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"The Saints Go Marching": The Church of God in Christ and the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1954-1968

by

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Having assumed black Pentecostals are “otherworldly” or detached from politics and this-worldly concerns, many religious and civil rights scholars have ignored black Holiness-Pentecostals’ involvements in the Civil Rights Movement and instead focused on the roles of black Baptists and Methodists. Primarily guided by historical, sociological, theo-ethical, and hermeneutical methods, this dissertation examines Church of God in Christ (COGIC) members’ engagements in the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1954-1968. I chose Memphis as the location to examine these assumptions because the most renowned Civil Rights leader, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered his last sermon at Mason Temple Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the headquarters of the largest and oldest black holiness-Pentecostal denomination. The dissertation argues that Memphis COGIC members were not divorced from the Memphis Movement but endeavored to combat racial injustice and inequality through a diversity of means, including through politics, nonviolent direct action, and spiritual quest. I contend that despite being marginalized and treated as outsiders on account of their race and religious faith, prior to the Civil Rights Movement early saints affirmed their identity as United States citizens, valued American democratic ideas of freedom and equality, and endeavored to advance democratic principles through participating in civic life.
Additionally, when the Civil Rights Movement came to Memphis in the 1950s, COGIC members joined and worked alongside black church leaders from other denominations and engaged in nearly every aspect of the struggle, including political campaigns, desegregation efforts, and the Sanitation Workers Strike. Furthermore, I argue that Holiness-Pentecostal theology informed the activism of Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists. Affirming his Holiness-Pentecostal heritage, Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., a prominent Memphis Civil Rights activist, sought to persuade blacks in general and to remind black Christian activists in particular of the indispensability of spiritual presence and empowerment for social struggle. My research findings provoke scholars of religion to rethink the meaning and implications of otherworldliness. Additionally, this research indicates that there is greater complexity to black churches involvement in the Civil Rights Movement besides the contributions of black Baptists and Methodists.
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# Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ iii  
List of Figures .............................................................................................................. viii  

**Chapter One: Introduction** .................................................................................. 1  

Rationale and Scope of the Study ........................................................................... 2  
Central Argument ................................................................................................. 5  
Research Methodology ......................................................................................... 6  
Literature Review .................................................................................................. 10  
The Layout of the Argument .................................................................................. 20  
Contributions to the Study of African American Religion ................................ 23  

**Chapter Two: Religion, Race, and Nationhood in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism** ................................................................................................. 25  
The “Holiness” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism ............................ 28  

*The Wesleyan Doctrine of Sanctification* ............................................................ 28  
*The Holiness Movement* ..................................................................................... 35  
The “Pentecostal” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism ....................... 46  

*Charles Parham’s Apostolic Faith Movement* ..................................................... 46  
*William Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival* .......................................................... 56  
*COGIC’s Synthesis of Parham and Seymour’s Doctrines* ................................. 67  
The “African” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism ............................... 69  

*The Nature of Africanisms in African American Religion and COGIC* ......... 69  
*The Shout and the Holy Dance* .......................................................................... 71  
*Spirit Baptism and the Tarrying Ritual* ............................................................... 74  
*The Call and Response Tradition and Oral Spirituality* .................................. 77  
The “American” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism ......................... 80  
Identity and Political Participation ...................................................................... 99  
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 103  

**Chapter Three: “Others Unidentified”—Saints’ Contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis** ........................................................................ 105  
Background and Historical Context of the Memphis Civil Rights Movement ...... 106  
Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple: Worship and Political Space ............... 114  
Voter Registration Drives ..................................................................................... 119  
Civil Rights Organizations and Protest Demonstrations .................................. 123
List of Figures

Figure 1……………………………………………………………………………………………………..121
Bishop J. O. Patterson Sr., Reverend Henry Bunton, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at a Voter Registration Drive at Mason Temple, 1959

Figure 2……………………………………………………………………………………………………..125
Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. and Jesse H. Turner at a NAACP Event, 1965

Figure 3……………………………………………………………………………………………………..136
J.O. Patterson Jr. Political Campaign Committee, 1967

Figure 4……………………………………………………………………………………………………..154
Reverend James Lawson, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Dr. H. Ralph Jackson Memphis Press-Scimitar Press Conference Photo, March 29, 1968

Figure 5……………………………………………………………………………………………………..154
1968 Sanitation Workers Strike Videotape Photo of C.O.M.E Committee Members Press Conference Photo, Highlighting Elder G.E. Patterson, March 29, 1968

Figure 6……………………………………………………………………………………………………..158
Mother Elsie Shaw at Mason Temple during King’s Final Sermon, April 3, 1968

Figure 7……………………………………………………………………………………………………..158
Elder W.L. Porter at Mason Temple during King’s Final Sermon, April 3, 1968
Chapter One: Introduction

Because Black Holiness-Pentecostals have traditionally placed a strong emphasis on sanctification (being set apart from the world) and personal salvation, some scholars including anthropologists and sociologists of religion such as Gary Marx, Hans Baer, and Merrill Singer have assumed black Holiness-Pentecostal religion is apolitical and “otherworldly.”¹ Pentecostal scholars such as James Tinney and Leonard Lovett have contested these prevailing assumptions by pinpointing revolutionary impulses within black Pentecostalism, noting several instances in which saints engaged in protest struggles.² Yet, Pentecostal scholars have not performed an in-depth historical and theological analysis of black Pentecostals’ engagements in political protest during the Civil Rights Movement.

Furthermore, significant questions remain unanswered as it relates to black Pentecostals and the Civil Rights Movement. For example, in what ways were black Pentecostals engaged in the Civil Rights Movement? How did Pentecostal faith and religious practices factor in their Civil Rights activism? Why did some saints choose to participate directly in protest struggles while other COGIC members ostensibly watched


the Movement from the sidelines?³ Answering these questions, as it relates to COGIC, is significant because COGIC was the largest black Pentecostal denomination in the United States and the second largest denomination in the Black Church during the Civil Rights era.⁴ Despite the large membership, the Civil Rights activism of members of COGIC has received limited attention and analysis. This dissertation examines the engagements of some Memphis COGIC members in local Civil Rights struggles and analyzes ways saints’ theology inhibited and/or informed their activism.

**Rationale and Scope of the Study**

Appropriating political scientist Frederick Harris’ definition, I define political protest activism as “direct action, organized around specific political goals, either protesting measures that produce harm or demanding measures that produce good.”⁵ I chose Memphis as the location of this study for a variety of reasons. First, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his final sermon at Mason Temple COGIC, the headquarters of COGIC, in 1968 during a rally for the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike. Little has been published about the involvements of COGIC leaders and members in the Sanitation Workers Strike and in the broader Civil Rights Movement. Second, as the COGIC headquarters, Memphis is the site where multitudes of COGIC saints traveled to attend


⁵ Frederick Harris, Something Within: Religion and African American Political Activism (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.
National Convocations for several decades. Third, Memphis is also a key site for amassing historical literature on Senior Bishop Charles Harrison Mason, the founder and leader who served COGIC for over half a century, and on the first elected presiding bishop, James O. Patterson Sr. Both leaders together led COGIC for nearly three-quarters of a century.

Yet, this study does not only focus on 1968, but the historical scope is 1954 to 1968. While I acknowledge that the quest for civil rights has “long origins” and began as early as the period of black enslavement, my dating of the Civil Rights Movement begins with the Supreme Court’s Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954 and ends with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., in Memphis in 1968.6 The Brown vs. Board of Education ruling outlawed segregation in public schools and inspired many activists to strive to combat segregation in other areas such as public transportation, restaurants, and public parks. King was a central figure within the Civil Rights Movement because he was the movement’s national and “charismatic” leader and his philosophy of nonviolent resistance and his highly publicized protest demonstrations, which were inaugurated during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, typified the movement to many blacks and whites.7 The political protest campaigns spearheaded by King and several other national and local civil rights activists influenced Congress to enact legislation, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1964, that respectively outlawed segregation and


7 Ibid.
discriminatory practices in voter registration. Nevertheless, racial and economic injustice persisted, and during the mid 1960s, King’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance began to become less popular among many blacks, especially young black activists. Activists such as Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Floyd McKissic of the Congress of Racial Equality questioned the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance and interjected the philosophy of black power into the Civil Rights arena. Although misunderstood by many persons in the media as being a form of reverse racism or a doctrine of black supremacy, black power called for blacks to overcome racial injustice and to improve their communities by organizing and working together to acquire political and economic strength. Even when King’s approach was becoming less popular during the 1960s, many blacks and whites respected King as being the quintessential champion of nonviolence, and he maintained his ability to galvanize masses of persons including blacks and whites to participate in nonviolent demonstrations. Following his assassination in Memphis, the Civil Rights Movement did not altogether cease as civil rights leaders such as King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference successor, Ralph Abernathy, continued to organize and lead nonviolent political protest demonstrations. However, his death distributed a major blow to the nonviolent phase of the Civil Rights Movement, as “no other black leader could match King’s ability to rally large numbers of

8 Leaders of the Community on the Move for Equality (COME) desired to bring King to Memphis to help rally the community to support the Sanitation Strike. Thousands of persons attended Mason Temple to hear King and numerous persons participated in the march on March 28.; Adam Fairclough, To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King Jr. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 370-374.
people from both races to actively participate in the cause for civil rights.”

This study primarily concentrates on the participation of COGIC members in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement during the years from 1954 to 1968 when King’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance was a popular protest strategy that many persons utilized to pursue social justice.

**Central Argument**

Employing historical, sociological, theo-ethical, and hermeneutical methods, this dissertation examines Church of God in Christ (COGIC) members’ engagements in the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1954-1968. I also explore the Memphis Movement from the vantage point of COGIC members and leaders to reveal their unique insights and religious, cultural, and ethical perspectives. The dissertation argues that Memphis COGIC members were not apolitical and divorced from the Memphis Civil Rights Movement but endeavored to combat racial injustice and inequality through a diversity of means, including through politics, nonviolent direct action, and striving for spiritual empowerment. African American COGIC leaders and members offered significant contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, giving spatial, financial, cultural, and religious resources to the Memphis Movement. COGIC Civil Rights activists opposed racial and economic injustice through collaborating with

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political protest activists and through simultaneously safeguarding spiritual means of resistance and empowerment.

**Research Methodology**

To study civil rights activism among Memphis COGIC members, I employ an interdisciplinary approach, utilizing tools of analysis from history, sociology, theology, and hermeneutics. Religious history is the primary methodology for this dissertation. Seeking to uncover saints’ involvements in the Memphis Movement, I gathered primary source materials from special collections at libraries in Memphis, Tennessee; New York, New York; Los Angeles, California; Springfield, Missouri, and Lancaster, Texas. I also explored a variety of newspapers especially Memphis newspapers such as the Memphis World, Tri-State Defender, Commercial Appeal, and Press-Scimitar. Additionally, I consulted COGIC denominational literature including editions of The Whole Truth and Lifted Banners newspapers, Annual Holy Convocation Souvenir Programs, and International Women’s Convention Programs and Souvenir Books.

As well as consulting newspapers and other archival resources, I gathered additional information by employing sociological qualitative research such as conducting oral history interviews with COGIC persons who lived in Memphis during the Civil Rights Movement (See Appendix A for Interview Questions). During my oral history research, I attended convocation meetings at the Memphis Headquarters District and I invited several members to participate in the study. Ten COGIC members were willing to share their stories, but several persons who could have shared decided not to participate despite the promise of confidentiality. Some persons who chose not to participate expressed that they did not want to misrepresent or give a negative
representation of the church or church leaders. While there are several benefits to oral history interviews, Stephen Everett notes that this technique has some limitations. For example, interviewees may be dishonest or unwilling to discuss certain matters or errors “even years after the fact.” Everett also argues that some interviewees may not be able to provide accurate accounts of the past because of deficits in memory. Although the Civil Rights Movement occurred more than four decades ago, the value of the interviews is not necessarily diminished. During the study, some elderly persons were able to recall significant events and experiences that they experienced several decades ago. As well as interviews I conducted, I also consulted several interviews done by other researchers during the Civil Rights era. The Sanitation Strike Interviews, a collection of 247 interviews created from 1968-1972 by the Memphis Search for Meaning Committee, were particularly helpful.

Because religion and theological arguments and grammar have often informed the activism of black Christians, this dissertation also utilizes theological tools of analysis. Appropriating theologian George Lindbeck’s *cultural-linguistic* understanding of theology, I hold theology to be the doctrines or beliefs that guide the behavior and action of particular communities. In my discussion, I connect theology and ethics. I employ

\[\text{[Equation]}\]

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11 Ibid.

12 The interviews are a result of a partnership between Rhodes College and the University of Memphis. The interviews are available [http://www.crossroadstofreedom.org/](http://www.crossroadstofreedom.org/) (accessed June 18, 2013).

the term theo-ethics to underline ways in which communities’ theological doctrines inform their choices and actions. I examine saints’ diverse theological positions towards social oppression and study how COGIC theology and beliefs impacted the Civil Rights activism of COGIC members. Examining a plethora of denominational theological sources, my research explores Holiness-Pentecostal doctrine from the early twentieth century to the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. To analyze Memphis COGIC leaders’ thoughts and perspectives about the civil rights movement and social justice, I study the sermons and writings of influential COGIC leaders such as Bishop James O. Patterson Sr., the first presiding bishop of COGIC.

As well as employing theological tools of analysis, I also utilize a hermeneutic of suspicion to detect and critique problematic concerns as it relates to some COGIC members’ theology and their postures towards social activism. Within the larger Christian tradition, liberation, feminist, and queer theologians and biblical scholars have employed a hermeneutic of suspicion to pinpoint and critique racism, patriarchy, and

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14 In *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretive History*, Paul Ricouer juxtaposes three “masters of suspicion” (Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Karl Marx) with some notable phenomenologists such as Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade to explain the crisis in philosophy and hermeneutics that surfaces as a result of “double meanings” that are inherent in symbols or texts. The conflict of interpretation involves two opposing hermeneutics, the *demythologizing of meaning* (hermeneutic of suspicion) versus the *restoration of meaning* (hermeneutics of trust). On one hand, the scholar who appropriates the former hermeneutic approaches symbols as illusions and myths to be demystified and seeks to interpret symbols from outside of the symbol system, perceiving symbols as disguised signals pointing to deeper layers of meaning. On the other hand, the scholar who seeks to restore the meaning of symbols respects the sacred and mysterious nature of religious symbols and endeavors to illuminate and unpack the kernels of truths within symbols. Unlike with Ricouer’s masters of suspicion, my objective is not to argue that Christian and/or holiness Pentecostal faith symbols are illusions and should be completely rejected. However, I aim to critique oppressive concerns within the Pentecostal tradition. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Denis Savage, trans. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 6-9, 27.
heterosexism within the Christian church and even within the biblical text.\textsuperscript{15} The critiques offered by black liberation theologians such as James Cone have been sharp and cutting. For example, Cone argued that white churches that “took the lead in establishing slavery as an institution and segregation as a pattern in society by sanctioning all white churches” manifested the antichrist in contemporary times.\textsuperscript{16} Writing as a Christian theologian and as a member of the Christian church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church in particular, Cone exercised a hermeneutic of suspicion by seeking to expose corrupt, distorted presentations of the Christian gospel. His critical analysis of the church and his constructive theology related the gospel to blacks’ experience of suffering and enabled many black Christians to see that God and Jesus Christ supported blacks in their struggle for freedom and liberation. The hermeneutic of suspicion permits theologians to examine elements of Christian theology that are disconcerting. I employ the hermeneutic of suspicion to analyze and critique Holiness-Pentecostal doctrines that have overemphasized the role divine agency plays in the advancement of social justice and have neglected to acknowledge how human agency and creativity factor significantly in blacks’ struggles for freedom and justice.


Literature Review

When studying militancy among black Christians in the 1960s, sociologist Gary Marx argued that black religion functions as an opiate for African Americans.\(^{17}\) Surveying 1,119 respondents in Chicago, New York, Atlanta, and Birmingham collectively, he found that blacks who were very religious and attended church services regularly were less likely to support civil rights struggles than blacks who were not committed to the church. He also argued that blacks who were members of predominantly white denominations such as Presbyterian,Episcopalian, or Congregationalist churches were more militant than blacks who belonged to independent black denominations such as Baptists and Methodists, and blacks who were members of “sects and cults” were even less militant than black Methodists or Baptists.\(^{18}\)

Sociologists Hart M. Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen refuted Marx’s argument that blacks are more otherworldly than whites. Analyzing Gallop Poll data collected through the 1950s and 1960s and doing survey research among blacks and whites in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Nelsen and Nelsen found that black Christians, even Christians with a mainstream conservative theological orientation, were more inclined than white Christians to support their ministers being involved in protest demonstrations and to speak favorably of the work of Martin Luther King.\(^{19}\) While Nelsen and Nelsen

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\(^{18}\) Marx, *Protest and Prejudice*, 98.

found orthodoxy to be a predictor of militancy, they suggested sectarianism was negatively related to militancy.\textsuperscript{20} They defined sectarianism as “an extreme religious conservatism or an otherworldly orientation” that is characterized by “a charismatic and non-professional leadership,” “stringent” membership standards, and an aversion to participation in “community affairs and controversial subjects.”\textsuperscript{21} Thus, though Nelsen and Nelsen disagreed with Marx’s contention that blacks are less militant than whites, both Marx and Nelsen and Nelsen perceived black sectarians as being otherworldly or sectarian. Yet, neither Marx nor Nelsen and Nelsen acknowledged the revolutionary impulses lodged within black Pentecostal religion and culture. My analysis of COGIC protest activists dismantles the Marx and Nelsen and Nelsen generalization of Pentecostals as sectarian or “charismatic” and “non-professional” and explains ways in which Memphis saints’ Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs inspired them to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Notable COGIC leaders such as Bishop C.H. Mason, Mother Lillian Brooks Coffey, Arenia Mallory, and Bishop Patterson were charismatic but were also astute businesspersons. Furthermore, I show that early saints were not resistant to being controversial. C.H. Mason, the founder of COGIC, defied racial customs and openly fellowshipped with white Christians. Despite the threat of backlash from the establishment, Mason affirmed his religious convictions and refused to enter the draft during World War I. I argue that Mason’s theological emphasis on racial solidarity within the body of Christ and his positions regarding not participating in war enabled

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 119-123.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 7, 106-116.
some Memphis COGIC activists to connect with Dr. King’s nonviolent philosophy and vision for beloved community during the Civil Rights Movement.

In *African American Religion in the 20th Century: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation*, anthropologists Hans Baer and Merrill Singer also suggest that black Holiness-Pentecostals are otherworldly. Instead of comparing blacks to whites as Marx and Nelsen and Nelsen did in their studies, they offer a comparative analysis of black religious persons’ responses to racism. Baer and Singer contend that African American religious traditions including mainstream churches (Baptists and Methodists), conversionist churches (Holiness-Pentecostals), Messianic-Nationalist institutions (Nation of Islam), and thamaturgical religious groups (spiritualist churches), responded to institutional oppressions, namely racism and classism, through either resisting or accommodating to the establishment. As it relates to my focus, the authors categorize Holiness-Pentecostal churches as “accomodationist” and otherworldly. They assumed that Holiness-Pentecostals’ spiritual and sanctified beliefs prohibited them from providing a strong critique of racism and capitalism and led them to focus on personal transformation rather than social transformation.\(^2\) I challenge Baer and Singer’s argument by pinpointing how COGIC leaders and members resisted social evil in more expansive ways than the “accommodation and resistance” dialectic permits. I argue that non-activist Memphis COGIC members were not content with racial injustice or only preoccupied with personal change. However, they fought against racial injustice through seeking to transcend it by pursuing Christian perfection and excellence, through praying

for divine deliverance, and through seeking to promote and establish interracial Christian community. Rather than merely being concerned about their personal salvation, in each of these ways, many saints were aspiring to strengthen and improve their families, communities, and society. Instead of viewing personal and social transformation through an either/or framework as Baer and Singer argue, COGIC activists such as J.O. Patterson Sr. connected personal and social transformation by emphasizing that spiritual empowerment is essential for social transformation. My project troubles the this-worldly and otherworldly binary and examines the resistance and protest threads in black Pentecostal faith and culture that anthropologists Baer and Singer overlooked. I discuss ways Memphis saints engaged in political protest campaigns such as downtown boycotts and the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike.

Few historians of African American religion have given serious attention to COGIC and the Civil Rights Movement. In an article entitled, “‘Doing All the Good We Can’: The Political Witness of African American Holiness and Pentecostal Churches in Post-Civil Rights Era,” historian David Daniels III focuses on the post-Civil Rights activism of black Holiness-Pentecostal churches.23 Positing that many black Holiness-Pentecostals tended to stress divine agency over human agency, Daniels argues that only a minority of black Pentecostals affirmed political protest during the Civil Rights era and many black Holiness and Pentecostal leaders debated the legitimacy of clergy becoming

involved in politics at all.²⁴ He argues that the Civil Rights Movement “in unprecedented ways” legitimated and inspired the engagements of many post-civil Rights black Pentecostal activists.²⁵ Because his primary agenda was to explain the post-Civil Rights activism of black Pentecostals, Daniels gives only marginal attention to political protest activism among black Pentecostals during the Civil Rights era. In his discussion of black Pentecostal political protest activism during this period, he does not provide detailed analysis of COGIC saints’ involvements in the Civil Rights Movement. Through providing a focused interdisciplinary analysis of the social and political engagements of Memphis saints, and through interviewing COGIC activists, my research endeavors to provide a more descriptive and thorough discussion of the political protest engagements of black Pentecostal pastors and members during the Civil Rights Movement. This is important because saints’ involvements in the Movement have frequently been left out of Civil Rights historical narratives.

In addition to Daniels, historian Calvin White Jr. discusses COGIC’s involvements in the Civil Rights Movement in The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ.²⁶ White provides a history of the ascent of the COGIC denomination during the Jim Crow era, the Interwar Period, and the Great Migration. He

²⁴ Ibid., 164. Through using the language of prophetic radicalism, Daniels appropriates Robert Franklin’s discussion of five forms of social witness that have been present among black Christians, including grassroots revivalism, pragmatic accommodationism, redemptive nationalism, positive-thought materialism, and prophetic radicalism.; Robert Michael Franklin, Another Day’s Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 44-45.

