, accessed July 3, 2022, https://www.revival-library.org/revival_heroes/20th_century/farrow_lucy.shtml.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Marcia J. Davis, "Cheerleader For The Lord," *Charisma*, 2009, <https://cdn.website-editor.net/1cade8c0ed8c4590ab62a589f5ec4c09/files/uploaded/2020%2520Rodgers%2520Joyce.pdf>

³²⁶ Ibid.

2021 in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC).³²⁷ The largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States, The Church of God in Christ's founder Charles H. Mason would also attend the 1906 Azusa Street Revival.³²⁸ They strongly believe in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost as spiritual evidence of one's conversion and sanctification, enabling the believer to speak in tongues.³²⁹ Despite her denomination's stance on women, she continued preaching and teaching across the country, using her physical presentation as a stance against ingrained patriarchy. "As one of COGIC's most compelling female speakers, Rodgers made femininity an important part of her brand. Embraced by a denomination that pushed the traditional boundaries that have previously defined first-string evangelists as male players."³³⁰

Rodgers made great strides in the Church of God in Christ, becoming the fourth chairlady of the denominations International Youth Department in 1999.³³¹ That same year, Evangelist Rodgers preached at the North California First Jurisdiction Workers Meeting at the Old Path Miracle Cathedral COGIC in Vallejo, California. There standing behind the lectern, surrounded by black clergymen, she begins crying aloud, invoking the Holy Spirit. She cries "Spirit of the Living God" over and over until the crowd begins to stir, she begins speaking in tongues, moving the crowd even more.³³² During her introductory statement, she made it a point to thank publicly

³²⁷ Nadia Joy Schult, "'Cheerleader for the Lord' COGIC Evangelist Joyce Rodgers Dies at 65," Charisma News, 2021, <https://www.charismanews.com/culture/85487-cheerleader-for-the-lord-cogic-evangelist-joyce-rodgers-dies-at-65>.

³²⁸ Cherese Jackson, "Evangelist Joyce Rodgers Fought a Good Fight," Guardian Liberty Voice, May 27, 2021, <https://guardianlv.com/2021/05/evangelist-joyce-rodgers-fought-a-good-fight/>.

³²⁹ "What We Believe," Church Of God In Christ, n.d., <https://www.cogic.org/about-us/what-we-believe/>.

³³⁰ Cherese Jackson, "Evangelist Joyce Rodgers Fought a Good Fight," Guardian Liberty Voice, May 27, 2021, <https://guardianlv.com/2021/05/evangelist-joyce-rodgers-fought-a-good-fight/>.

³³¹ dperry, "Evangelist Joyce L. Rodgers," Auxiliaries In Ministry, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.cogic.org/aim/2014/05/06/evangelist-joyce-l-rodgers/>.

³³² "Evangelist Joyce Rodgers 'the Process of Faith' 1999," www.youtube.com, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rd-eazvUznw>.

the women who were not seated on the pulpit but were there in the pews. She stated, “To all the mothers in Zion and the daughters of Judah.”³³³ For Rodgers to publicly stand in a pulpit, exhorting God and honoring those women who were not able to stand alongside her in the pulpit belonging to a denomination that still does not allow women to occupy their highest offices was transformational and disruptive.

In a 2018 video interview, Evangelist Rodgers speaks about a session that she led at the Young Leaders Conference where four women had received the power of the Holy Ghost. “Isaiah 61:1 says The spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has given me supernatural power to do somethings and I was given supernatural power to do somethings.”³³⁴ “When God speaks a word in your belly that you have been chosen to carry the gospel, you are chosen to carry his word, nothing can stop you.”³³⁵ She shares the story of Mary’s meeting with her pregnant cousin Elizabeth found in Luke 1, how when Mary spoke, John leaped within the belly of his mother. “Women in ministry must hang with other women that when they speak to them, something leaps on the inside.”³³⁶ She states, “There is something so powerful in the voice of women...God is raising up an army of feminine warriors who will cry aloud and spare not.”³³⁷