²⁵ Ibid.

gives explicit attention to COGIC’s development as a juggernaut among black Christians denominations during the modern era despite the fact that some early twentieth century black religious groups’ politics of respectability led them to demean Mason’s folk religious practices and expressions. White devotes an entire chapter to “COGIC and the National Civil Rights Movement.” He argues that persons with a COGIC background had a major impact on the national Civil Rights movement, including figures such as Medgar Evers, a Civil Rights activist from Mississippi who served as field secretary for the NAACP and became a martyr for the movement, and Mamie Till—the mother of Emmet Till who protested the violent slaying of her son by having an open-casket funeral so the world could see his mutilated body. Besides noting that these persons were COGIC, White does not make a clear connection between how the activists’ beliefs factored in their activism. Furthermore, he primarily discusses COGIC’s role in the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike and gives scant attention to saints’ involvements in the broader Memphis Movement. My work reconstructs the history of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis and gives much more detailed discussion and analysis to various ways saints participated in civil rights campaigns in Memphis. I concentrate attention on the Memphis Movement because Memphis is the location of the COGIC headquarters, and Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his last sermon at Mason Temple COGIC in 1968 during the Sanitation Workers Strike.

Several historians have provided detailed histories of the Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee in general and in the city of Memphis in particular. Bobby Lovett’s *The Civil Rights Movement In Tennessee: A Narrative History* includes extensive coverage of various civil rights initiatives throughout the state of Tennessee, including marches, sit-
ins, and African Americans’ switch from the Republican to the Democratic Party in Tennessee. Though his work focuses on other cities besides Memphis such as Nashville, his study helps me to contextualize the Memphis Movement in the framework of the broader Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee. Furthermore, his in-depth and well-documented research provided some discussion of COGIC’s engagements in the Memphis Movement. For example, he mentions Mason Temple and a few COGIC figures such as Bishop James O. Patterson Sr. and James O. Patterson Jr. However, as his objective was to cover the Civil Rights Movement throughout the entire state of Tennessee, he does not give focused attention to COGIC and black Pentecostals’ contributions to the Civil Rights struggle in Memphis.

While Lovett’s work examined the Movement throughout the state of Tennessee, since Memphis was the location where King was assassinated, several researchers have concentrated on the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. Two significant works that relate to my research focus are David Tucker’s *Black Pastors and Leaders: Memphis, 1819-1972* and Michael K. Honey’s *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign*. Tucker’s work offers detailed biographical sketches of prominent black clergy in Memphis, Tennessee, from 1819 to 1972. He discusses the roles and diverse political-theological orientations of Memphis black ministers in different denominations during the antebellum, post-Civil War, and Civil


Rights periods, including Reverends Benjamin A. Imes, Thomas O. Fuller, Sutton E. Griggs, Charles Harrison Mason, James M. Lawson Jr., and James O. Patterson Sr. Though my work explores several of the COGIC church leaders that Tucker examined and builds from his historical analysis, our studies have a different scope and objective. My dissertation concentrates on the Civil Rights activism of a broader variety of COGIC leaders and members in Memphis, and I also discuss the activism of rank-and-file black Pentecostals in the pews and explore their diverse political-theological orientations. Through focusing my analysis on activism among COGIC leaders and through utilizing more recent findings, my research uncovers significant Civil Rights COGIC activists such as Gilbert Earl Patterson, whom Tucker did not highlight in 1975. While my approach is primarily historical and descriptive, my theological analysis of COGIC’s participation in the Memphis Movement is more in depth than Tucker’s work.

Honey proffers an excellent narrative replete with insightful details that explain the Memphis Sanitation Worker’s Strike. Centering his history on Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s Poor People Campaign, he discusses King’s involvement in the strike and explains how the strike ultimately culminated as his final campaign. His work is valuable to my dissertation, as he documents several specific ways that COGIC leaders and members factored in the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike. Yet, his analysis centers on King rather than the local Memphis COGIC participants. Since King delivered his final sermon at Mason Temple COGIC, this dissertation examines COGIC’s involvement in the Sanitation Workers Strike and the broader Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. I endeavor to explore the Memphis Movement from the angle of COGIC leaders and members.
Focusing on the perspectives of COGIC members allows me to analyze how members’ theology factored in their engagements in the Movement. My analysis differs from Pentecostal scholars who aspire to defend Holiness-Pentecostal themes and symbols rather than critically interrogate them. In his unpublished dissertation, “A Theoretical and Historical Comparison of Black Political and Religious Movements,” black Pentecostal political scientist James Tinney refuted the prevailing assumption that Pentecostals are apolitical. He argued that black Pentecostals across various Pentecostal traditions have demonstrated their inherent political nature by employing spiritual power to affect social, economic, and political changes and by maintaining a positive faith that God could empower them to affect “the present transformation of political kingdoms.”

Black Pentecostals believed that by appropriating spiritual power they could achieve “social, economic, and political change.” While I agree with Tinney that COGIC Civil Rights activists emphasized striving for political power is essential to social change, I delve deeper into Memphis COGIC members’ diverse theo-ethical postures toward the Civil Rights Movement through engaging C.H. Mason’s theo-ethical commitments to evangelism, holiness, and spiritual empowerment. I acknowledge and analyze ways some saints’ Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs prevented them from participating in the Civil Rights movement. I discuss how Mason’s theological doctrines factored in the Civil Rights protest engagements of COGIC activists. Hence, in contrast to Tinney, I provide a


30 Ibid.
more expansive discussion of how COGIC theology impacted saints’ participation in the Movement.

COGIC theologian and ethicist Leonard Lovett also challenged the assumption that black Pentecostals are apolitical and socially detached in his unpublished dissertation, “Black Holiness Pentecostalism: Implications for Ethics and Social Transformation.” Critical of black liberation theologians such as James Cone’s weak concentration on the Holy Spirit, Lovett argued that black Pentecostalism’s emphasis on spiritual empowerment offers profound implications for ethics and liberation from social oppressions. The major implication that he deduces is that effective struggles for liberation accompany authentic encounters with the Holy Spirit. He argues that humans who encounter the Holy Spirit will be inspired to engage in liberation and to oppose personal and social evil. While spiritual striving can have significant implications for social change, spiritual quest did not by itself compel many black Pentecostals to become engaged in the Movement. Lovett overestimates the influence spiritual empowerment has on social and political activism. I argue that spiritual experience did not necessarily lead all Pentecostals to join the Movement. Rather than defending Holiness-Pentecostal symbols, my work theologically interrogates black Holiness-Pentecostals’ beliefs. I discuss ways some COGIC members’ beliefs in divine power led them to disavow political protest. For instance, some COGIC members explained they did not participate in the Movement because they trusted God would fight their battles. Naming this response the battle is the Lord’s motif, my work critiques some Holiness-Pentecostals

and black Christians’ historical appropriation of this biblical theme, which is based on the
Exodus narrative in which God miraculously freed the people of Israel through divine
means. Engaging other passages in Scripture where this theme occurs such as in the story
of David and Goliath, I argue that the battle is the Lord’s motif also affirms courageous
action on the part of human beings. David’s insistence that the battle is the Lord’s gave
him the nerve and audacity to face and challenge Goliath, a Philistine giant who
intimidated many Israelite soldiers. Affirming the battle is the Lord’s theme in the David
and Goliath narrative as opposed to the Exodus narrative, I argue that prayer and other
spiritual traditions may have given some black Christian Civil Rights activists in general
and COGIC activists in particular the courage to step on the battlefield and fight racial
injustice and inequality during the Jim Crow era. I relate this interpretation of the battle
of the Lord’s motif to Holiness-Pentecostals’ belief in spiritual empowerment, which
holds that the Holy Spirit can boost the strength and power of human beings.

**The Layout of the Argument**

Chapter 2 provides a historical and theological foundation for my study. As
COGIC is an African American Holiness-Pentecostal denomination, I engage the
following questions: What is the Holiness in Holiness-Pentecostalism? What is
Pentecostal about African American-Holiness Pentecostalism? What is African about
African American Holiness-Pentecostalism? What is American about African-American
Holiness Pentecostalism? Besides providing a discussion of the theological roots of
African American Holiness-Pentecostalism, I examine each of these layers of saints’
identities to set the stage for my examination of how saints’ religious, racial, and national
identities inform their engagement in political activism. Responding to Cheryl Sanders’
“exilic thesis,” which holds saints’ (African American Holiness-Pentecostals) religious practices and racial differences resulted in their alienation from the dominant culture, I argue that Sanders’ work primarily attends to saints’ religious and racial identities but does not engage their understanding of their nationalistic identities. I appropriate social psychologists Xenia Chyssochoou and Evanthia Lyons’s theory of nationhood identification to demonstrate ways in which saints’ embrace of their identity as United States citizens motivated them to value American democratic principles and to participate in American civic life and politics. As proud citizens of the United States, they were conscious of their constitutional rights and felt that they should be treated as equals with whites. I discuss ways a variety of COGIC members, including Arenia Mallory, the president of Saints Industrial School and a leader in the National Council of Negro Women, and Bishop Louis H. Ford, a COGIC minister who actively engaged in Chicago politics, worked within the structures of American democracy to advance equality and justice for blacks during the pre-Civil Rights era.

In Chapter 3, I argue that COGIC leaders and members also contributed to the struggle for freedom and justice through joining and participating in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement. Doing archival work, I discuss how Mason Temple was an important site for political rallies, voter registration drives, and civil rights planning meetings. Memphis COGIC leaders did not merely open their church doors to Civil Rights activists, but COGIC leaders such as Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. frequently collaborated with local

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Civil Rights figures such as Rev. Henry Bunton (a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Memphis), Maxine Smith (executive secretary of the NAACP in Memphis), Rev. William Lawson (the founder of the Community on the Move for Equality—COME), and others during the Memphis Movement. Memphis saints participated in voter registration campaigns, the local NAACP, protest marches, boycotts, and other demonstrations. While I give significant attention to the roles that COGIC pastors and leaders played in the Memphis Movement, I utilize data from oral history interviews to highlight ways a variety of Memphis COGIC members contributed to the movement as well.

Chapter 4 analyzes the theo-ethics of Memphis saints and examines how their theological beliefs informed their postures towards protest activism. I acknowledge that some members’ Holiness-Pentecostal theology led them to avoid participating in the Movement and to seek to oppose racism in alternate ways such as through aspiring to transcend racism by living sanctified and through praying to God to change social conditions. Yet, I argue that Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists joined the Movement because King’s emphasis on integration and nonviolence resonated with their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs, including for example Mason’s pacifism and Seymour’s beliefs in interracial spiritual unity. Furthermore, I contend that Memphis COGIC activists such as J.O. Patterson Sr. aspired to assert Holiness-Pentecostal thought into the Movement ethos and to encourage blacks pursuing social change to value deeply the importance of spiritual presence and empowerment. While Patterson supported direct action, he and other COGIC Civil Rights activists ostensibly upheld spiritual striving to be most central to the struggle for justice.
Chapter 5 provides a brief conclusion to the dissertation. I discuss some methodological challenges of the study, the implications of the research findings, the contributions the study makes to African American religion, and some possible trajectories for future research.

**Contributions to the Study of African American Religion**

This dissertation contributes to religious studies in multiple ways. First, this work engages the otherworldly versus this-worldly and accommodationist versus resistance debates, central topics of conversation among religious scholars in general and scholars of African American religion in particular. My research troubles the assumption that members of COGIC are strictly otherworldly and that saints simply acquiesced to the status quo and did not strive to resist racial injustice in meaningful ways. I demonstrate that members of COGIC have historically affirmed their identity as United States citizens and have endeavored to strengthen their communities through participating in American civic life and through pragmatically negotiating with the political establishment. Furthermore, Memphis saints in particular actively engaged in the Memphis Movement alongside blacks from other denominations. This research influences scholars to rethink the meaning of Baer and Singer’s rigid dialectical categories. Second, the study admonishes scholars of religion and the Civil Rights Movement to extend their scope of analysis beyond mainline Baptist and Methodist figures who have received national attention for being at the forefront of the Movement. Approaching the Civil Rights Movement from a local perspective rather than a national viewpoint allows scholars to explore specific ways in which a broader variety of black religious groups participated in the Movement as well as to examine how different religious groups’ theology impacted
their participation. Lastly through documenting and exploring the perspectives of COGIC Civil Rights activists, this dissertation encourages scholars to reconsider the potential value spiritual beliefs and practices have had and may continue to have for black Christians’ struggles for social justice in the United States.
Chapter Two: Religion, Race, and Nationhood in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism

In this chapter, I provide a historical overview of African American Holiness-Pentecostalism by answering the following questions: What is the Holiness in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism? What is Pentecostal about African American Holiness-Pentecostalism? What is African about African American Holiness-Pentecostalism? What is American about African American Holiness-Pentecostalism?33 Beyond engaging these questions to provide a historical and theological foundation of African American Holiness-Pentecostalism, these questions set the stage for my analysis of saints’ involvements in civic and political activism.

In answering these questions, I discuss the Wesleyan-Holiness roots of Pentecostalism, the emergence of the Holiness Movement in the late nineteenth century, the development of the Pentecostal Movement from the Holiness Movement in the early twentieth century. I highlight ways that some African American Holiness-Pentecostals affirmed their identity as United States citizens and participated in civic life and politics. I acknowledge that there is much theological diversity within African American Holiness-Pentecostalism including Trinitarian Pentecostals, Oneness or Jesus Only Groups, Father Only groups, and several other denominations.34 However, I give

33 Throughout this chapter, I use black and African American interchangeably. Here I employ the term African American instead of black to highlight the duality of African American culture. Furthermore, the term African in African American points to the African cultural roots of African American Holiness-Pentecostalism.

34 There is much theological diversity within black holiness-Pentecostalism. George Eaton Simpson notes the following five main variations among black Pentecostal groups in the United States: 1)
particular attention to the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) because this predominantly African American denomination is the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States with nearly 5.5 million members and is the largest Pentecostal denomination. Furthermore, COGIC is the oldest Holiness-Pentecostal denomination, established as a Pentecostal denomination in 1907.

After providing a historical overview of African American Holiness-Pentecostalism, the last section of this chapter explores the relationship between the racial, religious, and national identities of African American Holiness Pentecostals. My analysis engages Cheryl Sander’s *exilic* thesis, which holds that saints’ (African American Holiness-Pentecostals) religious practices and racial differences resulted in their alienation from the dominant culture. Sanders’ work mainly focuses on the categories of religion and race and gives weak attention to nationhood within the African American Holiness Pentecostal experience. In line with Sanders, many scholars of African American Holiness-Pentecostalism have failed to discuss African American Holiness-Pentecostalism and nationhood. Seeking to fill this void, I appropriate social

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psychologists Xenia Chyssochoou and Evanthia Lyons’s theory of nationhood identification, which argues that religious and ethnic minorities that view their religious/ethnic identities as compatible with their national identity are more likely to be involved in “collective claims for minority rights” or political demonstrations than minority groups that perceive their religious/ethnic identities as conflicting with the national group. Building from my historical discussion and from my application of Chyssochoou and Lyons’s theory, my central argument is that despite experiencing religious and racial oppression in the early twentieth century, some saints viewed their religious, racial, and national identities as compatible. Furthermore, their self-understanding of their rights as United States citizens impacted their participation in American civic life, in democratic and political processes, and in what Robert Franklin defines as pragmatic accommodationism—pursuing social order through cooperating and negotiating with “the political and corporate status quo” or through working within the system. For example, Charles Harrison Mason (the founder and leader of COGIC) negotiated business deals with mayors and political officials in Memphis to acquire financial resources for the COGIC denomination. Arenia Mallory and Lillian Brooks

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Coffey, prominent COGIC leaders in the COGIC Women’s Department, participated in the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), an organization that endeavored to help women develop competence in the “political, economic, social, and civic and cultural life of America.” NCNW members advocated for a vast array of social justice issues including equal educational opportunities, “full and unrestricted citizenship” rights, and “federal action to abolish lynching.”

The “Holiness” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism

The Wesleyan Doctrine of Sanctification

The Wesleyan Movement contributed constitutively to African American Holiness-Pentecostalism. John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, pioneered the second blessing or Christian perfection tradition, a tradition that stressed a deeper Christian faith beyond the initial moment of conversion. In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley defines sanctification as “the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions,” and he argues that

40 Elton Hal Weaver III, “‘Mark the Perfect Man’: The Rise of Bishop C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Memphis, 2007), 267-270.


42 National Council of Negro Women. “Historical Background” Bethune Cookman Papers. Rice University Library.

sanctification occurs during an “instant” and “after justification.” Wesleyan theologian William Abraham defines Wesley’s second blessing doctrine as: 1) an *exercise in ascetic theology* in which Christians can strive for perfection and do not have to surrender to a life of moral defeat; 2) a *vision of realized eschatology* that holds Christian perfection is obtainable in the present; and 3) a *psychology of spiritual development* that contends perfection does not typically happen during conversion but occurs after conversion. Wesley believed Christians could live free from sin through spiritual discipline and devotion. The second blessing tradition provides the spiritual and intellectual foundation for the Holiness and Pentecostal movements.

Wesley experienced conversion on May 24, 1738, during a prayer meeting at Aldersgate Street. Despite experiencing the first blessing of salvation during this moment, Wesley’s reading of Bishop Taylor’s *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying* and William Law’s *Treatise on Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* influenced him to seek to experience Christian perfection, the second blessing. Although the literature is not clear on when and how Wesley experienced

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sanctification, some persons within the Holiness tradition hold that Wesley experienced sanctification on January 1, 1739, during a prayer meeting at Fetter-Lane. Wesley wrote:

> About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His Majesty, we broke out with one voice, ‘We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.’

After his experience of sanctification, Wesley wrote a book entitled, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley*, and he repeatedly issued updated editions of his work throughout his ministry. During the organization of the Methodist Church in the United States in 1784, the first leaders of the American Conference, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright, adopted Wesley’s views on holiness. The Methodist’s first *Book of Discipline*, produced in 1788, included a complete printing of Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

Many revivalists committed to Wesley’s sanctification doctrine and desired to experience God on a deeper level. They brought fiery, heartfelt religion to the American colonies, and they willingly shared the gospel with enslaved African Americans as early as the First Great Awakening (1730-60). Prior to the American Revolution, few blacks converted to Christianity because many white ministers were not concerned about blacks’

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spiritual welfare. During the Great Awakening, white evangelical revivalists such as George Whitefield migrated to the United States from England and traveled throughout the American colonies ministering to whites and blacks. Rather than focusing on Christian catechesis and teaching the slaves the Apostles Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, early Baptist and Methodist revivalists aspired to make Christianity accessible and appealing to the slaves by encouraging them to accept Christ through faith and to seek to experience God in their hearts. The Trinitarian theology that white evangelists preached resonated with enslaved African Americans’ traditional African cosmologies, including their beliefs in ancestor gods, nature gods, a Supreme Deity, and spirit possession. Hence, blacks responded favorably to Baptist and Methodist evangelists and they joined Baptist and Methodist biracial churches. For instance, in 1768 several blacks were members of John Street Church, and though they experienced discrimination and were not treated as equals with whites, they participated in the service through listening to sermons, singing hymns, participating in the sacraments, and other religious ceremonies with whites.

The First Great Awakening was essentially a northern movement and did not have a presence in the South. Revivalism did not come to the South until the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830). During the Second Great Awakening, ministers inspired

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southerners to assemble in outdoor camp meetings to pray, repent of sins, and wait for God to deliver them, renew their hearts, and transform their lives. Blacks and whites sang, prayed, and shouted together during the camp meeting revivals. During the First and Second Great Awakenings, many blacks embraced Christianity because they found that evangelical religion aligned with their traditional African worldviews and because they connected with white evangelists’ emphasis on religious experience.\textsuperscript{52}

Charles Finney, a prominent leader in the Second Great Awakening emphasized the experience of sanctification. While in his law office, he says that he experienced “a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit” as “waves and waves of liquid love.”\textsuperscript{53} After this experience, Finney insisted his sermons began to have a significant emotional edge. He became known for his extemporaneous and fiery preaching under the power of the Holy Spirit. As president of Oberlin College, he endeavored to advance Wesley’s emphasis on entire sanctification. Oberlin scholars promulgated their own version of Wesley’s Christian perfection, “Oberlin Perfectionism,” which gave greater attention to ethics and Kantian moral philosophy as well as to Christians’ capacity to achieve Christian perfection.\textsuperscript{54} Oberlin Perfectionism also identified the baptism of the Holy Spirit as being central to sanctification.\textsuperscript{55} Persons affiliated with Oberlin College published several


\textsuperscript{55} Synan, \textit{The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States}, 15.
articles and pamphlets related to sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Henry Cowles, a member of the faculty at Oberlin, wrote two brief sermons in 1840 on the “baptism with the Holy Ghost” for the *Oberlin Evangelist*, and he also later wrote *On Being Filled with the Holy Ghost.*"^56^ John Morgan wrote two essays for the *Oberlin Quarterly Review*, entitled “The Holiness Acceptable unto God” and “The Gift of the Holy Ghost.” Morgan stressed that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not restricted to the Early Church but is available to all Christians, and he also argued that the baptism of the Holy Spirit differs from the Spirit of God that leads sinners to conversion. He contended that the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised for saints.^57^

Committed to perfectionism, Wesley and Finney opposed both moral (private, individual sins) and social evil (systemic, *organized* evil).^58^ Both revivalists not only focused on sharing the gospel and saving souls, but they also pursued social reform and opposed the institution of slavery. Viewing the institution of slavery as antithetical to Christianity and to the moral law, Wesley argued, “Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature.”^59^ Finney, a supporter of the anti-slavery

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movement, considered slavery to be a “a great national sin” and “a sin of the Church.”

He felt that far too many churches were silently acquiescing to the issue.

Many reform movements that aimed to lead to a more perfect society such as the anti-slavery evolved from the holiness movement. During the Methodist General Conferences of 1824 and 1832 Methodist bishops encouraged laypersons to place a high emphasis on holiness, stating, “If Methodists give up the doctrine of entire sanctification, or suffer it to become a dead letter, we are a fallen people.”

Northern Methodist churches such as the Wesleyan Methodist Church in New York and New England also took a strong stance against slavery, and the pastors were not willing to compromise with slavery. During the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1844, southern and northern Methodist churches split over the issue. Many southern Methodist churches that upheld and defended the institution of slavery did not embrace Wesley’s doctrine of perfectionism.

Yet, after the South was torn apart following the Civil War, some southern Methodist churches began to call for a reemphasis on sanctification, saying: “Nothing is so much needed at the present time throughout all these lands, as a general and powerful


61 The temperance and women’s rights movement also evolved from the holiness movement.

62 Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition, 17

63 Citing The Methodist Pulpit, South (1858), Synan argues that “only one out of eighteen ‘representative’ sermons was Wesleyan in regard to sanctification.”; Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition, 19-20.
revival of scriptural holiness.”  In 1878, some bishops of Southern Methodist churches criticized their ministers for not regularly preaching holiness, and they admonished ministers to “reassert this grand doctrine.” Southern Holiness bishops were eager to revive holiness because they feared that the old-time camp meeting revival Methodism was dying and that seminary-educated ministers were moving away from revivalism through introducing organs, “robed choirs,” and allowing members to wear fashionable clothes to church.

They mourned that camp meeting grounds had changed from being places where persons go to shout and sing praises to God to being a place for persons to mix, mingle, and socialize.

The Holiness Movement

As southern leaders called for a revival of holiness, northern Methodist leaders sought to renew the camp meeting style of worship. Reverend William Osborn of the New Jersey Methodist Conference and Reverend John S. Inskip of the Green Methodist Episcopal Church invited Methodist ministers and laypersons committed to sanctification to participate in a camp meeting planning committee on June 13, 1867, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The persons who attended the meeting named themselves “the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness” and voted to hold a camp meeting at Vineland, New Jersey, from July 17 through July 26.

The committee

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64 Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition, 23-25.

65 Ibid., 27.

66 Ibid., 30.
publicized the meeting across denominational lines and issued a call for unity and revival:

Come, brothers and sisters of the various denominations, and let us in this forest-meeting, as in other meetings for the promotion of holiness, furnish an illustration of evangelical union, and make common supplication for the descent of the Spirit upon ourselves, the church, the nation, and the world.\textsuperscript{68}

The modern holiness movement officially commenced with a large camp meeting in Vineland, New Jersey in 1867, and thousands of persons attended.\textsuperscript{69} According to historian Melvin Dieter, “Overnight the town’s population swelled to almost double its 10,000 regular inhabitants as hundred of tents sprang up around the speaker’s stand on the camp ground.”\textsuperscript{70} During the close of the meeting, the Methodist leaders organized the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. The purpose of the organization was to revive the camp meeting style of worship and to share the gospel with sinners and to teach holiness. Between 1867 and 1883 the Methodist annual conferences held fifty-two national camp meetings in various northern locations. The meetings attracted large crowds and reached across denominational lines.\textsuperscript{71} The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness made the holiness movement

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{68} Synan, \textit{The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition}, 25.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{70} Melvin Easterday Dieter, \textit{The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century} (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 88.

\textsuperscript{71} Synan, \textit{The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition}, 26.; Dieter, \textit{The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century}, 88-89.
“extremely experience centered” and its commitment to holiness as an experience enabled the growth of the holiness revivals beyond the Methodist denomination.72

During the 1870s and 1880s the National Holiness Association published several periodicals such as the Guide to Holiness, The Christian Standard and Home Journal, and the Advocate of Holiness, which helped to advance the spread of holiness teachings. In addition to Methodist presses, several individuals published writings on sanctification. Phoebe Palmer’s The Way of Holiness was widely distributed throughout the South. Amanda Berry Smith, a freed slave who was a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and had experienced sanctification in 1868 after attending a holiness meeting led by Phoebe Palmer, was a leading advocate of holiness. Many blacks and whites read Smith’s Autobiography (1893), and her work helped advance holiness doctrines across racial and denominational lines.73 Smith wrote that she experienced sanctification while exiting the church after hearing a stirring sermon about the second blessing. She says:

I felt so wonderfully strange, yet I felt glorious…Just as I put my foot on the top step I seemed to feel a hand, the touch of which I cannot describe. It seemed to press me gently on the top of my head, and I felt something part and roll down and cover me like a great cloak! I felt it distinctly; it was done in a moment, and O what a mighty peace and power took possession of me! I felt the

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72 Ibid., 116.
73 Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition, 27.
touch of God from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and the welling up came, and I felt I must shout.\textsuperscript{74}

Following her sanctification experience, Smith became a traveling evangelist and spread the holiness message throughout the world, including Great Britain, Europe, Asia, Africa, and India.\textsuperscript{75} During the 1890s, southern holiness newspapers also dispersed Christian perfection doctrines to blacks and whites in the South.\textsuperscript{76} After reading holiness literature while living in Memphis, Tennessee in 1863 and attending a Quaker holiness meeting, Joanna P. Moore converted to holiness. Subsequently, she published a holiness periodical in Arkansas that was read by thousands of African Americans including black Baptist holiness leaders such as C.H. Mason and C.P. Jones.\textsuperscript{77}

Holiness teachings may have appealed to blacks Baptists and Methodists not only because the doctrines emphasized religious experience but also because sanctification doctrines could be utilized to promote social equality between blacks and whites and to affirm blacks’ personhood.\textsuperscript{78} Several white holiness evangelists such as L.P. Cushman and J.A. Williams denounced racial bigotry and promoted social equality on the grounds of perfectionist teachings.\textsuperscript{79} J. Livesey, a white holiness evangelist, argued that Christian


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Randall Stephens, \textit{The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South} (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 8.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 46.; Alexander, \textit{Black Fire}, 75.

\textsuperscript{78} Stephens, \textit{The Fire Spreads}, 86.
perfection teachings could elevate African Americans’ feelings of self-dignity, enabling them to see themselves “as common heirs with all the saints.” Holiness religion helped blacks to maintain “the highest dignity” despite racial prejudice and social injustice. For example, Black holiness Christians often expressed their “dignity and self-worth” through their clothing. Black holiness ministers such as C.H. Mason often wore a suit and a bowtie. Black holiness women often wore “plain gray, white, or black dresses and matches hats.” They aspired to reflect the image of a saint, a virtuous and holy person who had a strong relationship with God. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes also indicates that black holiness persons resisted racial stereotypes and strove to reflect a certain level of dignity by refusing to call each other by their first names in interracial venues and by placing only first initials and surnames on signs listing church officials.

The Wesleyan-holiness movement was a vibrant force within Methodism until the 1880s when perfectionism became controversial. In the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, D.D. Whedon, a Methodist leader, accused the National Holiness Association and its many periodicals and prayer meetings of “not being Wesleyan,” asserting “a living

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79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 87.
83 Ibid., 97-98.
Wesley would never admit them into the Methodist system.” The independency of the National Holiness Association did not fit with Methodist Church’s polity and tight structure. In the *Southern Methodist Review*, Leonida Rosser challenged persons who spoke against holiness by contending anyone who contests holiness combats Methodist because Methodism emerged in England as a holiness movement.87

During the 1880s a “come-outism” movement developed among radical defenders of holiness. In 1887, John P. Brooks published the “textbook of come-outism,” entitled *The Divine Church*.88 Brooks decided to leave the Methodist church because he felt it was becoming secular and was accommodating to culture through allowing secular gatherings and festivities and building expensive temples to satisfy its pride. The holiness of Brooks and other evangelists was more radical than the perfectionism taught earlier in the Wesleyan movement. Radical holiness evangelists in Kentucky, Iowa, and Texas criticized some Methodist preachers for dressing unholy and for engaging in worldly pleasures. Furthermore, radical holiness evangelists disdained Methodist’s lack of emotion and strong commitment to structure and formality.89

After the Civil War, personal, experiential Methodist revival religion began to lose ground to Darwinism, Socialism, higher criticism, and the social gospel. Higher criticism influenced many within seminaries to examine the historical and theological

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 36.
89 Ibid.
claims of the Bible. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* challenged the traditional
Biblical interpretation of the doctrine of creation.90 Rather than personal religious
experience, the Social Gospel movement emphasized advancing the kingdom of God by
changing the social and economic conditions within society that subjugated
underprivileged and poor persons. The Industrial Revolution enabled thousands of new
jobs to be created and allowed many persons to re-locate to urban locations. Many
upwardly mobile Christians disavowed the emotionalism of the holiness camp meetings
and desired to pursue respectability in worship.

Seeking to remain connected with the country folks and the old time religion,
radical holiness preachers attracted many of the followers from the Holiness Association.
For example, the Texas Holiness Association became controlled by “come-outers,” and
to counteract this group the Methodist church organized the “Northwest Texas Holiness
Association” to teach Wesleyan holiness. Radical holiness preachers in Texas taught
doctrines such as “sinless perfection,” “freedom from death,” “marital purity,” a third
blessing following sanctification called “the fire,” and that sanctified persons do not need
doctors or drugs.91 Holiness leaders attending a General Holiness Assembly in Chicago
wrote that holy living consisted of “keeping aloof from all worldly alliances” by not
being involved in “oath-bound secret orders,” maintaining “simplicity in dress,” and not

90 Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 37

91 Ibid., 36-37.
decorating the body with “gold and pearls and costly array.” The “come-outers” advocated for a more radical version of Christian perfectionism.

In addition to the “come-outers,” several leaders within the Methodist church also challenged Wesley’s perfectionist doctrines. In a sermon, Bishop Atticus Green Haygood insisted that sanctification was gradually attained by believers rather than during an instantaneous “second blessing.” Haygood ultimately contributed to the collapse of perfectionism in the Southern Methodist Church. Holiness doctrines also began to be challenged by theologians in the Methodist Church in 1884. Wilbur Tillett, a theologian at Vanderbilt University, argued that the concept of sanctification was “semi-Pelagian” and that holiness doctrine led Methodists to seek to attain salvation through works rather than through faith. The opposition to holiness teachings intensified as leaders within Methodist churches wrote books such as J. M. Boland’s The Problem of Methodism, George H. Hayes’s The Problem Solved, and James Mudge’s Progressive Sanctification that refuted the second blessing doctrine.

Around the same time Methodist leaders were writing books against the second blessing doctrine, holiness leaders wrote books that defended holiness doctrines such as Daniel Steele’s A Defense of Christian Perfection and Reverend Lovick Pierce’s A Miscellaneous Essay on Entire Sanctification: How It Was Lost to the Church and How It May and Must Be Regained. The holiness controversy came to a head in 1894 during the

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94 Ibid., 38.
General Conference of the southern Methodist Episcopal Church, when the conference issued a statement against the holiness movement, saying: “we deplore their teaching and methods in so far as they claim a monopoly of the experience, practice, and advocacy of holiness, and separate themselves from the body of ministers and disciples.” Following this statement, several Methodists committed to sanctification separated from the Methodist church and initiated holiness churches throughout the United States.

In 1895 Benjamin Hardin Irwin of Lincoln, Nebraska, founded the Fire Baptized Holiness Church, a radical offshoot of the American Holiness movement and a forerunner to the Pentecostal movement. Though Irwin embraced Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification, John Fletcher’s teaching on the “baptism of burning love” also had significant influence upon him. Irvin referred to Fletcher’s baptism of burning love as the “baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire.” Extrapolating from Fletcher’s teachings, Irwin was one of the first persons to hold that the baptism of the Holy Spirit with fire was a separate third blessing experience apart from sanctification. Believing he had already experienced sanctification, Irwin began to seek to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit with fire. He testified that once he received the baptism with fire he experienced “great ecstasy and demonstrations of joy.” He held revivals throughout the Midwest and emphasized fire baptism during his services. Many persons who attended his revival services signaled their reception of “the fire” by shouting, speaking in other tongues,

95 Ibid., 40.
97 Ibid.
falling out, dancing uncontrollably, and getting the “jerks.” Some persons in the Holiness movement rejected Irwin’s doctrine. For example, Isaiah Reed and S.B. Shaw, staunch followers of Wesley’s entire sanctification, condemned Irwin’s doctrine as “the third blessing heresy;” and they refused to permit it to be preached in their churches. Nevertheless, Irwin continued to travel throughout the South preaching his doctrine of fire baptism. He established his own independent association, called the Iowa Fire-Baptized Holiness Association, in Olmitz, Iowa, and organized additional branches in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The founders of the Church of God in Christ, C.H. Mason and C.P. Jones, split with the Baptist Association in Mississippi in 1896 because of their embrace of the doctrine of Christian perfection. Mason was born September 8, 1866, to former Afro-Baptist slaves in Shelby County, Tennessee. He became a Christian at twelve years old. In 1893 he accepted the call to ministry and received his minister’s license from Mount Gale Missionary Baptist Church. He experienced sanctification after reading passages from Scripture as well as Amanda Smith’s Autobiography. Subsequently, he began to devote himself to living holy and to preaching sanctification. During a revival meeting in Preston, Arkansas, he told persons attending the meeting that “sin was destroying them,

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 63.
100 Ibid
their churches and all that they possessed” and that “sin was the cause of all their sickness and disease.” Several Baptist leaders were uncomfortable with his perfectionist teachings. His brother, Nelson Mason expressed discomfort with his “uncompromising teaching against the practice of sin.” Reflecting on his life as a holiness minister, Mason said, “My life has been threatened by members of my own race because I would openly speak and preach against their unlawful and ungodly manner of living.”

Although many persons despised his holiness preaching, Mason’s holiness sermons and revival meetings appealed to scores of persons and led them to convert to the Christian faith and to seek to experience the second blessing.

In 1895 Mason pastored a Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and he continued to teach holiness. While in Jackson, he befriended a local Baptist leader, Charles Price Jones. The two connected because of their shared holiness convictions, and Mason says he admired Jones “spirit of love” and Jones’s commitment to the discipline of prayer. Mason and Jones upset many local Baptist leaders by organizing Holiness meetings among Baptists members in Mississippi in 1896. Disagreeing with their emphasis on sanctification, Baptist association leaders excommunicated Mason and Jones

102 Charisma, November 2007: 44.; Patterson, Ross, and Atkins, “History and Formative Years of COGIC,” 16.


106 Patterson, Ross, and Atkins, “History and Formative Years of COGIC,” 16.
from their Baptist churches. The holiness leaders then organized a meeting to establish a church committed to the doctrine of sanctification. In 1897 Mason, Jones, J.A. Jeter, W.S. Pleasant and others established COGIC as a holiness church.

The “Pentecostal” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism

Charles Parham’s Apostolic Faith Movement

Charles Fox Parham is central to the history of the Pentecostal Movement because he was the first Pentecostal leader to associate speaking in tongues with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a central doctrine among Pentecostals in North America. Parham was the founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement, an early Pentecostal movement that emphasized divine healing, speaking in tongues, and restoring the faith of the early apostles. Parham was born in Muscatine, Iowa, on June 4, 1873. Being ill and feeble as a child, he spent a significant amount of time reading the Bible. He accepted Christ into his life at thirteen years of age while attending a meeting of the Congregational Church. Though he felt God had called him, he was initially reluctant to enter a career in ministry because he desired to enjoy the material comforts of financial prosperity through pursuing a career in medicine. When he began to battle with rheumatoid fever, having excruciating joint pains, fevers, and headaches, he believed his sickness was God’s way of telling him he needed to accept and stop running from his call to ministry. After promising God he would surrender wholeheartedly to the ministry, Parham says his

107 Patterson, Ross, and Atkins, “History and Formative Years of COGIC,” 16.; Charles H. Pleas, Fifty Years Achievement from 1906-1956 (Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Press, 1906), 4-5.

severe pain started to subside. Still, he struggled to walk straight for several months because of the affects the rheumatic fever had upon his ankle joints. Parham testified that God healed his weak ankles and enabled him to leap on them after he prayed and promised God that he would commit fully to evangelistic ministry.¹⁰⁹

Parham’s experience of healing inspired him to make divine healing one of the central platforms of his ministry. One of his first initiatives was to open the Bethel Healing Home at Stone’s Folly, a luxurious mansion in Topeka, Kansas, in 1900. At the Bethel Healing Home, several sick persons experienced healing. Parham emphasized that the healing of the sick was a part of the great commission of Christ and a sign demonstrating God’s power operating in true believers.¹¹⁰ While at the Bethel Healing Home, he also enrolled about thirty-four students in a small bible school, “the College of Bethel.” Though many of the students believed they had already received the baptism of the Holy Spirit when they experienced sanctification, Parham taught his students that Spirit baptism was a third blessing besides the second blessing of sanctification.¹¹¹ In January 1901 he instructed his students to search diligently for Biblical evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. His students studied the book of Acts and found a scripture in the second chapter of Acts they believed provided biblical support that speaking in


¹¹¹ Irwin’s Fire-Baptized Holiness branch in Kansas influenced Parham to believe that baptism of the Holy Spirit was a separate Christian experience following sanctification.; Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement, 68.
tongues is a sign of Spirit baptism.¹¹² Agnes N. Ozman, one of Parham’s students, asked Parham and other students to lay hands upon her so that she might receive the Spirit baptism and speak in other tongues before going into the foreign missionary fields. Parham initially refused to pray for her because he had not received Spirit baptism himself, but he prayed nevertheless, and he said, “I had scarcely repeated three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her[,] a halo seemed to surround her head and face[,] and she began speaking in the Chinese languages, and was unable to speak English for three days.”¹¹³ Three days later, Parham and twelve of his students attempted to create their own version of the upper room. They fasted and prayed tirelessly until many of them experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit with tongues. One student, Samuel J. Riggins departed from the Bible school after the Pentecostal outpouring. He told a reporter with the Topeka Daily Capital: “I believe the whole of them are crazy.” Riggins enticed the interest of local media, and many journalists began to go to the Bethel College to see the events for themselves.¹¹⁴

Though Parham’s ministry received attention from the press, he did not gather the following that he had expected. He had less than a hundred followers, and the small attendance at the meetings did not enable him to receive enough financial contributions to

¹¹² Acts 2:4, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” New Revised Standard Version


fund his vision for the movement. His meetings in Kansas City and Lawrence, Kansas in February of 1901 were not very impactful. To gain a stronger following, Parham planned for a massive revival in Topeka, projecting that thousands of persons would come from various parts of the United States to attend the revival to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues. However, the Topeka Camp meeting did not occur, as Parham’s son, Charles Parham Jr., abruptly died at sixteen years of age in March 1901. A few months later in July 1901, Parham was forced to move his Apostolic Faith Headquarters from Stone’s Folly, as the building was sold to a new owner, Harry Croft, who converted the building into a “resort cottage.” With the rapid fire of unwelcome events, Parham eventually closed Stone’s Folly and relocated to Kansas City, where he began to work on his first book, Kol Kare Bomidbar, which is translated from Hebrew into English as “A Voice Crying in the Wilderness.”

Seeking to revive his Apostolic Faith movement, from 1902 to 1904 Parham traveled to several different cities in the Midwest, including: Nevada, Missouri; Eldorado Springs, Missouri; and Galena, Kansas. Parham’s divine healing ministry resurged in the summer of 1903 when Parham moved his evangelistic team to Eldorado Springs, Missouri. While he was there, Mary A. Arthur experienced healing from a fourteen year battle with “dyspepsia,” “prolepsis, hemorrhoids and paralysis of the bowels,” and blindness in her right eye. This event revitalized Parham’s ministry, and residents of Galena, Kansas, Mrs. Arthur’s hometown, invited Parham to hold revival meetings in

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115 In this book, which was published in January 1902, Parham offered a brief biographical sketch of his life, and he explained the main tenets of his Apostolic Faith doctrines.; Goff, Fields White Unto Harvest, 83-5.; Newman, Race and the Assemblies of God Church, 50.
their city. Parham’s revival success was capped by the attendance of about two thousand persons to his nightly revival meetings in January 1904. Furthermore, nearly a thousand persons “claimed healing from some physical ailment,” twenty-five hundred persons attended a New Year’s Eve service, and hundreds of persons experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues.\textsuperscript{116}

Following the meeting in Galena, Parham held revival services in Joplin, Missouri, and his reputation continued to burgeon. But, the death of a local pre-adolescent girl, Nettie Smith, from a treatable illness attracted negative attention to Parham and threatened to jeopardize his reputation. The girl’s father, Bert Smith, embraced Parham’s message of faith healing and refused to allow his daughter medical treatment. Advocating faith healing, Parham often spoke against physicians and modern medicine. Unfortunately, the young girl died, and “public opinion of Parham shifted from respect and awe to disgust and anger.” Furthermore, Parham became sick during this period, and he returned to nearby Baxter Springs to recuperate. While he was recovering, Parham felt God leading him to go to the South. Walter Oyler, a resident of Orchard, Texas, who had visited Parham’s impactful revival in Galena, invited Parham to Orchard. Oyler and Mrs. Anna Hall, two of Parham’s disciples, had attempted without much success to spread the Apostolic Faith in Texas. Trusting that Parham could ignite the Apostolic Faith movement in Texas, Oyler and Hall convinced Parham that Texas’s warm climate would aid his recovery from his illness. Subsequently, Parham agreed to move to Texas “as a three-week recuperative vacation.” After having a successful revival

\textsuperscript{116} Parham, \textit{The Sermons of Charles F. Parham}, 69-96.; Goff, \textit{Fields White Unto Harvest}, 86-93.;
meeting in Orchard, Parham and twenty-five of his workers prepared to take their Apostolic Faith message to Houston, Texas, beginning on July 10, 1905.\textsuperscript{117}

To publicize the Apostolic Faith revival in Houston, Parham submitted several announcements to the \textit{Houston Daily Post}, Houston’s leading newspaper.\textsuperscript{118} The first \textit{Daily Post} announcement briefly highlighted Parham as a distinguished “Divine Healer” from Kansas. Parham simply announced that he and his workers would hold meetings in the streets and in Bryan Hall, and he stressed that his mission was “to turn people again to the apostolic faith,” the original teachings of the early church.\textsuperscript{119} Parham also stressed Zionist themes in several of his announcements. After a week of the revival, a \textit{Daily Post} journalist wrote an extensive article entitled, \textit{The Zion Movement: Making an effort to Purchase Palestine}. The author wrote that a large congregation was keenly interested in Parham’s “lecture” on Zionism, saying: “The preacher received perfect attention.” In his lecture Parham expressed that he had been fighting for the restoration of Palestine to the Jews for ten years. Since the Bible accorded the Jews as God’s chosen people, Parham considered their welfare to be important.\textsuperscript{120} He stressed that Americans should support the restoration of Zion because persons with an Anglo-Saxon ancestry are “descendants

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{118}] The first issue of the \textit{Houston Daily Post} was on April 5, 1885; Samuel Oliver Young, \textit{A Thumb-nail History of the City of Houston, TX, From Its Founding in 1836 to the Year 1912} (Houston, TX: Press of Rein and Sons Co., 1912), 90-1.
\item[\textsuperscript{119}] \textit{Houston Daily Post}, 6 July 1905
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] In his work, \textit{A Voice Crying in the Wilderness}, Parham wrote: “There are 13,000,000 Jews in the world. The purchase of Palestine can be accomplished with $10,000,000.”; Parham, \textit{The Sermons of Charles Parham}, 102.
\end{itemize}
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of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel that disappeared into Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C.E.”
Hence, he held that Anglo-Saxon Americans were ancestrally related to the Jews and were superior to other racial groups. Many Houstonians were so captivated by Parham’s Zionist lecture that they asked him to repeat it the next week. According to the *Daily Post* journalist, the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was a hallmark of the Apostolic Faith. During the evening hours, Parham and his workers would parade through the downtown Houston streets dressed in distinctive Middle Eastern apparel, carrying a large Apostolic Faith movement banner. *Daily Post* articles indicated that Parham’s emphasis on Zionism attracted multitudes to his revival meetings at Bryan Hall.