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ YLC, “Evangelist Joyce Rodgers | ‘God Is Raising an Army of Feminine Warriors!’ | #YLCTv,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leXBKQwNzU), 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leXBKQwNzU>.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Black Church has and remains a place of healing but it continues to grapple with remnants of patriarchy, for the “stained-glass” ceiling though damaged still remains. The disruptions in ministerial paradigms across multiple denominations have been prompted by the transformative leadership of black clergywomen since the 19th century. The theologies and traditions that aimed to put women on the periphery of religious leadership have been refuted by their epistemological, political, and anthropological disruptions. Stephanie Mitchem states that “too many churches’ theologies, doctrines, rituals, and policies do not resonate with African American women: churches are skillful at ignoring what they choose to ignore.”³³⁸ Because women are frequently ignored, undervalued, or underestimated in many religious settings, I propose that it is essential to highlight their contributions to institutions like the Black Church and other organizations.

Factors like male dominance and patriarchal normativity have tried to keep women away from pulpits relegating them to other spaces like pews and classrooms. It is critical to recognize the extent to which black preaching women have influenced the spiritual landscape of African Americans. That without their labor and perseverance, the Black Church would not be what it is today. These women's ministries have helped to demolish male supremacy and patriarchal ideals in predominantly black congregations while restructuring new meanings for positions like pastor, bishop, and preacher. As discussed in the beginning of this paper, documentation found in memoirs, interviews, movies, and essays is just a small part of the tangible evidence of their impact. The very lives of women Jarena Lee assist in forming a living text that guides and probes

³³⁸ Stephanie Y. Mitchem, “Prelude to Tapping Power: Juggling Acts,” in *African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), pp. 23.

the next generation of black female leaders. Even if men continue to hold the majority of ministerial roles in the Black Church, the mere presence of black women leaders helps to slowly shift the normative gaze of religious leadership away from maleness, which is an epistemological disruption.

The foundation for the concept of disruption is the intentionality of upsetting the usual path of activity, engagement, or communication in order to introduce a new way of being. As shown by political disruption, women have challenged political power by way of mother boards and social justice organizations. Black clergywomen's transformative leadership is disruptive because it shatters institutions' established routines that have become thwarted due to social ills like misogyny while gaining power in places that have tried to shut them out. From Sojourner Truth preaching at an unruly camp meeting to Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon's revisitation of her graduate paper disturbing her male professor, interactions like these interrupt and rejuvenate all at the same time. Beckoning forth a new becoming for the church and society together. In my opinion, black clergywomen are similar to what Thomas S. Kuhn describes in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, as an anomaly. Within the usual or anticipated experience, the anomaly has the power to signify that something is wrong and opens that paradigm up to further adjustments.³³⁹

Black clergywomen's very presence, ministry, and leadership are acts of disruption that call attention to the inequality in spiritual settings while also assisting in the dislodging of male hegemony and patriarchy. Thus the lives and ministerial work of African American preaching

³³⁹ Thomas S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), 64.

women like Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall to Evangelist Joyce Rodgers has been a necessary piece in helping to restructure black sacred experiences equitably. Displaying that women are also beings who are called by and filled with God's spirit despite the systems that try to deny this fact. This is the core of what is considered anthropologically disruptive.

As previously stated this thesis covers three particular disruptions caused by black preaching women; epistemological, political, and anthropological. These three forms of disruption are important because they reflect the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and soul. From how one acquires knowledge, to the exercise of power and the inclusivity provided by the Holy Spirit, this shows that the human experience does not just exist or occur in one particular plain but that all things are consistently working in concert to form the present reality. That each category has a direct impact on the other. This is similar to Black Feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality."³⁴⁰

It is pivotal for the Black Church to understand that the mistreatment of black women is not an isolated event. Denying a woman's right to preach though she feels called based solely upon her gender does not just harm her, but those around her and even the institution itself. Which can be doubly detrimental to a people who are already under the weight of marginalization due to race and gender. This paper is designed to show how the ostracization of persons like African American women damages the church, stunting its growth and prohibiting it from becoming all that it was structured to be. Yet provide hope by emphasizing the disruptive work of black clergywomen and the positive changes that were born in congregational contexts

³⁴⁰ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

because of them. So, is God's love enough to free black women? The answer is still no. The freedom of black women requires a dismantling of systems, a dethroning of power, and a building of community which often comes by way of their own disruptions.

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