Not only did several Houstonians come to the revival meeting to hear Parham’s Zionist message, many persons also came to the meeting seeking to experience divine healing and the gift of tongues. During the close of the summer revival session, the *Houston Chronicle* offered a favorable story of Parham’s revival meetings. The title of the report explained: “Houstonians Witness the Performance of Miracles: Mysticism Surrounds Works of Apostles of Faith – Speak in All Tongues Known to Man – Weird Scenes That Are Witnessed.” The *Chronicle* writer was stupefied by the events taking place at Bryan Hall. The reporter attested to have witnessed persons experience divine

healing and to have heard persons speak in tongues. Not only was the writer an eyewitness, but he or she also interviewed Parham and several of his Apostolic Faith workers. The writer named five persons who had been healed of different ailments and eight persons who had spoken in tongues. The journalist noted the following claim of Apostolic Faith workers: “Among the languages spoken by the professors of Apostolic Faith the government interpreters have made investigation and authoritatively report that all known modern languages have been demonstrated including 20 Chinese dialects.”

Followers of Parham’s Apostolic Faith did not perceive that they were speaking in unknown tongues that only God could understand, but they stressed that tongues were one of the many known languages spoken by human beings throughout the world. Parham’s vision was to evangelize and to spread the gospel to the world through xenoglossic missions. Parham said that when he spoke in tongues under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to foreigners during his mission trips that some foreigners have often “translated sayings of wisdom back to him,” which he did not have a clue that he was speaking. In sum, Parham’s Apostolic Faith ministry centered on restoring the faith of the early apostles and stressed demonstrations of divine healing and tongues that occurred during the days of the apostles.

123 Houston Chronicle, 13 August 1905, 6.

124 Goff defines xenoglossa as “speaking a known foreign language without having gained a prior knowledge of that tongue.” Parham “theorized that this gift from God signaled the dawn of a missionary explosion.”; Goff, Fields White Unto Harvest, 15-6.

April Lucy Farrow (usually referred to as Lucy Farrow), a native African American Houstonian, met Charles Parham during the five-week summer revival meeting at Bryan Hall. She was the pastor of a small African American Houston congregation. Parham recruited her “to serve” as the cook for the Apostolic Faith mission during the summer. Being pleased with her work, Parham asked her to accompany him to Kansas to serve as a “nanny” and “governess” for his children, and he also invited her to continue in her role as a cook for the Apostolic Faith. Even though it conflicted with her service as pastor of the small holiness congregation, Farrow accepted the offer because she like many black Houstonians needed the money. After accepting the opportunity, Farrow asked William J. Seymour, a holiness preacher who had recently moved to Houston from Cincinnati, to lead her church during her absence.

Farrow stayed in Kansas for about three months between August and October of 1905. While Farrow worked in Parham’s home and continued to serve as cook for the Apostolic Faith, she was able to listen more attentively to Parham’s doctrines and to observe discussions and interactions among Parham’s student followers. Unofficially, Farrow was one of Parham’s first African American students. Searching to experience


God on a deeper emotional and spiritual level, she embraced Parham’s teachings and prayed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She received the baptism and spoke in tongues while attending one of the Kansas revival meetings.\textsuperscript{130}

Once Parham had completed his revival tour in Kansas, Farrow and Parham returned to Houston in October 1905. Parham sought to re-establish his Apostolic Faith headquarters in Houston, because the Apostolic Faith movement was burgeoning with about twenty-five thousand Pentecostal believers and sixty preachers.\textsuperscript{131} An anonymous person donated one hundred dollars to Parham to establish the Apostolic Faith headquarters at a residential home at 503 Rusk St.\textsuperscript{132} Parham and his family moved into their new home in December of 1905. Parham opened a Bible Training School in January 1906 in response to many Houstonians and Texans who were seeking for a more thorough knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Prior to meeting at the location at the intersection of Rusk and Brazos streets, the school first started at the Caledonia Hall at the intersection of Texas Avenue and Main Street. When opening the school, Parham vowed not to charge students for tuition. He insisted that the school would derive its funding from free-will offerings. Parham took this stance because tithes and offerings supported the early apostles’ ministries. Holding that every aspect of his ministry should

\textsuperscript{130} Robeck, \textit{The Azusa Street Mission and Revival}, 44-47.

\textsuperscript{131} In Kansas, Parham’s Apostolic Faith headquarters consisted of the Parham Bible School and an Apostolic Faith printing operation. When Parham moved his headquarters to Houston, he sought to re-establish the Bible school, and he also moved the printing operation to Houston. \textit{Apostolic Faith} (Melrose-Houston) 1 (September 1905) (December 1905):15.; Goff, \textit{Fields White Unto Harvest}, 105.1 Douglas J. Nelson, “For Such a Time as This: The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, England, 1981), 31.

\textsuperscript{132} Parham, \textit{The Life of Charles F. Parham}, 135.
be supported by free-will offerings, Parham did not charge persons to attend his healing services, lectures, or the various bible schools that he established.\textsuperscript{133}

Regarding his vision for the school, Parham states, “Not only are students expected to receive a thorough knowledge of the written Word, but a practical realization of it in their lives.”\textsuperscript{134} Being an early participant in Parham’s Topeka and Houston schools, Goss tendered a vivid detailed account of the operations of the Houston Bible School. He explained that students received “a thorough workout and a rigid training in prayer, fasting, consecration, Bible Study and evangelistic work,” and that students also studied the Bible during the morning hours, engaged in outreach ministry at hospitals and jails throughout the day, and worshipped together during the evening hours.\textsuperscript{135} Parham did not intend for the school to be a seminary by any stretch, as students were not expected to engage in higher criticism of the Bible, to learn biblical languages, or to delve into the history of Christianity. However, the curriculum of the school strictly revolved around biblical themes such as repentance, sanctification, healing, and prophecy and focused on practical ministry and equipping students to become evangelists in the Apostolic Faith.\textsuperscript{136}

\textit{William Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival}

\textsuperscript{133} Parham, \textit{The Sermons of Charles F. Parham}, 57.

\textsuperscript{134} Parham, \textit{The Life of Charles F. Parham}, 136.

\textsuperscript{135} Goss, \textit{The Winds of God}, 34.

\textsuperscript{136} Parham, \textit{The Life of Charles F. Parham}, 137-40.
William Seymour, an African American holiness minister, sought to become a student in Parham’s Bible Training School. Once Farrow moved back to Houston, she shared her Pentecostal testimony with her holiness congregation and with Seymour, who as mentioned had served as the interim pastor while she was working in Kansas during most of the fall. After hearing Farrow’s testimony, Seymour became intensely interested in the Pentecostal experience. Like Farrow, Seymour desired to deepen his experience of God and to integrate his holiness understanding of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Hence, Seymour was anxious to attend the “Bible Training School.”

There is no evidence that Seymour attended one of Parham’s revival meetings while he was in Houston, prior to Farrow sharing her testimony with him. It does not appear that Seymour even knew whom Parham was prior to Farrow telling Seymour about him. Certainly blacks were allowed to attend the meetings despite the segregated practices of the period. The *Houston Chronicle* reported that an elderly black threw away his crutches at one of the revival meetings. Parham reported that an African American woman was also healed at one of the revival meetings. Nevertheless, Seymour was the first black to attend the Bible school, and no blacks had attended the Bethel College in Kansas.137

Because Farrow had already developed a rapport with Parham in Houston and Kansas, she may have interceded on Seymour’s behalf in getting him accepted into the school. Though the segregation laws of Texas did not permit blacks to integrate with whites, Parham could not refuse to allow the humble and spiritually hungry Seymour

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attendance at the school. Hence, Parham allowed Seymour to listen to his Apostolic Faith lectures, but he still followed the racial mores and laws of the South by leaving the door open and requiring Seymour to sit outside of the classroom separate from the white students during the daily lessons.\(^{138}\) Not only did Seymour have to sit in the hallway, but he also was not permitted to pray at the altar with the other white students at the school.\(^{139}\) Though Parham respected Jim Crow laws, he still was committed to his vision of world evangelism, as he believed that both blacks and whites needed to experience Pentecost. Parham felt that blacks should lead the evangelistic efforts in the black sections of Houston. However, by requiring Seymour to sit outside the door during his lectures, Parham respected established segregation customs, which were disparaging to blacks. Nonetheless, Seymour may have spent about five to six weeks in the bible training school.\(^{140}\) Being very attentive and learning all of the core tenets of the Apostolic Faith, he was a faithful student at the Bible Training School. Because Seymour was such an exceptional student follower, Parham planned for Seymour to preach the Apostolic Faith message to blacks in Texas. As a part of the practical ministry

\(^{138}\) Sarah Parham says that Seymour was “given a place in the class,” but she does not mention that Seymour had to sit in the hallway.


\(^{140}\) Scholars debate the length of time that Seymour was in the school. Douglas Nelson suggests that Seymour was in the school for only a few days and at most a couple of weeks. Vinson Synan argues that Seymour attended the school for several months; Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 93; This certainly cannot be true, since the school was only open for ten weeks—January through March. Parham said that Seymour spent up to six months in the Houston Bible School; Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest*, 67.
curriculum of the school, Seymour and Parham preached on the streets in African American quarters of Houston.\textsuperscript{141}

Parham’s agenda for Seymour was stymied when Seymour accepted Neely Terry’s invitation to move to Los Angeles, California. Terry, an African American woman from Los Angeles, had come to Houston to visit relatives. During her visit she received the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of tongues while attending one of Farrow’s holiness worship services or one of the revival services led by Parham in Houston. The former is probably more likely as few blacks spoke in tongues under Parham’s leadership due to the segregation practices at the altar.\textsuperscript{142} While visiting Farrow’s holiness church, Terry was inspired by Seymour’s sermon on holiness, and she was impressed by his pastoral gifts and graces. When she returned to Los Angeles and learned that her Holiness mission was seeking a pastor, she recommended Seymour and persuaded Julia Hutchins, one of the ministers at the Sante Fe Mission, to invite Seymour to serve as pastor.\textsuperscript{143}

Seymour accepted the offer and relocated to Los Angeles. During his first sermon at the Santa Fe Mission, he elected to preach from the second chapter of the books of Acts, and his sermon echoed potent traces of Parham’s third blessing doctrine. He preached that when a person received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he or she would

\textsuperscript{141} Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 167; Robeck, The Azusa Street Mission and Revival, 48.

\textsuperscript{142} The Houston Chronicle reported blacks being healed during the revival services, but the report does not discuss black Houstonians receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues. Segregation laws did not permit blacks to pray at the altar with whites during Parham’s revival services.; Alexander, The Women of Azusa Street, 20.

speak in tongues as the early apostles did on the day of Pentecost. Rejecting Seymour’s teaching that speaking in tongues was initial evidence of Spirit baptism and holding that believers experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit during sanctification, Hutchins fired Seymour and locked him out of the Santa Fe Mission.\textsuperscript{144} She suspended his salary and canceled his housing allowance. Having meager resources, Seymour was not able to return to Houston, and he was essentially homeless.\textsuperscript{145}

One of the members of the Sante Fe Mission, Brother Lee, empathized with the distraught Seymour and welcomed him into his home on 214 Bonnie Brae St.\textsuperscript{146} While staying at Lee’s home, Seymour held regular prayer meetings with Lee and his other house guests. Not having yet spoken in tongues or received the baptism of the Spirit, Seymour prayed to experience the third blessing. Still, no one received the Pentecostal outpouring after several days of intense prayer and meditation. Hungry for the Pentecostal outpouring and growing frustrated with not receiving it, Seymour sent a letter to Parham asking for help.\textsuperscript{147} Parham responded by sending two of Seymour’s black friends from Houston, Lucy Farrow and Joseph Warren, to Los Angeles to aid Seymour. Within days after they arrived, they joined the prayer meeting and laid hands on persons assembled, the Pentecostal outpouring happened and persons at the prayer meeting,


\textsuperscript{145} Alexander, \textit{Black Fire}, 117.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.

including Seymour himself, received the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues.\textsuperscript{148} After Seymour and other persons attending the prayer meeting received Spirit baptism, the revival at Bonnie Brae St. began to burgeon, and the small house could not accommodate the considerable numbers of visitors. Seymour and other leaders sought a more accommodating place and found an abandoned “old wooden Methodist church, marked for sale, partly burned out” at 312 Azusa Street. After renovating the building to make it conducive to worship and to prayer, Seymour and other volunteers opened their mission and initiated their revival.\textsuperscript{149}

When Parham visited the Azusa Street revival, he condemned the religious and cultural expressions of the black worshippers as “heathen,” and “pagan” and regarded it as “inferior, uncivilized, and unenlightened.”\textsuperscript{150} Furthermore, the interracial demographics of the worship services bothered Parham, who expressed:

Men and women, whites and blacks, knelt together or fell across one another; frequently, a white woman, perhaps of wealth and culture, could be seen thrown back in the arms of a big ‘buck nigger,’ and held tightly thus as she shivered and shook in freak imitation of Pentecost.”\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{148} The Apostolic Faith, September 1906, column 4, pg. 1.


\textsuperscript{151} Robeck, The Azusa Street Mission and Revival, 141.
As many of the black worshippers spoke in unknown tongues, Parham categorized their glossolalia as “jabbering, not a tongue at all.”\textsuperscript{152} Upon seeing persons dancing uncontrollably, yelling, and frantically screaming, Parham concluded that many of the revival participants were “spiritualists” or were possessed by demonic spirits, not the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{153} His depiction of the Azusa revival resonated with sensational reports about the revival in the \textit{Los Angeles Daily Times}. The \textit{Daily Times} article had the following headline on its Wednesday morning paper: “WEIRD BABEL OF TONGUES. New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose. Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa Street. Gurgle of Wordless Talk by a Sister.” The journalist reported “the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal.”\textsuperscript{154} He or she further described the demographics of the congregation and the scene at Azusa, stating:

Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howling of the worshipers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication.\textsuperscript{155}

The author referred to Seymour as “an old colored exhorter,” “blind in one eye” with a “stony optic,” and “the major-domo of the company.” Born in 1870, Seymour was only

\textsuperscript{152} Parham, \textit{The Life of Charles F. Parham}, 169.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 144.

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Los Angeles Daily Times}, “Weird Babel of Tongues,” April 18, 1906, Part II, 1

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
about thirty-six years old at the time of the Azusa Street revival. Though Seymour was blind in one eye as a result of a battle with smallpox, Douglas Nelson and other historians show handsome pictures of Seymour that refute the claim that he had an unattractive, highly noticeable “stony optic” in one of his eyes. The journalist also described the worship service at Azusa as “pandemonium” and a complete “frenzy.” The *Daily Times* writer stated that an old “colored ‘mammy’ (a racially derisive term to describe an older African American woman) was shouting the words: “You-oо-goо-l oo-oо come under the bloo-oо—oo boo-loo.” The writer was obviously ridiculing the tongues that the older African American woman spoke. The author said, “Few of her words are intelligible, and for the most part her testimony contained the most outrageous jumble of syllables, which are listened to with awe by the company.” Furthermore, he/she said that the worshippers completely exhaust themselves by speaking in tongues, mentioning that one tired sister spoke in tongues for a lengthy period and needed assistance to her seat. Parham insisted that the Holy Spirit does not cause a person to shake violently, to become exhausted from physical movement, and to become tired from praying in tongues.  

Many persons attending the Azusa Mission were anxious to meet Parham, the man Seymour respected as his father in the Gospel. Parham came to the Azusa Mission because Seymour invited him to preach. Moreover, after Parham preached a couple of times and offended the leaders of the Mission by attempting to correct their worship style and speaking against their interracial fellowship, the elders of the Mission discouraged

156 Ibid.

him from preaching again and eventually dismissed him from their fellowship. Shortly thereafter, Parham and some of his Texas followers started a separate revival in the W.C.T.U Building on Broadway and Temple Streets in Los Angeles.\footnote{Ibid., 162-64.}

Notwithstanding Parham’s denunciations, the Azusa revival became the launching ground of the Pentecostal movement. The reputation of the Azusa Street Mission grew like California wildfires as the word spread that God was moving at Azusa, manifested through persons’ experience of the third blessing, divine healing, and unity in the Spirit that transcended race, gender, and class.\footnote{The Apostolic Faith, January 1907, column 2, page 1; The Apostolic Faith, September 1906, column 4, page 1.} Unlike Parham, Seymour did not have a segregated altar. He fostered an egalitarian and interracial atmosphere at Azusa, stating, “God makes no difference in nationality; Ethiopians, Chinese, Indians, Mexicans and other nationalities worship together.”\footnote{Bartleman, Azusa Street, 48; Robert Anderson, Vision of the Disinherited (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 69.}

Receiving a report that a spiritual outpouring was occurring at Azusa, leaders of the holiness COGIC, including C.H. Mason, J.A. Jeter, and D.J. Young, made the trek to Los Angeles in 1907. While there, they spent several hours and a few days in prayer seeking the third blessing. Mason provided a vivid description of his experience of Spirit baptism:

The sound of a mighty rushing wind was in me and my soul cried, ‘Jesus, only, none like you.’ My soul cried and soon I began to die. It seemed that I heard the...
groaning of Christ on the cross dying for me. All of the work was in me until I
died out of the old man. The sound stopped for a little while. My soul cried, ‘Oh,
God, finish your work in me.’ Then the sound broke out in me again. Then I felt
something raising me out of my seat without any effort of my own. I said, ‘It may
be imagination.’ Then looked down to see if it was really so. I saw that I was
rising. Then I gave up for the Lord to have His way within me. So there came a
wave of glory into me, and all of my being was filled with the glory of the Lord.
So when He had gotten me straight on my feet there came a light, which
enveloped my entire being above the brightness of the sun. When I opened my
mouth to say glory, a flame touched my tongue, which ran down in me. My
language changed and no word could I speak in my own tongue. Oh, I was filled
with the glory of the Lord. My soul was satisfied.161

When he returned to the South and discussed his Pentecostal experience and
shared his new beliefs with C.P. Jones in 1907, Jones separated from Mason. Jones
disagreed with Mason’s new doctrinal position that glossolalia is indispensable biblical
evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Mason invited ministers who believed in
Pentecostal doctrines to a conference in Memphis, Tennessee. While the leaders
maintained their commitment to holiness teachings, the conference members organized
COGIC as a Pentecostal denomination.162

161 Patterson, Ross, and Atkins, “History and Formative Years of COGIC,” 19.
162 Alexander, Black Fire, 120-123.
As leader of COGIC, Mason accepted Parham’s doctrine that speaking in tongues was evidence of Spirit baptism, and he imbibed the radical interracial ethos of Azusa that Seymour fostered. Mason contested segregationist customs by dining and sharing lodgings with white ministers during his travels and by preaching at majority white gatherings. He also ordained several white Pentecostal ministers. Since COGIC was the only incorporated Pentecostal denomination within the Pentecostal Movement, Mason was the only bishop who could ordain Pentecostal ministers and provide them with legitimate certificates of ordination that were recognized by the government. These certificates gave ministers the legal authority to perform marriages, funerals, and other Christian ceremonies; in addition, the certificates enabled ministers to receive discounts for railroad travel. Mason welcomed and respected the white ministers who joined COGIC. Between 1909 and 1913, there were as many white Churches of God in Christ as there were blacks—“all carrying Mason’s credentials and incorporation.”

Despite this period of interracial Christian fellowship within the early years of American Pentecostalism, racial separatism resurfaced. Some white Pentecostal leaders


separated in 1913, and formed the Assemblies of God.\textsuperscript{166} This schism was not because of theological differences. Many white and black Pentecostals shared basic Holiness-Pentecostal doctrines. For instance, black and white Pentecostals believe: 1) the Bible is the “inspired” and “infallible” Word of God; 2) Conversion is essential to salvation; 3) God can perform miracles and divine healings; 4) Satan and demonic forces are real entities; 5) Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead; and 6) Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years (premillennialism).\textsuperscript{167} Furthermore, many black and white Pentecostals stressed speaking in tongues as being the initial evidence of the Holy Spirit. White Pentecostals separated from Mason and COGIC and formed a separate denomination, the Assemblies of God, in 1914 primarily because of racial prejudices and because whites ministers were hesitant to continue to serve in ministry under a black bishop.\textsuperscript{168}

\textit{COGIC’s Synthesis of Parham and Seymour’s Doctrines}

Though blacks and whites were involved in the development of early Pentecostalism, Estrela Alexander notes that “most early Pentecostal history had been written by white scholars who have not only downplayed Seymour’s contribution in deference to Parham’s but have also ignored the contributions of many other African

\textsuperscript{166} Alexander, \textit{Black Fire}, 160.


American Pentecostals.” The racial origins of the movement have been an issue of 
debate among white scholars and black scholars of Pentecostalism. Arguing that many 
Pentecostal scholars discounted Parham’s contributions to the movement, James R. Goff 
wrote a biography of Parham, which endeavored to explain Parham’s influence on the 
American Pentecostal movement. He argues baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence 
of tongues is the fundamental basis of the Pentecostal movement because Parham and his 
Kansas students were those who proposed that speaking in tongues was biblical evidence 
for baptism of the Holy Spirit (1901). While Goff esteems Parham’s contribution to the 
early Pentecostal movement, other historians like Douglas J. Nelson point to William 
Seymour as the quintessential founder of American Pentecostalism. Nelson argues that 
Seymour’s promotion of an interracial and egalitarian atmosphere at the Azusa Street 
Meeting (1906) defines the true meaning and nature of Pentecostalism. In addition to 
Nelson, black Pentecostal scholars such as Leonard Lovett have highlighted the black 
origins of the Pentecostal Movement in their scholarship in the 1970s. Lovett says, “the 
twentieth-century Pentecostal movement in America originated from the womb of the 
Black religious experience.”

169 Ibid.
As it relates to the debate about racial origins of Pentecostalism and COGIC, the denomination has been influenced by both Parham and Seymour’s teachings. Mason adopted Parham’s doctrine of tongues as initial evidence, and he also embraced Seymour’s interracial Pentecostalism by demonstrating that spiritual encounter has social effects and consequences. That is to say besides speaking in tongues, Mason’s willingness to oppose segregation customs and to promote interracial worship services in a southern states like Mississippi and Tennessee were also signs of his spiritual baptism. In essence, the “Pentecostal” in COGIC stresses that the Spirit can manifest its presence in multiple ways, including through speaking in tongues, divine healing, acts of love and kindness, and through tearing down racial barriers.

The “African” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism

The Nature of Africanisms in African American Religion and COGIC

Scholars such as E. Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits have debated the nature of Africanisms in African American religion. Frazier argued that the enslavement process reduced to a very minimum “the possibility of the retention and the transmission of African culture,” and he contended that dancing was the only African tradition that survived the Middle Passage. In contrast, Herskovits argued “African survivals” and “Negroisms” could be traced throughout various phases of black life. Within this debate, I agree with Herskovits that several African cultural and religious traditions,


especially traditions from West Africa such as “spirit possession,” “rhythmic hand clapping,” and call and response participation of the congregation in the sermon, survived the Middle Passage. Albert Roboteau notes that enslaved Africans in the United States did not directly assimilate traditional African religious beliefs and worldviews such as spirit possession, veneration of saints and African gods, and the pervasiveness of religion in all life in the same manner as enslaved Africans in South America and the Caribbean who practiced religions such as Santeria (Cuba) and Shango (Trinidad). However, enslaved African American Christians syncretized their African religious traditions with American evangelical religious beliefs and practices.

Mason strongly embraced evangelical religion, especially evangelical Christians’ emphasis on religious experience and the sacred authority of the Bible. Still, Mason’s most fundamental endeavor, according to historian Ithiel Clemmons, was to preserve the spiritual culture of enslaved African American religiosity. Mary Mason says that Mason prayed “God would give him a religion like that he had heard the old folks talk about and manifest in their lives.” African traditions and culture such as the ring shout and spirit possession had a strong influence upon the worship and ritual practices of

175 Ibid.
African American Pentecostals. COGIC worship traditions, including the holy dance, spirit baptism and tarrying, and call and response and oral spirituality reflect elements typically associated with West Africa.

The Shout and the Holy Dance

Enslaved African American Christians practiced the “ring shout” after formal biracial worship services were complete and when clandestinely worshipping in the brush arbors. According to one participant-observer:

The shout takes place on Sundays or on praise nights through the week. . . . The benches are pushed back to the wall when the formal meeting is over, and old and young, men and women. . . all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the spiritual is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration.’

The ring shout resembles forms of dance performed in African and Caribbean worship. The Ekoi people of southern Nigeria engage in a similar dance as the ring shout. During the funeral ring dance, they assemble in a “counterclockwise circle” and they began to dance shuffling their feet on the floor and not lifting their feet from the ground. Walter Pitts also notes that the West African Ibo, Yoruba, and Ibibio folk perform a similar dance. During their shout, they move every part of their bodies and do

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181 Ibid.
a “counterclockwise shuffle so that a ‘wave-like ripple . . . runs down the muscles of back
and along arms to the finger-tips.’”\textsuperscript{182} The link between the ring shout and West African
religious customs is “fusion of dance, song, and rhythm in fervid religious possession.”\textsuperscript{183}
Both enslaved Africans who performed the ring shout and West Africans who practiced
their tribal religions fused dance, song, rhythmic bodily expression, and engagement of
the spiritual realm in similar ways.\textsuperscript{184}

The shout and the holy dance are common COGIC worship practices that have
some affinity to the ring shout. Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston noted that there is a
link between shouting and the African beliefs in spirit possession, stating: “There can be
no doubt shouting is a survival of African ‘possession’ by the gods…as a sign of special
favor from the spirit that it chooses to drive out the individual consciousness temporarily
and use the body for its expression.”\textsuperscript{185} When COGIC persons “get happy” or feel the
Spirit during the worship service, they may dance in the aisles of the church or run
around the pews ecstatically praising God. As they dance, they are inviting and allowing
God to “take control” of their bodies and they “release spiritual energy.”\textsuperscript{186}


\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{185} Zora Neale Hurston, \textit{The Sanctified Church} (Berkeley, CA: Turtle Island, 1981), 91.

\textsuperscript{186} Alexander, \textit{Black Fire}, 51.
COGIC stressed that holy dancing is biblically grounded, noting that David danced before God (2 Sam. 2:16). Furthermore, COGIC drew a distinction between secular dancing and the holy dance performed by saints:

The people of God do not dance as the world dances, but are moved by the spirit of God. So you can see it is all in the Spirit of God and to the glory of God.

It is not to satisfy the lust of the flesh, or the carnal appetite, as the world’s dance, but only to glorify God and satisfy the soul. The world dances of the world, about the world and to the world.

The children of God dance of God, for God and to the praise and glory of His name.\textsuperscript{187}

COGIC teaches that holy dancing is a means of praise and worship. Members also believe that the Spirit is moving through them and directing their dance steps. The holy dance is unrehearsed and improvisational. It is also typically performed in sanctified church with music. According to Eileen Southern, African cultures integrated music with dance.\textsuperscript{188} Sanctified Christians innovatively brought musical instruments, including tambourines, guitars, and the keyboard, into the folk church.\textsuperscript{189} COGIC meetings resounded with spirited expression, dancing, and engaging rhythmic music. Gospel legend Mahalia Jackson said that the sanctified church “introduced her to drums,
cymbals, tambourines, and triangles.”

She expressed further, “They had a beat, a powerful beat, a rhythm we held on to from slavery days, and their music was so strong and expressive it used to bring the tears to my eyes.”

**Spirit Baptism and the Tarrying Ritual**

In addition to the shout and to dance, COGIC is also known for its strong belief in spirit baptism. Many slaves converted to Christianity once they found points of correlation between their folk religious practices and Christianity. One significant point of correspondence was the parallel between West African beliefs in spirit possession as “a sure sign of contact with the divine” and evangelical Christian beliefs in “being possessed by the Holy Spirit” during worship. In line with enslaved Africans who embraced evangelical Christian beliefs in the movement of the Holy Spirit within the bodies of believers, Mason believed that the Holy Spirit indwelled sanctified Christians. Mason traveled to Los Angeles to seek to experience the Spirit baptism, which Seymour defined as “a gift of power” for sanctified Christians.

After his Azusa experience, Mason brought the tarrying ritual to COGIC, encouraging believers to tarry for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The tarrying ritual is similar to the “seekin’ the Lord experience,” an Afro-Baptist ritual in which blacks go to

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191 Ibid.


a remote place to seek the Lord for an authentic experience of Christianity. Theologian Alonzo Johnson links the “seekin’ the Lord” ritual to an African initiation rite of passage during which adolescents undergo initiation into adulthood.”¹⁹⁴ Johnson argues that the folk practice of seekin’ the Lord is the “spiritual center of the pray’s house,” the location where South Carolinians from the Low country, especially the Gullahs, went to seek God and “formally become a part of the church and community.”¹⁹⁵ He states, “Among African slaves and their descendants in the American South, the pray’s house spirit provided the ritual framework within which children could pass from childhood into adulthood.”¹⁹⁶ Children typically joined the pray’s house when they were about twelve years old. The seeking ritual was not merely a means of conversion ritual during which persons publicly confessed Jesus as Lord as in evangelical Christianity; however, the seeking ritual was a rite of passage, a “major spiritual requirement” for church membership.¹⁹⁷ Afro-Baptists were not considered to be a part of the Christian community until they had sought the Lord. Akin to the seekin’ the Lord ritual, tarrying was a rite of passage for COGIC believers. When tarrying, believers are instructed to pray tirelessly, sometimes repeatedly saying “Thank you Jesus” for several hours. Believers are to wait and to anticipate receiving Spirit baptism. The seeker often “sweats and cries and screams and physically throws himself, demanding that God do what he

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 8-12.
¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 13-14.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 16-17.
wants.” The tarrying process often does not take place during the normal worship service hours but occurs in more private places; furthermore, the process is “reserved for the initiated, true believers.” Once a person receives the Spirit he or she is a bona fide member of the church. Within the COGIC tradition, members of COGIC who testify of receiving the Spirit with evidence of glossolalia are often considered to be bona fide COGIC members. Church leaders and elders accentuated the necessity of Spirit baptism.

A popular song sang among COGIC members is, “This is the Church of God in Christ. You can’t join in. You have to be born in, into the Church of God in Christ.” While historian Anthea Butler interprets this song lyric as speaking to the importance of family in COGIC, my interpretation holds that the song’s emphasis on “being born into the church” has some affinity with the Afro Baptist ritual of “seekin’ the Lord.” As with the pray’s houses and the folk practice of seekin’ the Lord, persons are born into COGIC not by simply joining the church or giving their “right hand of fellowship” but by being committed to holiness and sanctification, by experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, and by ultimately becoming a saint of God.

Bishop J.O. Patterson states:

> The church is not about anthems, gospel singing, candles, choir robes and different committees, but it is about holiness. Unless you’re holy, you’re not in


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199 Ibid.


the church. You can’t ‘join’ in (the church) you have to be ‘born’ in. We’re making a big blunder by letting people ‘join’ in…I’m not concerned about how many members I have, but I am concerned about how many saints I have.\textsuperscript{202}

It is through being committed to living holy and tarrying for the Holy Spirit, as Mason did when he visited the Azusa Street revival, that persons are “born in[to]” the church and become a saint of God.

The Call and Response Tradition and Oral Spirituality

Besides the tradition of tarrying, the “call and response” folk tradition is also an African survival reflected within COGIC. Call and response, defined as back and forth exchanges between the speaker and audience which occur during the singing, preaching, and just about any element of the worship service, is a folk tradition that has been practiced among African American Christians since the antebellum period. When the preacher delivers a sermon or someone simply makes an announcement during the worship service, any person in the congregation may respond by shouting “Amen!,” “Yes, Lord!,” and a wide range of other phrases. When singing congregational songs, a leader would sing a line of the song and the congregation would sing the chorus.\textsuperscript{203} Call and response is rhythmic and not discordant during COGIC worship services. The call and response is another means of dancing through song and words rather than through bodily expression. According to Pitts, preachers use “verbal repetition” during their


\textsuperscript{203} Michael Wilkinson and Steven M. Studebaker, ed., \textit{A Liberating Spirit: Pentecostals and Social Action in North America} (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 60.
sermons to create audience feedback. The sermons consist of three phases: the opening, the buildup, and the climax. The congregation’s participation in call and response is typically weakest during the first stage and intensifies during the second stage. However, when the preacher reaches the third stage, the congregational response is most intense as members follow each of the “preacher’s lines” with “Amen!” or “Preach it!” During the third stage “the preacher can excite his hearers by running down the aisle, jumping vigorously behind the pulpit, waving his white handkerchief while pounding the lectern at each verse end.” The preacher’s behavior is similar to the bodily movements and gestures that occur in “West African performance of narrative discourse.” During the third stage, the preacher may also generate excitement in his hearers through engaging in “verbal artistry” or whooping. The whoop stems from “West African principles of verse, namely, the breath group as the basis of poetry.” The nonsense syllable, “whoa!,” that some preachers employ at the end of phrase has also been used by the Mandinka “to mark the end of the breath group.”

Related to the call and response tradition is what global Pentecostal scholar Walter Hollenweger refers to as the practice of oral spirituality. According to

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205 Ibid., 160-63.
206 Ibid., 164.
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
Hollenweger, oral spirituality centers on private and communal experience of God in worship rather than written texts; in this way, oral Christian traditions promoted a language that was accessible to all rather than abstract discourse. Oral Christianity predominated in Latin America, Africa, and other independent churches in the Third world. Hollenweger argues that many Third World Pentecostal church leaders based their spirituality on their private and communal experience of God in worship rather than critical reading of the Bible and biblical commentaries. In addition to a preference for emphasizing experience over reason, Hollenweger also pinpointed some additional features that are central to oral spirituality such as “orality of liturgy” and “narrative theology and witness.” In COGIC services, the “orality of liturgy” often occurs during the testimony period of worship service in which believers verbally and extemporaneously discuss ways that they have perceived God working in their lives.

In addition, during the worship service many southern black Holiness-Pentecostals responded better to ministers who communicated through “narrative theology and witness” and spoke in the common vernacular than ministers who read scripted sermons presented in a logical and academic format. Sermons delivered in narrative form and in the common vernacular were more accessible to many southern African Americans than the latter because many early twentieth century black Pentecostals did not have access to education and were poor. In contrast to black


Pentecostal churches that were dominant in the South, many black churches in northern cities placed greater emphasis on preaching that was “orderly” and worship that was “decorous.”

According to religious historian Wallace Best, folk or “vernacular” preaching became more popular in northern churches in Chicago during the Great Migration when thousands of southerners migrated to urban cities to search for industrial jobs. Many of these southerners were from Pentecostal religious traditions. The influx of southerners led many Northern Chicago preachers to adapt their sermons to appeal to southern migrants. To engage both black southerners and northerners, preachers gave “mixed-type” sermons that began with “a slow, studied pace with the preacher reading” from a prepared manuscript, gradually progressed to “extemporaneous speaking,” and lastly to an “emotional frenzy.”

The “American” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism

Prior to discussing the “American” in African American Holiness-Pentecostalism, I will discuss how the holiness-Pentecostal beliefs and folk religious practices that I have discussed above have alienated African American Holiness-Pentecostals’ from the dominant culture. In Saints in Exile, social ethicist Cheryl Sanders argues that African American Holiness-Pentecostals exhibit an “exilic dialectic,” defined as an “awareness of alienation or separation from the dominant culture,” based on religious practices and

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213 Ibid., 97-99.
racial differences.\textsuperscript{214} The saints’ “exilic consciousness” is on par with the Jews experience of exile as recorded in the Hebrew Bible. Like the Jews during the Babylonian exile, sanctified Christians understood themselves “as being in a foreign land” or being “in the world, but not of it.”\textsuperscript{215} In light of my preceding discussion, the phrase “in the world, but not of it” has a triple meaning. The phrase parallels the Wesleyan understanding of sanctification and refers to sanctified Christians’ yearning and effort to live a spiritual life free from the sin, denotes sanctified Christians’ aspiration to preserve their African religious identity and folk customs by not assimilating into white bourgeois Christian culture, and signifies the saints’ experience as the descendants of enslaved Africans who were snatched from their African homeland and forced to live in America.

African American Holiness Pentecostals experienced backlash for preaching against moral, individual sins. Mason says that he experienced persecution for teaching Christian perfection, saying that members of his race threatened him for preaching against their moral sins such as against smoking, alcoholic beverages, and narcotics, and pre-marital sex.\textsuperscript{216} Anthropologists such as Hans Baer and Merrill Singer and Bryan Wilson categorized COGIC and other Holiness-Pentecostal groups as a sect, a group that does not conform to the mainstream standards of the dominant religious groups.\textsuperscript{217}


\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.


Though the social scientists were likely following the standards of the period and did not mean to be disrespectful toward Holiness-Pentecostals by classifying them as a sect, the term implied that sanctified groups were backward and strange. Still, some sociologists such as William Clark downright belittled Holiness-Pentecostal groups by describing sanctified Christians as “simple,” “child minded,” and “incompetents.”

During the early twentieth century many black Christians such as Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was disgusted by African folk religious practices such as the ring shout. Bishop Payne criticized black southern folk music, calling it “corn-field ditties.” Holding that African folk traditions prevented the uplift of blacks and did not allow them to assimilate into the majority culture, Payne banned shouting, dancing, and folk religious practices from occurring in his African Methodist Episcopal church. He preferred and permitted more formal and respectable worship practices such as classical music and hymns. Zora Neale Hurston argues that many sanctified Christians endeavored to be agents of reform in the Black Church. She states, the Sanctified Church is “a protest against the high-brow tendency in Negro Protestant congregations as the Negroes gain more education and wealth.”

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220 Ibid.

221 Hurston, Sanctified Church, 103.
African American Holiness-Pentecostals’ exilic consciousness also relates to their experience with white supremacy in the United States. Cornel West offers a genealogy of modern racism that provides a sophisticated analysis of white supremacy and the effects that racism has had upon blacks.\textsuperscript{222} He argues that the modern West’s infatuation with classical antiquity resulted in a “normative gaze,” defined as an “ideal” standard from which all comparisons are made. Greek standards of “beauty, proportion, and human form” as well as classical Greek standards of stoicism and self-control represented the ideal.\textsuperscript{223} He contends that these “alienating ideas of beauty” affect the everyday lives of black people whose dark skin, thick lips, coarse hair, and broad noses do not measure up to the classical ideal.\textsuperscript{224} While West describes race in broad terms, blackness is the central marker of African identity. Winthrop Jordan notes that in the late seventeenth century, the English described Africans as black, stating, “Blackness became so generally associated with Africa that every African seemed a black man.”\textsuperscript{225} Initially, the English did not see African’s skin color as a problem or did not consider Africans to be inferior because of their skin color. The English simply distinguished blacks from themselves by noting their difference in color. Nonetheless, Jordan notes that the English eventually


\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 53-54.


began to perceive blackness as being related to evil, filth, sin, ugliness, and the devil, and they came to view Africans as the inferior “Other.”

The history of American slavery, segregation, and various injustices perpetuated against blacks rests upon the perceived inferiority of blacks. African American Pentecostals experienced racism in the United States throughout the twentieth century, and COGIC members were acquainted with white supremacy in the South. Three white men confronted Arena Mallory, the president of Saints Junior College, because they were incensed that she had the audacity to invite white teachers from California to come to Mississippi to volunteer at her school. One of the men said to Mallory: “Who told you that you could have white teachers out here? You are one of those smart ‘niggers’ from the North that don’t know your place and we came to put you in your place…We came to lynch you tonight.” One of the men approached her to grab her, but one of the men who knew Mallory held him back saying, “Give her a chance to get them away.” Mallory stated, “It is not my intention to violate any rules. I am trying to build a school to help my people and whoever wishes to be helped.”

Many black Holiness-Pentecostals throughout the United States in general and the South in particular undoubtedly had experiences with racial prejudice similar to Mallory’s incident.

226 Pinn, Terror and Triumph, 4.; Jordan, White over Black, 7-8.

227 Dovie Marie Simmons and Olivia L. Martin, Down Behind the Sun: the Story of Arenia Cornelia Mallory (Lexington, MS: D.M. Simmons, 1983), 18.

228 Ibid.
Many black Holiness-Pentecostal scholars contested the denigration of African American Holiness-Pentecostals’ religious and racial identities. Black Pentecostal scholar Leonard Lovett says his reading of W.E.B. Du Bois’ writings influenced his “cultural suspicion that black Holiness-Pentecostalism was far more African than Western at its core.”\(^{229}\) Lovett committed his energy toward focusing on the blackness of Pentecostalism.\(^{230}\) Acknowledging that many African American Holiness-Pentecostal scholars endeavored to affirm their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs and their African cultural heritage because the mainstream society denigrated these aspects of their identities, I hold that it is important to recognize and engage other layers of African American Holiness-Pentecostals’ identity beyond their religious and racial identities. I define identity as an individual or group’s self-understanding, which is situated within their social context. Several scholars have provided theories that portray the complexity of African American identity, including W.E.B. Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness, Audre Lorde and James Baldwin’s discussion of the “embodied self,” and Cornel West’s relation of Western philosophical traditions to Afro-American prophetic Christian thought. In addition to religion and race, African American religious scholars have dealt with issues

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of gender, sex, class, and other markers of human diversity. While I engage the religious and racial identities of saints, I also endeavor to explore African American Holiness-Pentecostals’ understandings of themselves as United States citizens. Engaging the nationalistic identities of black Holiness-Pentecostals is essential to challenge the assumption that saints are apolitical and socially detached. Hence, in addition to preserving their African culture, many African American Holiness-Pentecostals including Mason were patriotic United States citizens. Although saints aspired to be in this world but not of the world, they were not necessarily divorced from American civic life.

Scholars who have studied African American Holiness-Pentecostalism during the 1970s such as James Tinney and Leonard Lovett interpreted African American Holiness-Pentecostalism by examining the religious beliefs of saints but gave insignificant attention to saints’ perspectives regarding American democratic ideals. Recently scholars such as David Daniels III and Anthea Butler have expanded the interpretation of African American Holiness-Pentecostalism to include analysis and discussion of African American Pentecostals’ civic consciousness and identity. For example, Daniels discusses how African Americans were forced to create a separate African American civil society because the majority culture excluded them from participating in American civil society during the periods of slavery and segregation. The citizenship rights and status of


African Americans were not legally respected until the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. Yet, early African Americans identified with core American ideologies such as beliefs in natural rights and in American democratic freedoms, including freedoms of speech, press, and religion.\textsuperscript{233} Rather than being otherworldly, they utilized resources from within American civic culture to oppose structural injustice and to pursue social equality.\textsuperscript{234}

Robert Wuthnow defines civil society as non-governmental, non-familial, non-profit “secondary groups, associations, and organizations through which citizens develop and express their collective aims and aspirations, and through which they either enlist the government’s assistance to realize their aims or successfully pursue them on their own.”\textsuperscript{235} Civil society includes individual citizens who contribute to the common good of all citizens. Based on sociologist Robert Wuthnow and Jeffrey Alexander’s discussion of civil society, the following four institutions are central to civil society: communicative, associative, educative and expressive institutions.\textsuperscript{236} Communicative institutions such as magazines and newspapers endeavor to sway public opinion through informing the public about various social debates and issues. Associative institutions are groups, such as social clubs and organizations, fraternal orders, and sororities that seek to associate and

\textsuperscript{233} Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 43-46.

\textsuperscript{234} Frederick C. Harris, Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.; Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 47.


\textsuperscript{236} Jeffrey Alexander, The Civil Sphere (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Quoted in Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 46.
collaborate for a common purpose. *Educative institutions* are public and private schools that focus on knowledge production and seek to create an informed, educated public. *Expressive institutions* (e.g. literary clubs, musical groups, quilt guilds) employ artistic forms to exhibit their knowledge and beliefs to the public. Through working through these four institutions, African American Christians have been able to work cooperatively to strengthen their community and pursue the common good.  

COGIC churches sought to contribute to black civil society through each of the aforementioned institutions. Daniels argues “early Afro-Pentecostalism’s various discursive practices both supported and at the same time challenged the project of forming black civil society during the first half of the twentieth century.” As with black Baptist and Methodist denominations, African American Holiness-Pentecostals published religious newspapers such as *The Whole Truth* to communicate with denominational members and the public.  

COGIC organized associative institutions through establishing various departments within the church such as the COGIC Women’s Department and the COGIC Young People Willing Workers International Youth Department. While COGIC organized associative institutions within the denomination, some key leaders such as Mother Lizzie Robinson, the first Supervisor of the COGIC Women’s Department,  

237 Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 46.  
238 Ibid., 45.  
239 Ibid., 48.  
240 Ibid.
discouraged saints from participating in secular associative institutions such as lodges, like the Masonic Lodge, because they viewed them as “secret and oath-bound societies” that were not “conducive to piety or Christian usefulness.”241 She held that secular social clubs and lodges were worldly spaces and that saints should pursue holiness and not become involved with worldly activities. Yet, lodges, fraternities, and sororities have strengthened black civil life by providing “health and burial insurances, employment opportunities, social functions, and ritual life” and enabling blacks to pool their money for entrepreneurial programs and small business development.242 Although Robinson did not condone COGIC women’s participation in lodges, COGIC members joined social organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Arenia Mallory and Lillian Brooks Coffey became active participants in the NCNW, due to a relationship they cultivated with the founder of the organization, Mary McCloud Bethune. During the pre-Civil Rights period, COGIC also established black schools such as Saints Industrial and Literary School in Mississippi and the Page Normal and Bible Institute in Texas.243 Founded in 1917 by Pinki Duncan in the basement of Saint Paul COGIC in Lexington, Mississippi, Saints provided a secondary “religious based” education to COGIC youth as well as industrial training in agriculture and other industries.244 Founded in 1917 by E.M.

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241 Ibid., 51.; Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, 120.
242 Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 51.
243 Ibid., 49.
244 Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, 99-100; Pleas, Fifty Years Achievement, 47.
Page, the Page and Normal Bible Institute offered students training in the Bible, the teachings of holiness, Christian ministry, and a basic high school curriculum.\textsuperscript{245}

In terms of expressive culture, African American Holiness-Pentecostals contributed profoundly to the development of gospel music, which traces back to the hush arbor meetings of enslaved Africans. In addition to adopting black folk traditions, African American Holiness-Pentecostals helped introduce musical instruments such as the keyboard, drums, and tambourines into worship services.\textsuperscript{246} The recordings of many black Holiness-Pentecostal artists incorporated “the New Orleans jazz style and ragtime-style piano accompaniment and was impervious to distinctions between sacred and secular music.”\textsuperscript{247}

In addition to contributing to black civil society through establishing communicative, associative, educative, and expressive institutions, COGIC members participated in American democratic life and explicitly affirmed their rights as United States citizens. Saints were not only acquainted with the teaching of the Bible, but they also had knowledge of the Constitution and they upheld their identity as American citizens. Mason evidenced his knowledge and embrace of American democratic ideals when he became a conscientious objector and encouraged members of COGIC to be

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\textsuperscript{246} Southern, \textit{The Music of African Americans}, 453-459.

\textsuperscript{247} Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 49.
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conscientious objectors during World War I.\textsuperscript{248} Mason refused to enlist in the Great War because he believed that the Bible prohibited humans from killing other human beings. During the war, a white clerk in Lexington, Mississippi accused him of intentionally encouraging blacks to dodge the draft and of making treasonable remarks against the government.\textsuperscript{249} Some white Mississippians feared they may lose control over blacks, which constituted a significant percentage of the local population, if they permitted them to avoid the draft.\textsuperscript{250} In 1918, the Bureau of Investigations (BOI) began to investigate Mason and accused him of sympathizing with the Germans. Special agent, M.M. Schaumburger, described Mason as a “Negro reviv alist preacher with a $60,000 mansion in Memphis, Tennessee purchased with German gold.”\textsuperscript{251}

The BOI had an extensive file on Mason and COGIC. Their report revealed that they had investigated his background extensively. The BOI had read COGIC denominational literature in which COGIC took a firm position against war and had created a file on various black and white leaders in the denomination such as E.R. Driver, Lizzie Robinson, and Elder William B. Holt, who all were close to Mason.\textsuperscript{252} The BOI did not only investigate Mason because they deemed that he was intentionally providing a way for blacks to dodge the draft, but they were also suspicious of his interactions with

\textsuperscript{248} Pleas, \textit{Fifty Years Achievement from 1906-1956}, 91.


\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., v.

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid., 32.
whites.\textsuperscript{253} Many local, state, and federal officials feared Mason and harassed him because of his religious beliefs and his promotion of interracial unity among blacks and whites.\textsuperscript{254} The BOI eventually accused Mason of espionage and of conspiracy to commit crimes against the government and arrested him in Lexington, Mississippi.\textsuperscript{255} When white COGIC minister, William Holt, traveled from Los Angeles, California to pay Mason’s bail, this made the BOI even more suspicious of Mason’s white associates. The BOI file said that Holt “should be especially watched” because as a white man he traveled from California to Mississippi to pay $2,000 ($30,750.46 adjusted for inflation) to bail Mason out of jail.\textsuperscript{256} This was extraordinary for a white person to go out of his way to support a black person during the period of Jim Crow. Mason, Holt, and Henry Kirvin were later arrested and jailed in Paris, Texas in 1918.\textsuperscript{257}

Because many COGIC members refused to participate in World War I out of respect for their religious convictions, many whites perceived Mason and members of COGIC as being disloyal to the United States. When speaking to an interracial crowd during a religious meeting, Elder Jesse Payne, a COGIC pastor in Blytheville, Arkansas, 

\textsuperscript{253} Dupree, Exposed, 32.

\textsuperscript{254} The Whole Truth, Spring 1996, 15.

\textsuperscript{255} Dupree, Exposed, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{256} Dupree, Exposed, 9; The inflation data and statistics were retrieved from http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=2000&year1=1918&year2=2013 (accessed 12 March 2013).

\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., 9.; When Mason, black COGIC pastor, E.R. Driver, and William B. Holt, a white COGIC pastor, were arrested for their conscientious objection of the draft during World War I, the Paris Morning News in Texas reported that Holt was seen ‘eating and lodging with blacks and hugging and kissing fellow preachers.” Theodore Kornweibel Jr., “Bishop C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ during World War I: The Perils of Conscientious Objection” Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South. 26 (Fall 1987):277.
intimated that blacks should not fight in the war because it was a “white man’s war” and he said that “the Kaiser did not require his people to buy bonds, which made him a better man than President Wilson.” After Payne made these remarks, he was tarred and feathered by white members in the congregation. Connecting Mason’s opposition to the war with Payne’s thinking, many whites may have concluded that Mason was anti-American and disloyal to the United States. Counteracting this perception that he was unpatriotic and sympathized with Germany during the war, Mason preached a sermon in which he explicitly vituperated the German Kaiser as the anti-Christ. During the sermon he also demonstrated his support for the country and the war effort by encouraging his members to purchase liberty bonds to fund the war. He argued that it was biblically justifiable for COGIC members to purchase liberty bonds and lend money to the government because the Scriptures said, “give to him that asketh thee, and from them that borrow of thee turn not away (St. Matthew 5:42).” To defend COGIC members’ conscientious objection of the draft, Mason explained Article 17 of the Constitution of COGIC, “Political Governments,” which states:


259 Dupree, Exposed, 9.


261 Ibid.

262 Ibid.
We believe that governments are God-given institutions for the benefit of mankind. We admonish and exhort our members to honor magistrates, and the powers that be, and to respect and obey the civil laws.

We hereby and herewith declare our loyalty to the President and the Constitution of the United States, and pledge fidelity to the flag for which the Republic stands, but as God-fearing, peace-loving and law abiding people, we claim only our inheritance as American citizens, namely: to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience. We believe that shedding of human blood, or taking human life, is contrary to the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and as a body, we are averse to war in all its forms.²⁶³

Mason affirmed COGIC’s loyalty to the president of the United States and to the Constitution and asserted that saints have the right not to violate their religious convictions concerning taking human lives.²⁶⁴ He understood that the United States Constitution defended the religious liberty of all American citizens. Mason and many other African American Holiness-Pentecostals not only understood themselves to be saints, but they also identified themselves as United States citizens. To demonstrate his support for the United States during WWI, Mason told his congregation, “I have loaned the government, and have succeeded in raising for the help of the government more than

²⁶³ Pleas, Fifty Years Achievement from 1906-1956, 91.
²⁶⁴ Ibid.
three thousand dollars.” Furthermore, the COGIC Constitution taught members to “claim” their “inheritance as American citizens.”

As leader of COGIC, Mason collaborated with local political leaders to improve the life options of members in his church and community. He was not only a spiritual leader committed to Holiness-Pentecostal teachings, but he was also a pragmatic accommodationist who understood how to negotiate deals with civic and political leaders in Memphis on behalf of COGIC. For example, he utilized his position as leader of a large denomination and his business and “political acumen” to persuade Edward Hull “Boss” Crump of Memphis to support COGIC’s effort to “rebuild the national Tabernacle after it had been burned down.” Crump gave COGIC $10,000 to help build the new Temple after Mason wrote him a letter explaining how much COGIC had done to help poor people in the city of Memphis, how the COGIC annual convocations contributed to the city economy, and how COGIC is not bound to Memphis but can relocate to other major cities in the United States.

COGIC historical sources contain pictures of Bishop C.H. Mason standing next to several prominent politicians in his era, including the Tennessee Governor Gordon Browning (who served as Governor from 1937 to 1939), Dr. Joseph Edison Walker (a leading black physician in Memphis who founded the Universal Life Insurance Company

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265 Patterson, Ross, and Atkins, “History and Formative Years of COGIC,” 28.

266 Pleas, *Fifty Years Achievement from 1906-1956*, 91.


268 Ibid.
and the Tri-State Bank), and Memphis Mayor Walter Chandler (who served as mayor of Memphis from 1940 to 1946). Even though some newspapers such as the Chicago Defender and the Broad Ax vituperated black churches for allowing political forums to be held at their churches, many black pastors including black Holiness-Pentecostal leaders allowed politicians into their churches. Mason welcomed local politicians such as Mayor Chandler to attend the COGIC convocation meetings. During annual convocations, COGIC had a civic night service during which Mason would give the mayor and local politicians an opportunity to address COGIC constituents. President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote Mason a letter on September 24, 1938, stating: “I send all who attend the convention of the Church of God in Christ my cordial greetings and best wishes for a gathering which will promote and advance the interest of true religion.”

In addition to Mason, COGIC women such as Coffey and Mallory, key leaders in the COGIC Women’s Department, were actively engaged in local and national politics. During an address delivered to members attending the COGIC National Convocation, Lillian Brooks Coffey, the supervisor of the COGIC Women’s Department, said, “[a]vail yourself of the necessary preparation to fight the Battle for Democracy in which all of the people may share. I firmly believe that the church should take an active part in the affairs of the government.” Furthermore, while Coffey served as leader of the COGIC

269 “Civic night at the International Convocation with Bishop Louis Henry Ford Officiating,” Odie Tolbert Archival Collection, University of Memphis Special Collections; Memphis Corporate Salute Program Booklet, 24 August 1994, 5-6.
270 Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 52-53.
Women’s department, COGIC women issued a resolution during the COGIC Women’s International Convention in 1953, which states:

As Christian Women who believe in the word of God as a Foundation for Democracy, we recommend that our vigilance will never cease until the blight of discrimination be eradicated from our fair land. To this end we will cooperate with any and all organization within the framework of our AMERICAN GOVERNMENT—who are seeking equality, justice and integration of all Americans into the Democratic way of life.  

In line with the COGIC constitution, this resolution demonstrates that COGIC women upheld American democratic values and asserted that racial prejudice and discrimination were not only against divine law but were un-American and undemocratic. They were determined to keep a close eye on injustice and to ally with peaceful organizations that were seeking to pursue equality and justice.

Some COGIC women worked closely with organizations such as the NCNW. Through participating in the NCNW, COGIC women leaders met Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin Roosevelt and the first lady of the United States. Mary McCloud Bethune, the founder of the NCNW had a close friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, and their friendship gave Bethune access to Roosevelt’s administration. By being engaged in the NCNW, Mallory, Coffey, and ostensibly other COGIC women in

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272 Ibid., 53.
275 Ibid., 121.
the Women’s Department were able to advocate for a vast array of civil rights issues during the 1940s including equal educational opportunities, “full and unrestricted citizenship” rights, and “federal action to abolish lynching.”

Besides Coffey and Mallory, other COGIC leaders sanctioned political engagement during the early twentieth century. Bishop E.R. Driver endorsed political candidates in California in the 1930s. In addition, Bishop Louis H. Ford deeply engaged in politics. As a youth, Ford attended Saints in 1927, and he embraced the school’s emphasis on civic engagement. His civic training influenced his appreciation of American Democracy and inspired him to educate poor and marginalized persons in his church and community about their democratic rights and responsibilities. As a COGIC leader, Ford encouraged COGIC members to be civically engaged and to participate in the election process. He officiated the civic night meetings at the COGIC Annual Convocation during Bishop Mason’s tenure as leader of COGIC. He was very active in community affairs and in politics in Chicago, serving as a member of the Executive Committee of the NAACP and as a Commissioner for the Cook County Department of Corrections. He developed a strong rapport with Chicago public officials, including

276 National Council of Negro Women. “Historical Background” Bethune Cookman Papers. Rice University Library

277 Daniels, “Navigating the Territory,” 53.

278 “Civic night at the International Convocation with Bishop Louis Henry Ford Officiating,” Odie Tolbert Archival Collection, University of Memphis Special Collections.

Mayors Richard J. Daley, Richard M. Daley, and Harold Washington. When he became bishop, he invited several prominent politicians running for national office such as President Bill Clinton to speak to thousands of COGIC constituents during National COGIC Convocations.

**Identity and Political Participation**

Chryssouchou and Lyons’s theoretical discussion of the compatibility between the identity of religious/ethnic minorities and their identification with the national group has implications for my discussion of civic engagement among COGIC leaders and members. Utilizing their theory, I argue COGIC members’ religious (Holiness-Pentecostal) and racial (black consciousness) identities did not prevent them from seeing themselves as American citizens and being engaged in American democracy. Though all saints were not engaged in politics at the level of persons like Mallory and Ford, Mason through the COGIC Constitution encouraged COGIC members to be knowledgeable of their rights as American citizens. Furthermore, he admonished COGIC members to participate in American democracy and allowed politicians to address the saints at COGIC convocations. COGIC’s members’ affirmation of their rights as American (U.S.)
citizens and their beliefs in equality provided a foundation for them to pursue social justice through pragmatically working within the Democratic establishment.\textsuperscript{282}

Chryssouchou and Lyons’s define identity as a “collective elaboration of knowledge about the self in a social context.” They explicate the following three different aspects of an individual’s identity: \textit{subjective representation of the self}, \textit{ideological consciousness}, and \textit{psychological identification}.\textsuperscript{283} They define \textit{subjective representation of the self} as an individual’s self-understanding within his or her social context. For example, a person may be a member of multiple groups such as being black, a woman, being middle-class, etc. \textit{Ideological consciousness} is as an individual’s understanding of his or her core values. This self-knowledge of values affects a person’s decision to join or affiliate with a particular group. For example, an African American may join a social organization such as the NAACP or the NCNW because he or she connects with the mission and vision of the organization. \textit{Psychological identification} is defined as “inclusion of the national group within the self.”\textsuperscript{284} For example, a patriotic person may proudly define herself or himself as an American citizen. The authors hold that these different aspects of identity enable one to understand how ethnic minorities in culturally diverse societies identity with the nation. Citing several studies conducted with different minority groups in European countries, the authors argue that beliefs about the

\textsuperscript{282} Franklin, \textit{Another Day’s Journey}, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{283} Chyrssochoou and Lyons, “Perceptions of (In)compatibility between Identities” in \textit{Identity and Participation}, 79.

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 80-81.
“(in)compatibility” between the religious, ethnic, and national identities of minority groups can negatively affect the political participation of minority group members.\textsuperscript{285} Minority groups that \textit{subjectively, ideologically, and psychologically} identify with the national group can be more psychologically motivated to fight for their rights and to struggle “to redress status inequality” than groups who do not connect with the national group.\textsuperscript{286} Yet, identifying with the nation is not simply a matter of minority groups assimilating into mainstream culture to avoid prejudice and discrimination from the majority culture. On the contrary, bonding with the national group plays a strong role in enabling minority groups “to redress inequality and achieve material and symbolic resources.”\textsuperscript{287}

African Americans Holiness-Pentecostals’ experience of oppression moved Sanders to describe African American Holiness Pentecostals as “saints in exile.” If utilized uncritically, Chryssouchou and Lyon’s theory indicates that this trope may reinforce the perception that African American Holiness-Pentecostals are otherworldly and detached from politics because they do not perceive the United States as being their home. Many scholars have uncritically assumed that saints’ “otherworldliness” means that Holiness-Pentecostals are divorced from secular politics.\textsuperscript{288} Additionally, African American Holiness-Pentecostals who view holiness in this way may not actively engage in politics because they view the political and social arena as sinful. Many early saints

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 84-86.
\item Ibid., 83.
\item Ibid.
\item Baer and Singer, \textit{African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century}, 61.
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did not understand holiness or the calling to “be in this world, but not of it” as an admonition to be detached from American civic life and politics. COGIC members’ holiness teachings emphasized avoiding promiscuous sexual activity, cigarettes, and intoxicating beverage, not avoiding politics.

Saints’ commitments to sanctified beliefs, truth, righteousness, and justice resonated with their embrace of American democratic ideals of “liberty and justice for all.” Furthermore, the COGIC Constitution demonstrated COGIC’s ideological consciousness of their right to religious freedom. Saints included their national identity in their self-identification as African American Holiness-Pentecostals. Regardless of the inequality and injustice that they faced in the South, African American Holiness-Pentecostals deemed that they were citizens of the United States and were entitled to the same rights as white Americans. They did not uphold their status as American citizens because they were comfortable with the status quo or because they merely wanted to assimilate into the mainstream culture. On the contrary, black Holiness-Pentecostals such as Louis H. Ford endeavored to combat segregation and racial injustice through pragmatically developing relationships with local and national civic leaders because they desired to improve the life options of persons in their communities.289 Hence, COGIC members’ identification of themselves as American citizens and their embrace of

American democratic ideas of equality and justice played a major role in their involvement in American civic and political life in the early twentieth century.

COGIC leaders and members’ pragmatic accommodationism, their willingness to navigate within the American political, social, and economic system, laid the foundation for their engagements in the Civil Rights Movement. Memphis saints such as Bishop James O. Patterson Sr. and members of his Pentecostal Temple COGIC were actively involved in the NAACP, an organization that has historically aspired “to eliminate race-based discrimination” and “ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons.” The NAACP was attractive to COGIC members because the organization pursued social justice through legal recourse and worked within the framework of the American democratic establishment.

Conclusion

During the early twentieth century, African American Holiness-Pentecostals experienced persecution because of their holiness and Pentecostal beliefs, their efforts to preserve their folk religious practices, and their race. Although “saints” may have viewed themselves as exiles in the United States and a persons who were “in this world, but not of it” because of their religious beliefs and cultural practices, my central claim is that African American Holiness-Pentecostals’ commitment to sanctification did not necessarily preclude them from claiming their identity as US citizens and engaging in American civic and political life. COGIC members’ affirmation of their citizenship gave

some impetus to their engagements in political protest activism during the Civil Rights era. In the upcoming chapters, I will indicate and further explain how saints’ learning to navigate and operate in the American capitalistic and democratic society allowed them to make some important contributions to the Memphis Civil Rights Movement. I will discuss how saints contributed to Civil Rights Movement in Memphis through collaborating with black civic leaders, politicians, NAACP representatives, labor union leaders, and civil rights activists in Memphis.
Chapter Three: “Others Unidentified”—Saints’ Contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis

In this chapter, I situate the Memphis Civil Rights Movement in the broader historical context of African American struggles for Civil Rights in the South, and outline multiple ways blacks have opposed racial injustice such as establishing black business and organizations, building black political coalitions and voting blocs, forming and participating in civil rights organizations, and engaging in direct nonviolent political protest initiatives. My central argument is that COGIC churches and COGIC members figured prominently in Memphis Civil Rights activism. Though COGIC persons have been considered to be otherworldly and disengaged from politics, I will pinpoint that two Memphis COGIC churches, Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple, were not only places of worship but were also key centers of political activity during the Memphis Civil Rights Movement. Political rallies, voter registration drives, and strike meetings frequently occurred at Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple. Furthermore, COGIC ministers also held important leadership roles during the Civil Rights Movement and worked directly with well-known Civil Rights leaders such as Reverends James Lawson and Henry Bunton. COGIC members contributed financial resources and participated in a variety of political protest demonstrations. COGIC members struggled for civil rights through participating in voter registration drives and serving in local and state positions. COGIC leaders helped bring King to Memphis during the Sanitation Workers Strike, and several members were present at Mason Temple when King spoke.
Background and Historical Context of the Memphis Civil Rights Movement

African Americans experienced racial discrimination and injustice throughout the South in general and in the state of Tennessee in particular following the demise of slavery in 1863. During the period of Reconstruction, the United States Congress passed several amendments to the Constitution that benefited African Americans. The 13\textsuperscript{th} Amendment abolished slavery and granted blacks citizenship rights. The 14\textsuperscript{th} amendment ensured that blacks had equal protection of the laws and due process as it relates to life, liberty, and property. The 15\textsuperscript{th} Amendment gave blacks the right to vote in democratic elections. Disparaging these amendments, many white southerners who maintained a spirit of racial superiority did not believe that freed blacks were entitled to the same rights and liberties as southern whites. Nevertheless, despite white southerners’ disdain for blacks’ freedom and progress, the federal government sent troops to the South to protect the civil rights of blacks and enabled black southerners to participate in the election process and even allowed some blacks to become elected officials. For example, black southerners constituted a majority of the population in Memphis in 1869, and black residents of Memphis who supported the Republican Party (the party of Abraham Lincoln) elected two black Republicans to the state legislature. Various blacks in Memphis held local government offices and some blacks even served on local juries.\textsuperscript{291}

Continuing to view blacks as inferior, many white southerners were persistent in their efforts to challenge blacks’ constitutional rights. Whites found their opportunity

during the presidential election of 1876. During this disputed election, Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes influenced the end of Reconstruction when he won the White House by agreeing that in exchange for electoral votes from southern states that he would pull federal troops out of the South and permit southern state governments freedom to govern their states, especially southern black residents, as they desired. After his election President Hayes fulfilled his vow and pulled federal troops of out of the South. In 1883, the United States Supreme Court declared that the Civil Rights Act was unconstitutional and infringed on the rights of states. In a landmark case in 1895, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court endorsed racial segregation by declaring that the southern states principle of “separate but unequal” is constitutional and within the rights of the states.  

These new rulings virtually nullified the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, and enabled white southern state governments to reverse the progress that the era of Emancipation and Reconstruction had brought blacks. Discrimination and inequality became custom and law, enabling whites to treat blacks not as equals but as inferior persons in nearly every social arena, including in public education, transportation, housing, schools, libraries, swimming pools, and hospitals. White supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan used fear and intimidation tactics to discourage blacks from voting. Blacks who did vote in Memphis were not permitted the freedom to vote for their candidate of choice, but under a system of machine politics, political bosses such as Boss

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Edward H. Crump pressured blacks to vote as a bloc for his candidates. Crump ruled Memphis politics from 1910, the year he was elected as Mayor, till his death in 1954. When A. Philip Randolph, the African American president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, accepted an invitation by the local branch of his organization to speak at a mass meeting at the First Baptist Church of Beale Street on March 30, 1944, he referred to Crump as “the Memphis political Boss who out-Hitler’s Hitler.” Randolph encouraged blacks to stand up for their right to “free speech” in Memphis and not be intimidated by Crump. Crump responded to Randolph and other blacks who came to Memphis to promote racial and economic equality, saying:

You have a bunch of niggers teaching social equality, stirring up social hatred. I am not going to stand for it…This is Memphis…We are not going to tolerate a bunch of niggers spreading racial hatred and running things their way. Tell them Mr. Crump said so.

Crump used the Memphis police department to harass black Republican political and business leaders such as Robert Church Jr., Elmer’s Atkinson, and Dr. J.B. Martin. When Dr. Martin, a local business owner, organized a political rally at Salem Baptist Church in 1940, Crump sent his police officers to force Martin to cancel the rally. The officers

293 Katherine Hudson and Evelyn Lara, An Examination of Discriminatory and Segregatative Laws of Memphis, Tennessee, 1880-1964, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center, 3-7.


warned him that if he did not stop his rally that his drug store would be closed, and he would be arrested for selling illegal drugs. Crump’s machine politics influenced black voter turnout to diminish in Memphis and led to a decline in the number of black elected officials.  

The political picture for blacks improved in the 1950s following the defeat of the Crump machine by Senator Estes Kefauver who led a U.S. Senate Special Committee to investigate organize crime and after Crump’s death in 1954. No longer controlled by Crump, local citizens and public officials were free to follow their convictions. The relationship between blacks and whites improved in Memphis. When the desegregation movement came to Memphis in the 1950s, white Memphis leaders responded to blacks’ demands for equality through forming a group called the Memphis Committee of Community Relations (MCCR). The organization consisted of professional and religious leaders whose main objective was to maintain peace and order in the city. Learning from the Civil Rights demonstrations in Selma, Alabama and Little Rock, Arkansas, the MCCR hoped to keep things as peaceful as possible in Memphis and proceed towards desegregation without much difficulty. Hence, the MCCR privately discussed and often accommodated to blacks’ demands when they felt pressured by protest demonstrators. The Memphis Press-Scimitar newspaper proudly touted

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297 Church and Church, *The Robert R. Churches of Memphis*, 193.

Memphis as “a model in peaceful segregation,” and one journalist stated in the headline of an article, “Memphis Provides More and Better Jobs for Negroes [in downtown businesses].” Many black ministers in Memphis viewed Memphis as a pleasant place to live and held race relations to be close to the best in the South. In 1966, COGIC Elder Willie Porter wrote in The Whole Truth, “Race relations in Memphis have attracted favorable national attention” and have not been “marred by violence” as in other southern cities.

Although many blacks viewed the Memphis racial climate as being better than in other southern cities, Memphis blacks still perceived and were conscious of discrimination and racism among whites and endeavored to resist Jim Crow practices in multiple ways. Many blacks resisted segregation through simply choosing to operate effectively within their own spheres. Black elites avoided the denigrating “Jim crow practices in white-controlled business institutions” through establishing their own separate organizations and black businesses. Blacks in Tennessee formed their own separate business leagues, insurance companies, publishing companies, churches and denominations. In 1927 Robert Church, a wealthy businessman and politician, established the West Tennessee Civic and Political League, an organization that


300 Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

conducted voter registration campaigns, improved the look of urban communities by paving dirt roads and creating a recreational park for blacks.\textsuperscript{302}

In addition to establishing black businesses and churches, blacks also endeavored to pursue social justice and equality through forming black political coalitions and working to help blacks participate in the democratic process. Though limited by Crump’s machine politics, blacks in Memphis had the right to vote. The voting rights of black citizens were not as severely restricted and challenged in Memphis as in other southern cities and states. Though Tennessee included a poll tax, literacy tests and grandfather clauses were not included as in other southern states.\textsuperscript{303} Seeking to build a strong black political base and to elect blacks in government positions, in the 1950s many Memphis civic and church leaders encouraged blacks to register to vote. Electing blacks into office benefited the Memphis Movement by placing blacks in positions of power whereby they could institute legislation and programs that helped blacks and other marginalized groups.

Additionally, blacks opposed segregation through establishing civil rights organizations such as the Afro American League, the National Association of Colored Peoples (NAACP) and the National Urban League.\textsuperscript{304} The NAACP fought racial injustice and Jim Crow laws through the courts. One of the most successful court battles that the NAACP won was the 1954 Supreme Court case, \textit{Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka},


\textsuperscript{304} Lovett, \textit{The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee}, xxi-xxii.
Kansas. The Supreme Court ruled that the doctrine of “separate but equal” in public education was unconstitutional. Chief Justice Earl Warren declared that “separate education facilities are inherently unequal” and the doctrine “deprived colored children of equal educational opportunities.” Following this ruling, the NAACP labored to tear down the walls of segregation in other social areas besides education.

Besides the NAACP and other early civil rights organizations, new civil rights organizations emerged during the mid-twentieth century such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. These organizations often criticized the NAACP for being too slow and gradualist in their approach to civil rights struggles. They endeavored to oppose segregation and discrimination more aggressively through engaging in nonviolent protest demonstrations—boycotts, marches, sit-ins, kneel-ins, etc. When leading massive protest demonstrations, Martin Luther King Jr. aspired to dramatize injustice and to speak to the conscious and soul of whites who advanced segregation. Throughout the United States, blacks utilized a variety of tactics to pursue social justice and equality, and black ministers, civic leaders, politicians, and leaders of Civil Rights organizations such as the NAACP and younger Civil Rights organizations such as the SCLC collaborated together during the 1950s and 1960s to advance the struggle for freedom and justice locally and nationally.

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305 Katherine Hudson and Evelyn Lara, An Examination of Discriminatory and Segregatative Laws of Memphis, Tennessee, 1880-1964, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center, 7.

Sketching the fight for justice in its broader historical context and outlining diverse methods that activists utilized to oppose racial injustice enables me to identify and acknowledge meaningful contributions that persons from Memphis COGIC churches made to the Memphis Movement. Though the particular involvement of COGIC churches in the struggle for equality and justice have often gone unnoticed and received insignificant scholarly attention, COGIC factored prominently in the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis in the following five ways: 1) COGIC established a strong organizational and denominational base in Memphis and contributed significant denominational resources to the Movement, including meeting space for Civil Rights activity; 2) COGIC leaders encouraged civic engagement among blacks in Memphis in general and members of COGIC churches in particular through facilitating voter registration drives; 3) COGIC leaders and members participated in civil rights organizations and civil rights demonstrations; 4) Memphis COGIC members participated in electoral politics and helped a Memphis COGIC candidate, J.O. Patterson, Jr., become a state congressman and city council member during the Civil Rights era; and 5) COGIC leaders and members contributed to the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike through participating in boycotts, marches, rallies at Mason Temple, and through providing leadership to the strike.

1964 and 1965. My analysis ends with the assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis, the nation’s leading champion of nonviolent protest. I tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis utilizing the perspectives of COGIC leaders and members who were involved in the Movement. C.H. Mason is pivotal to COGIC history because he served as the senior leader of the denomination for over half of a century. Bishop James O. Patterson Sr. is central to understanding COGIC’s role in the Civil Rights struggle in Memphis. After Mason’s death, Bishop Patterson Sr. helped COGIC continue to thrive as a denomination. He was influential in politics, contributed to the local branch of the NAACP, and participated in protest campaigns during the Sanitation Workers Strike. Many COGIC members in Memphis respected and followed his leadership. Not only were both persons leading figures in the denomination in Memphis, but COGIC facilities, Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple, established respectively under their leadership factored prominently in the history of the Memphis Civil Rights Movement.

**Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple: Worship and Political Space**

Although Bishop Mason’s vision was not for COGIC to be a separate majority black denomination, many of the white members who affiliated with Mason surrendered to southern racial customs and separated from COGIC and formed a separate denomination, the Assemblies of God. Nevertheless, Mason organized and led the members who continued to serve with him, and his leadership influenced COGIC to grow and to become one of the leading denominations in the United States in general and in the Black Church in particular. In establishing the church, Mason utilized a hierarchical, episcopal structure, consisting respectively of bishops, superintendents, ordained elders,
and licensed ministers and missionaries. Desiring to create a space for COGIC members to worship and experience the movement of the Spirit and to give offerings to the denomination and for bishops and church leaders to meet and offer reports about their jurisdictions, Mason invited COGIC members throughout the United States and countries around the world to attend annual national convocation meetings in Memphis at Tabernacle COGIC. After Tabernacle COGIC burned down in the late 1930s, Bishop Mason and COGIC members prepared to build a new church to accommodate the thousands of COGIC members who traveled to attend the annual convocation meetings in Memphis.  

He appointed leaders within the denomination to spearhead the construction of the Temple, including appointing Bishop R.F. Williams as building commissioner, Elder U.E. Miller as Superintendent of Construction, and H. Taylor as architect. During the Great Depression, Mason and several COGIC leaders and members raised more than $275,000 to build the Temple. Completed in 1945, Mason Temple had an auditorium seating capacity of 7,500 persons, a large kitchen and dining hall in the rear of the building for members to eat and fellowship, a huge lobby with restrooms, a large meeting and assembly room for bishop and church leaders to discuss the business and administration of the church, an office for Bishop Mason, and a separate suite for the Women’s Department.  

The Memphis Press-Scimitar acknowledged that the successful


> “Facts About the Temple,” The Elsie W. Mason Papers, Memphis Public Library; Keith D. Miller, Martin Luther King’s Biblical Epic: His Final, Great Speech (Jackson, MS: University Press of
completion of the Temple was “a tribute to Mason’s organizing ability and ingenuity.”"\textsuperscript{309}

Mason Temple was the largest black church owned and operated by an African American religious group in Memphis and throughout the United States.\textsuperscript{310}

This space was an important location during the Memphis Civil Rights Movement. Although Mason planned for the Temple to be a place for saints to worship, Mason also welcomed citizens of Memphis to use the Temple for civic engagement and political empowerment. As early as the 1940s well before King spoke at Mason Temple during the Strike, well-known activists such as Paul Robeson and Mary McLeod Bethune spoke at Mason Temple. As noted in Chapter 2, Mason and COGIC members welcomed Memphis politicians such as Mayor Walter Chandler and Mayor-elect Edmund Orgil to attend COGIC national convocations to address the saints. Black Memphians utilized the Temple for political forums and rallies, NAACP meetings, and Sanitation Workers Union Meeting during the Memphis Movement.

The COGIC denomination grew tremendously under Senior Bishop Mason, who possessed superb business and organizational skills. Mason became known as the man with more than a million members.\textsuperscript{311} After Mason’s death, the denomination also experienced tremendous success under the leadership of the first elected presiding bishop

\begin{footnotes}
\item[310] Butler, \textit{Women in the Church of God in Christ}, 130.; Keith D. Miller, \textit{Martin Luther King’s Biblical Ethic: His Final, Great Speech} (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 2012), 62-63.
\end{footnotes}
J. O. Patterson Sr. Born July 21, 1912, in Derma, Mississippi, Patterson moved to Memphis with his parents in 1923. He became a member of Temple COGIC, led by Senior Bishop Mason. He eventually met and married Deborah Mason, the daughter of C.H. Mason. After Mason ordained him as a minister in 1936, Patterson served several churches throughout Tennessee. He served as the pastor of Woodlawn COGIC starting in 1941. Under his leadership, Woodlawn experienced significant membership growth and the church raised funds to build a new facility in 1950. The church named the facility Pentecostal Temple. Bishop C.H. Mason dedicated the newly erected building. The memorial dedication plaque for the building read: “To God, to the people and to the Churches Of God In Christ, Incorporated.” Although religious temples are places devoted to worship and dwelling places for God, Pentecostal Temple was also dedicated to the people. As such, Pentecostal Temple was an important location where black Memphians and members of the Pentecostal Temple congregation held political and civil rights meetings.

Bishop Mason ordained Patterson as bishop in 1955 and appointed him to the Tennessee Second Jurisdiction. He later appointed him to serve as the secretary of the Executive Committee of COGIC. In this role, he helped his elderly father-in-law

312 The temple was an important place of worship in Jewish culture and in the Hebrew Bible. Solomon viewed the temple as being a sacred house and space for the Lord to inhabit. Solomon believed God resides everywhere including in “thick darkness.” Yet, as an act of worship and fulfilling his father David’s desire to build a temple for God, Solomon said to God after completing the temple, “I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to reside in forever.” 2 Chronicles 6:2, NRSV. In naming their churches temple, COGIC leaders believed that these houses were sacred spaces devoted to worship.

coordinate the executive and administrative affairs of the church. In 1968, after a tumultuous leadership controversy within the national church following the death of Bishop Mason, the COGIC church elected Patterson as the denomination’s first presiding bishop. As presiding bishop, Patterson established the Charles Harrison Mason Seminary, the C.H. Mason System of Bible Colleges, the J.O. Patterson Fine Arts Department, the COGIC Publishing House, etc. Under his leadership, the membership grew to exceed 4 million members in fifty states and in forty-seven countries.314

As a high-ranking leader in COGIC during the 1950s and 1960s, Patterson was an elite and respected figure in Memphis. He became an influential power broker in the city, and he often operated behind the scenes during the Civil Rights Movement. Many politicians, civic leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, and civil rights leaders were eager to become acquainted and network with him due to his influence within the COGIC church. He developed ties with prominent church leaders and business leaders in Memphis. For instance, he had a rapport with civic leaders such as Lt. George Lee, a prominent black business and political leader in Memphis. During the Civil Rights era, he invited Lee to speak during a national COGIC convocation.315 In his autobiography, Christian Methodist Episcopal Bishop Henry Bunton, a civil rights activist who worked directly with King in the Southern Leadership Conference in Memphis and nationally, acknowledged Patterson’s contribution to the Movement and listed his name at the top of a long list of Memphis ministers with whom he “worked closely.” He wrote: “The


315 Lt. George Lee Papers, Ben Hooks Center, Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library
persons named and hundreds of others worked together in carrying forward the movement toward complete civil rights and first class citizenship.\textsuperscript{316}

**Voter Registration Drives**

Bishop Patterson collaborated with various black leaders in Memphis to help register blacks to vote in the 1950s. Patterson was a member of the Ministers and Citizens League, a committee of about two hundred ministers that aspired to register black voters to elect black candidates such as the Reverend Roy Love to the school board in 1955. The committee believed that qualified black elected officials would be more sensitive to the needs of their black constituents than many of the white officials who were currently representing them. Lieutenant George Lee and Dr. J.E. Walker were the organizers of the new league, and Reverend H.C. Bunton was elected general chairman of the drive. Patterson welcomed the ministers to have their first organizational meeting and voter registration drive at his church, Pentecostal Temple. The League helped double the number of registered black voters in Memphis.\textsuperscript{317}

In 1959 Bishop Patterson also played a role in the “Volunteer Ticket” campaign, which also endeavored to register thousands of blacks to vote and to elect black candidates such as Russell Sugarmon Jr. for Public Works Commissioner, Attorney Ben


Hooks for Juvenile Court Judge, and the Reverends Roy Love and Henry Bunton for the School Board. Patterson and other respected Memphis ministers from different denominations attended an organizational meeting on February 3, 1959, to establish a committee to aid the campaign. The rally committee initially planned for different church choirs and members to march from Mason Temple to Martin stadium. Once the churches arrived at Martin stadium, the committee planned to have a large outdoor mass meeting. To generate proceeds for the Volunteer Ticket campaign, the committee invited Dr. King and popular gospel singer Mahalia Jackson to be the featured guests at the event. The committed aspired to fill Martin Stadium and to sell twenty thousand tickets for one dollar a piece.

Though the plans had been established and tickets had already been sold, the rally had to be relocated to Mason Temple after the owner of Martin Stadium, Dr. B.B. Martin—an established Memphis dentist—refused to allow the use of his stadium for a political rally. Having already printed, distributed, and sold tickets, the ministers and committee members were upset and disappointed that a fellow black citizen reneged on his promise to allow them to use the stadium. Some ministers of the committee even proposed boycotting the stadium. However, Dr. Martin insisted that he was unaware that the committee planned to use the stadium for political purposes. Rather than boycotting the stadium, the committee leaders shifted the venue to Mason Temple.  

318 Unlike with

Dr. Martin, Patterson was fully supportive of the event occurring at Mason Temple and did not have qualms with political discussions taking place there.

More than 5,000 persons attended the rally at Mason Temple. Mahalia Jackson and a very large choir composed of members from different churches stirred the audience with singing. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the keynote speaker, commended the ministers for their spirit of unity and for "rising above denominational lines.” He recognized that CME ministers such as Rev. H. Bunton and COGIC minister J.O. Patterson were working together to register blacks to vote (Figure 1). He admonished attendees to arise

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*Tri-State Defender,* 1 August 1959.; “Ministers Rap Dr. Martin For Refusing Use of Stadium,” *Memphis World,* 29 July 1959.
early and go to the polls, to walk together, and he shouted, “For we just want to be free.”

The candidates on the ticket declared they were going to put an end to segregation in Memphis. Attorney Sugarmon said, “Rev. Ben Hooks is going to preach the funeral but there will not be much mourning.” Speakers also called for the burial of “uncle toms” ministers and city officials who attempt to stymie black progress. One of the organizers, Lt. George Lee, excited the audience by saying that Negroes are determined to turn out and vote the candidates into office. Lee invited each citizen to contribute one dollar to support the campaign.

On the day of the election, the *Tri-State Defender* reported that forty Memphis black churches held sunrise services and began their days praying for divine favor on the elections of the black candidates. Some of the churches had all night prayer vigils. After praying, many blacks joined together and marched to the polls and voted at different polling locations. Black ministers urged their members to take advantage of their right to vote. As Patterson, Lt. Lee, and other committee members anticipated, blacks turned out to vote in record fashion. Nevertheless, the black candidates did not win because whites also increased their turnout.

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320 Ibid.

Although the black candidates lost this election, Bishop James O. Patterson Sr. continued to encourage blacks to participate in the democratic process, and he continued to be a power broker in local Memphis politics. Patterson and other blacks in Memphis recognized that blacks needed to possess political power to improve the life options of blacks in their communities.

**Civil Rights Organizations and Protest Demonstrations**

In addition to advancing the struggle for justice and equality through playing a significant role in voter registration drives, Bishop Patterson Sr. was also a member of the NAACP, an organization that was influential during both phases of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. After the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, the Memphis NAACP branch helped spearhead the desegregation of Memphis schools, public transportation, and parks through organizing demonstrations and providing financial and legal resources to aid several persons arrested during the sit-in demonstrations. The Supreme Court ruling in 1954 inspired many local ministers to become involved in the Civil Rights struggle. Several prominent ministers in Memphis were actively involved in the NAACP and served as president of the organization, including Rev. Van J. Malone (Baptist minister), Rev. Dwight V. Kyle (AME Minister), and Rev. Roy Love (president of the local Baptist ministers Alliance), and Rev. D.S. Cunningham, CME minister.\(^{322}\) Though Patterson did not serve as president of the NAACP or participate on the executive committee, he contributed to the organization in other ways. The Pentecostal Temple COGIC Choir frequently was listed on NAACP programs to provide

\(^{322}\) Tucker, *Black Pastors and Leaders in Memphis,* 107-112.
“inspirational singing” at NAACP Branch Meetings.\textsuperscript{323} For example, during a NAACP volunteer membership drive, the Pentecostal Temple COGIC Choir was a feature of the program. The COGIC church revolutionized gospel music. The music “brought joy, celebration, and a spiritual release from any life experiences.”\textsuperscript{324} In COGIC services, the entire congregation, not simply the choir, was involved in the performance. Furthermore, COGIC music did not depend solely on the piano or organ but employed a variety of additional instruments such as “trumpets, trombones, drums, rubbing boards, and Congo Drums.”\textsuperscript{325} As COGIC was at the cutting edge of gospel music, the church choir often attracted a large crowd. J.O. Patterson Singers were featured performers during an annual Memphis Branch NAACP celebration at Mason Temple on May 17, 1961.\textsuperscript{326} Maxine Smith, Executive Secretary of the Memphis branch, wrote Bishop Patterson letters, thanking him for allowing the branch to use the church for NAACP meetings and conferences. She wrote, “Thanks a million for the use of the church; express our gratitude to the choir and director for the music which is always superb.”\textsuperscript{327}

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\textsuperscript{323} Maxine Smith Papers, “Memphis Branch NAACP Freedom Mass Meeting at Metropolitan Church,\textit{Memphis Tri-State Defender}, 21 May 1963.
\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{327} Maxine Smith Papers, Letter addressed to Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., Shelby County Room Archives, Memphis Public Library.
\end{flushright}
Bishop Patterson also assisted the NAACP with fundraising. In another thank you letter addressed to Patterson Sr., Smith thanked him for allowing her and the NAACP to solicit new memberships at Pentecostal Temple and for paying for his own life membership ($500) as well as life membership of the church (Figure 2). The Tri-State Defender had a picture of Patterson presenting a check to the NAACP to become a life member. This photo was taken to encourage other blacks in Memphis including members of COGIC to become members of the NAACP. One of the ways that the NAACP generates income is through soliciting memberships and collecting membership

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dues. Jackie Washington, a member of Pentecostal Temple during the Civil Rights era, recalled that the NAACP conducted several membership drives at Pentecostal Temple, and she remembered frequently receiving literature in the mail. Several members who followed Patterson and attended Pentecostal Temple joined the NAACP because Patterson endorsed the organization. Washington says that she joined the NAACP because she respected her pastor’s (J.O. Patterson Sr.) judgment.\textsuperscript{329} Many COGIC persons joined the NAACP and paid membership dues and gave donations to the organization. Smith, the executive secretary of the NAACP, thanked Patterson Sr., saying:

\begin{quote}
It is indeed heartwarming to have the continuous support of you and your membership. Your contributions in the fight for human dignity are beneficial to our entire community.\textsuperscript{330}
\end{quote}

The NAACP acknowledged Patterson and the members of Pentecostal Temple for their contributions, for paying their membership dues. These contributions and possibly other donations that Patterson and COGIC members made to the organization during different events and rallies helped fund the freedom struggle. The NAACP paid attorney fees for civil rights cases and other expenses through money that persons donated to the organization and through revenue generated from membership dues.

The financial support of COGIC and other Memphis denominational churches would certainly be needed to pay the bail money for students demonstrators that were

\textsuperscript{329} Ms. Jackie Washington (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 10 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{330} Maxine Smith Papers, Letter addressed to Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library.
arrested during the sit-in movement. Prior to the official launch of the Memphis sit-in movement in 1960, Memphis COGIC member Vickie Walters recalled an instance during her teenage years in the late 1950s when she and a few of her friends purposefully violated segregation norms and entered a white owned-store. She explained:

I boldly led a few others into a white-owned store where ‘colored’ [persons] had to purchase items from an outside window. We were not allowed to come inside the store. A Caucasian woman in her late twenties was working alone at that time. She seemed frightened, and hurriedly filled our orders to get us out of the store as fast as she could. I can’t recall her saying anything to us—but I can recall a panicked look on her face. I felt proud and powerful. It was an extremely brave and foolish thing to do.331

Apparently the white owners did not react in a violent way, and neither Walters nor her friends were arrested. As Walter looked back and reflected on the incident, she held their action was “brave” but “foolish.”332 She was cognizant of the potential threat of violent white backlash that could have ensued from their entering the white store. Black youth in other states such as Emmett Till had been beaten and killed for whistling at a white woman who was working as a store clerk in Money, Mississippi. Despite their

331 Ms. Vickie Walters (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 10 August 2012.

courageous protest activity, Walter and her friends did not receive media attention because their protest endeavor only included a few persons and was haphazard rather than carefully planned and organized. Since the white owners did not react in a malicious way and the police did not show up to arrest them, there simply was not any reason for the media to cover the story.

The first sit-in demonstration that received media attention in Memphis occurred on March 19, 1960, when forty-one Owen and Lemoyné College students and five black newsmen were arrested for entering two public libraries, the Gossett and Peabody libraries. Robert Morris, one of the black photographers with the *Memphis World* newspaper arrested during the sit-in, was a member of the COGIC. Morris vividly recaptured and described his experience as follows:

...we were all in there and the students were just sitting at the table with the book, got them a book and were reading it, and we were there snapping pictures. It was for whites only, the employees panicked. They said, “Let's call the police. Lock the doors, call the police.” So Palmer, who was with the *Tri-State Defender*, he said newsman, “Get yall news card out!” At that time I had the national press card, a local press card from the newspaper and a highway patrolman press card. We all did, and when he said that he told the arresting officer we are photographers, newsmen. I don’t care who you are. You all are

going to jail, so you all are going to get an inside story today. So they loaded us with the students all of us in the Paddy Wagon.\footnote{Robert Morris, Interviewed by author in Memphis, 10 August 2013.}

Morris did not intend to trouble the waters when he went to the library to do his job and take pictures of the first sit-in demonstration occurring in Memphis. However, Morris created a disturbance when he violated segregated norms by entering a white library. There were several white newsmen and photographers who were at the library covering the story; however, they were not arrested.

Following the sit-ins and the students and photographers’ arrest, Rev. D.S. Cunningham, president of Memphis NAACP, called an emergency meeting of the NAACP. Although Cunningham made it clear that the NAACP did not provoke the youth to engage in the sit-in, he pledged to back the students and to offer the “moral, financial, and legal resources” of the NAACP to help them in their pursuit of equality and justice. He called for leaders and ministers from the community to support the students.

According to the \textit{Tri-State Defender}, about seventy ministers from different denominations attended and pledged to aid and back the students.\footnote{“Memphis NAACP Pledges All-Out Support to ‘Sitters,’” \textit{Memphis Commercial Appeal}, 20 March 1960.; Tucker, \textit{Black Pastors and Leaders in Memphis}, 113.; Markham Stansbury, “Memphians Rally, Help Arrested in Sit-Downs,” \textit{Memphis Tri-State Defender}, 26 March 1960.} The papers did not specify which members attended or which denominations were present. However, given that one of the persons arrested was a member of COGIC and Bishop Patterson Sr. was a member of the NAACP, some COGIC ministers may have attended the meeting.

Ministers raised over $3,000, referring to the offering as “freedom donations,” to support
the defense of the students and newsmen that were on trial for the sit-ins.\textsuperscript{336} Although prosecutors tried to charge the students with threatening the breach of peace, an offense that would have prohibited them from being released on bail, Morris says NAACP lawyers forced them to change the charge to disorderly conduct and everyone was released on bail after midnight that Sunday morning. As they exited the jail, members of the community had food and refreshments waiting for them and they sang, “We shall overcome.”\textsuperscript{337}

To protest the arrests and convictions of the black students and newsmen, ministers called for every black person to avoid downtown and not to buy new clothes from downtown stores for the Easter holiday. The ministers urged the black community to use the money that they would spend for new Easter clothes for the defense fund for the NAACP or they should simply add more to their private savings. The “No Buy for Easter” Campaign called Christians to observe Easter by sacrificing for freedom and not purchasing new clothes from downtown stores but instead “wearing old clothes with new dignity.”\textsuperscript{338} Morris and other COGIC persons participated in the boycott and avoided the downtown stores. A rally for the “No Buy for Easter” campaign was held at Mason Temple in 1960.\textsuperscript{339}

\textsuperscript{336} Tucker, \textit{Black Pastors and Leaders in Memphis}, 114.

\textsuperscript{337} Robert Morris (Memphis COGIC member), interviewed by author, 10 August 2013

\textsuperscript{338} Markham Stansbury, “Memphians Rally, Help Arrested in Sit-Downs,” \textit{Memphis Tri-State Defender}, 26 March 1960.; Russell Sugarmon Papers, University of Memphis Special Collections, Box 2.

The sit-ins at the two downtown libraries were only the beginning of the sit-in movement in Memphis. Less than a day later, twelve young blacks were nearly arrested after engaging in a sit-in at McClellan’s Variety Store at 57 South Main. During the summer of 1960, additional sit-ins occurred at segregated stores in the downtown area such as Goldsmith’s, Bry’s, Lowenstein’s, Gerber’s, and Walgreen’s. Three blacks were arrested, charged with “disorderly conduct,” and fined twenty-five dollars by a judge for visiting an all white city zoo. Blacks also engaged in sit-ins at the Union and Grand Central railroad stations.\(^{340}\)

In addition to Walters and Morris, other COGIC members participated in political protest struggles during the first phase of the Memphis Movement, 1954-1965. Charles H. Mason Jr. was one of the first blacks in Memphis to engage in a move-in, moving into an all-white neighborhood, Glenview Heights. Some white residents of Glenview attempted to pressure Mason and his family to leave the neighborhood. Over the course of several weeks, racist whites burned a cross in his front yard, littered his yard with waste and refuse, threw a sign in his yard that said “White community not for sale to Negroes,” threw a rock through his window, shot up his car and house with bullets, and called his home leaving threatening messages.\(^{341}\) Mason’s church, Temple COGIC, and


his home mysteriously caught fire. Despite these malicious assaults on his property and threats on his life and family, Mason held his ground and was insistent on remaining at his home that he had lived in for the past nine months. The *Tri-State Defender*, local black newspaper, lauded Mason as a “pioneer in integration.”

During an interview, two COGIC members reported participating in protest marches and the downtown boycotts. Jackie Washington recalled participating in a protest march on Beale Street. However, she expressed that she felt fearful when she was marching and she knew herself and that “if somebody would have hit me during that time, it would have been all over, it would have been an all out fight.” Hence, she expressed that she avoided participating in any other marches because at the time she could not control her temper and she did not think that she could maintain a nonviolent disposition.

Some COGIC persons such as Julia Petersen and Gloria Johnson insisted that they desired to march and support the Movement, but their parents prohibited them from getting involved because they feared for their safety. During the Civil Rights Movement, fear of white racism, of being beaten unjustly, or killed prevented many persons from getting involved. In the South, black persons did not have to do much to experience assaults on their property and bodies by whites. As noted, many blacks in general and

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343 Ms. Jackie Washington (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 10 August 2012.
COGIC persons in particular were aware that it was not uncommon for whites in the South to beat and kill blacks without being held accountable by the justice system.

Throughout 1961, Memphis ministers supported sit-ins and weekly marches in downtown Memphis. In June and July 1961, the Memphis Branch of the NAACP picketed segregated downtown stores, and the Branch also organized a series of marches each week to protest segregated institutions.344 Children, youth, and adults marched through the downtown area in protest with picket signs, saying “Don’t Buy Here We Too Can Type Spell and Count!,” “What More Can I Do to Make Democracy A Reality,” and “DADDY, I WANT TO BE FREE TOO!”345 In August, the Memphis NAACP met with prominent black ministers at the Mt. Olive CME Church and organized a plan to expand the movement “to include ALL stores on Main Street through the months of August and September.” NAACP officials announced that they would begin their all out assault with an “ALL DAY MARCH FOR FREEDOM” on Saturday, August 5, and their slogan would be “LET’S BE SANE AND STAY OFF MAIN!”346

The intense combination of boycotts, sit-ins, and marches influenced downtown Memphis to desegregate in February 1962. Memphis NAACP President, Jesse H. Turner, announced in a press release that the branch was ending its downtown picketing because whites were now negotiating with them and desegregating their restaurants and


facilities and allowing employment opportunities for blacks. A reporter from the 
*Memphis Press-Scimitar* newspaper wrote that white business owners decided to 
desegregate their businesses because they wanted to move forward and “help keep 
Memphis a peaceful and prosperous city.”\(^{347}\) Despite having some success in opposing 
segregation in several Memphis public facilities, the Memphis NAACP continued to 
combat discrimination in various sectors including employment, housing, and the 
criminal justice system during the 1960s.

After 1962 the NAACP and other organizations continued to engage in protest 
demonstrations in Memphis. Yet, the demonstrations occurred less frequently as 
Memphis desegregated. On a national scale, the Civil Rights Movement experienced a 
major success when Congress passed legislation that outlawed discrimination against 
minority groups on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or sex and outlawed 
discriminatory voting practices in 1964 and 1965. Even though these acts represented a 
major milestone in the Movement, many activists recognized that the battle was not 
complete.

In an annual NAACP report for 1965, Maxine Smith insisted that despite the 
passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the NAACP Branch was going to continue to 
“remain alert and active in its role of assuring the implementation of acts and bills passed 
in the areas of civil rights, voting rights, poverty, etc.”\(^{348}\) During the years between 1965


\(^{348}\) After 1965, the Civil Rights Movement shifted its focus from racial segregation to economic injustice and inequality, unrestrained police brutality, and the Vietnam War.; Maxine Smith NAACP
and 1968, COGIC leaders and members continued to be active supporters of the NAACP. On June 26, 1966, Bishop Patterson delivered the memorial address for a service organized by the Memphis Branch of the NAACP that commemorated the third anniversary of the death of civil rights activist Medgar Evers. On May 19, 1968, the 14th Anniversary of the 1954 Supreme Court Decision, Salute to the NAACP, was held at Pentecostal Temple. The Pentecostal Temple Church Choir provided multiple musical selections, and Bishop Patterson offered concluding remarks.349

**State and Local Politics**

With the passage of the voting rights acts in 1965, many blacks began to enter the realm of politics at an increasing pace. Having done work with the Ministers and Citizens League and the Volunteer Ticket, James O. Patterson Sr. took politics seriously, and he was eager to help qualified black candidates become elected in Memphis. Patterson Sr. served on the campaign team of his son, Attorney James O. Patterson Jr. Patterson Jr. grew up COGIC, was active in the church, and he even expressed that he felt a call into ministry early in his life. He enrolled in Temple University’s Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1958. However, he soon withdrew because he said that he felt in his heart that he was not ready to commit fully to the ministry. As his grandfather C.H. Mason was the Senior Bishop of COGIC and his father was a jurisdictional bishop,

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Patterson Jr. knew the burden and responsibility that full-time ministry work entailed. He decided to pursue a career in law instead and went to DePaul University Law School in Chicago. He attended St. Paul COGIC in Chicago while working towards his law degree. Upon finishing law school, he moved back to Memphis and began practicing law. Seeking to expand his reputation in Memphis to build his law practice, he decided to pursue a career in politics.\textsuperscript{350}

On June 10, 1966, at thirty-one years of age Attorney Patterson completed paperwork to have his name placed on the ballot as a candidate for election in the Democratic primary for the position of state representative (See Figure 3). He was one of

the first black representatives in the state of Tennessee since the period of Reconstruction along with A.W. Willis, the first black elected to the state Legislature from Shelby County. Furthermore, Patterson Jr. and Willis, a major Civil Rights attorney in Memphis who was part of James Meredith’s legal defense team when he integrated the University of Mississippi, were close friends.\footnote{351} As black politicians, Patterson Jr. and Willis contributed to the Civil Rights struggle through working to enact laws and support legislation that benefited impoverished African Americans. Both black politicians endeavored to help Tennessee participate fully in the War on Poverty and to raise the minimum wage for workers. As a politician, Patterson Jr. maintained his connection to Pentecostal Temple, and he served as an attorney for the church’s legal and business affairs.\footnote{352}

In addition to serving as a State Representative during the Civil Rights Movement, Patterson ran for the City Council.\footnote{353} During his campaign, he explained to a

\begin{quote}
\textit{Negro Delegate ‘At Home’ In House” Memphis Commercial Appeal, 15 January 1965.} \end{quote}

\footnote{353} After the Civil Rights Movement, Patterson also continued his career in politics and served as the chairman of the City Council, Patterson served as an interim mayor of Memphis after the Mayor Wyeth...
radio audience that the current city council representative of District 7 was inexperienced
and failing to improve the district, which he argued contained the greatest number of
unemployed and low-income persons in Memphis. He insisted that he could help create
jobs and improve the district. The *Tri-State Defender* endorsed Patterson as the candidate
that their majority black readership should elect for District 7, holding that “the name
Patterson” has for two decades “been synonymous with public service, love, concern for
its fellowman, and responsible business and civic leadership.”

Patterson was elected to the City Council in 1967.

**Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike**

Councilman Patterson Jr. played a major role in helping support the Sanitation
Workers and the Union during the Sanitation Workers Strike. On February 12, 1968,
about 1,375 Memphis sanitation workers and the Memphis Local 1733 of the American
Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) declared a strike
because they were livid about improper, unsanitary, and dangerous working conditions
and racial inequalities in hiring and pay. The city did not provide the workers with
gloves, attire, or a place to shower after picking up trash all day. Their discontent reached
a peak when two young black sanitation workers, Echol Cole, 35, and Robert Walker, 29,

Chandler resigned following being appointed as a circuit court judge by the governor of Tennessee. He

354 “Patterson Caravan Touring District 7,” *Memphis Tri-State Defender*, 30 September 1967.;
were crushed to death because of a mechanical problem with one of the garbage trucks on February 1, 1968.  

Mayor Henry Loeb had only been in office for a few weeks after the strike began. Furthermore, the city of Memphis changed the structure of its city government in 1966. The city shifted from the machine politics of the Crump years. Rather than being led by a mayor with five city commissioners, the city would be governed by a mayor and thirteen city council members that represented different districts. Six of the council members would hold at-large positions, and the other seven would represent particular districts in the city. Each council member would serve four-year terms. Memphis citizens voted to institute this new form of government on January 1, 1968. Patterson and other Council members were adapting to the new government when the strike began. Patterson Jr. initially stood with the other council members and felt that the mayor should be the one to deal with the strike. Loeb refused to bargain with the union representative, P.J. Ciampa of AFSCME, because he deemed the strike was illegal. Loeb refused to bargain with the workers until they returned to work. The editors of the Memphis Press-Scimitar complemented Mayor Loeb for facing the strike with “determination and firmness,” and they pleaded with strikers to end the “illegal” strike against the city.  


Upon recognizing that the mayor was not going to bargain with the union that represented the Sanitation workers, and that the city council needed to utilize its authority and take action to solve the problem, Councilman Patterson Jr. attempted to persuade the city council to utilize its authority to end the strike by simply addressing the city’s policy towards dues check-off. He considered the central disagreement to be between the union and City Hall, and the union simply wanted to enable the workers to pay their union dues by having the city to take union dues out of the workers’ checks. He argued that the city had enabled a dues check-off for the city bus drivers. He proposed that the city council members could resolve the strike by establishing a policy whereby the credit union could exist without interference from the mayor.\(^{357}\)

During one council meeting, he read a quote from the Bible, Proverbs 11:14, which states: “Where no council is, the people fail, but where there is a multitude of councilors there is safety.”\(^{358}\) Patterson’s appeal to Scripture within the Council Chambers was likely influenced by his COGIC upbringing. COGIC teaches that the Bible is a supreme and final source of authority in all matters.\(^{359}\) Patterson may have

\(^{357}\) Sensitive to the plight of the Sanitation workers, many of whom resided in his district, Patterson stood in solidarity with the workers rather than the mayor and attended and spoke at a union rally on February 19.; City Councilman James O. Patterson Jr., interview by David Yellin and Joan Beifuss, 11 September 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.; Other speakers included Taylor Blair, Paisely, Ciampa, Jones, Starks, Crenshaw, Bell, and City Council member J.O. Patterson, Jr.; Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 161-162.

\(^{358}\) City Councilman James O. Patterson Jr., interview by David Yellin and Joan Beifuss, 11 September 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.; Other speakers included Taylor Blair, Paisely, Ciampa, Jones, Starks, Crenshaw, Bell, and City Council member J.O. Patterson, Jr.

hoped that by employing Scripture he could have persuaded his fellow Council members to utilize their power as a council to restore order and peace within the city.

Still, Mayor Loeb refused to permit the city to coordinate a dues deduction. The union attempted to navigate around working through the city by proposing that an independent credit union agency collect the dues. Loeb rejected that proposal as well. Concluding that Mayor Loeb was not willing to compromise or negotiate with the Union, Patterson attempted to persuade other fellow city council members to resolve the strike by establishing a policy whereby the credit union could exist without interference from the mayor. Nonetheless, the majority of the Council members decided to reject Patterson’s proposals and instead elected to give Mayor Loeb complete power to make a decision about the strike. Despite his multiple efforts to sway the Council to end the strike, Patterson Jr. held a minority position on the council and was one of three black Memphis council members, including City Councilmen Reverend James Netters and Fred L. Davis, who were also advocates for the workers.

Going against the desires of Mayor Loeb, black City Councilman Fred Davis, chairman of the Public Works Sub-Committee, invited the sanitation workers to come to the City Council Chambers to address the Council on the morning of February 22.

360 City Councilman James O. Patterson Jr., interview by David Yellin and Joan Beifuss, 11 September 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

361 Although Patterson’s efforts were not successful, it is noteworthy that as a politician he was in a position of influence. If he had and other black politicians who were advocating for the workers had been successful, they might have altered history, as King possibly may not have had to come to Memphis. His political endeavors and the support that he received from his father indicate that Memphis COGIC members were not disengaged from the political arena. “First Black Councilmen Reflect on Patterson,” My Fox Memphis News, 27 June 2011, Retrieved from http://www.myfoxmemphis.com/story/18534699/first-black-councilmen-reflect-on-patterson#axzz2xGuTFGUy (accessed March 28, 2014).
hoped to persuade the Council to utilize its authority to resolve the strike by allowing the striking workers to tell their own stories to the Council. Instead of the workers, several union representatives showed up to the meeting and addressed the Council, seeking to explain to the Council why the workers needed a pay raise and to persuade the Council to recognize the workers’ union dues. Davis adamantly told the union leaders that the Council desired to hear directly from the workers. Deeming that union leaders were the representatives and spokesman for the workers, the Union Labor Council president Tommy Powell reluctantly agreed to bring the men. Emphatically he brought the men and not just a few of them. During the early afternoon, about 700 sanitation workers and supporters flooded into the council chambers, which had a seating capacity of 427. Despite city officials warning them that they were violating fire department codes, the workers and their supporters entered the room nonetheless, refused to leave, and usurped the occasion to meet with the Council as an opportunity to engage in a sit-in demonstration at the Council chambers. Although Davis informed the workers and their supporters that they would have to suspend the meeting temporarily and relocate to a larger space in the auditorium, leaders such as O.Z. Evers and T.O. Jones disregarded Councilman Davis’s message and urged everyone to stay and to demand the Council to exercise its power to end the strike. Deeply agitated and feeling disrespected, Councilman Davis adjourned the meeting, and the City Council members left the room. Still, the workers and demonstrators refused to leave the Council chambers and began to sing

362 Beiffus, *At the River I Stand*, 76-77.

363 Ibid.
union songs, church hymns, and “God Bless America.” The Union leaders exercised their sit-in demonstration in the Council chambers from morning until the evening. Their plan was to pressure the Council to utilize its power to meet the demands of workers’ demands. After meeting with members of his sub-committee, at about 5:30 pm, Councilman Davis returned to the Council chambers and read the following statement to the Union representatives and their supporters:

Our committee has met for quite a few hours. The recommendation for our committee to the Council will be that the city recognizes the Union as the collective bargaining agent and that there be some form of dues checkoff.\textsuperscript{365}

The demonstrators cheered thrillingly, as they anticipated that their demands would be met and that the strike would end the next day.

The next morning on February 23, 1968, the City Council had an emergency meeting that lasted for four hours. Prior to the meeting, the majority of the City Council members had already determined that they would reject Davis subcommittee’s recommendation. During the meeting the Council members formulated an alternate resolution that compromised with the Mayor’s inflexible position and did not meet the workers’ demands for a written union contract, a dues checkoff, and a “specific date or amount of pay raises.”\textsuperscript{366} Later that afternoon, the Sanitation Workers and their supporters came to the City auditorium to listen to the Council vote on the committee

\textsuperscript{364} Beiffus, \textit{At the River I Stand}, 78-79.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{366} Ibid., 83.
resolution that Davis had proposed the day before. As the Council members read the resolution, the Union leaders and strike supporters recognized that the resolution was quite inconsistent with the resolution that Councilman Davis had read to them the prior day. The new resolution included the following nine points:

1) right of the employees to form and join a union be recognized, 2) right to elect union officials be recognized, 3) right to select representatives to negotiate for employees be recognized, 4) employees be included in Civil Service, 5) provision for fair promotions be recognized, 6) fair hospitalization be provided, 7) adequate life insurance coverage and uniform pension plan be established, 8) a meaningful grievance procedure with right of union representation at all steps be established, and 9) a wage increase be provided at the earliest possible date.\footnote{367}

The Black Council members voted against the resolution, recognizing that it did not meet the demands of the workers or the Union that Councilman Davis’s Public Works Subcommittee had proposed. Nonetheless, the resolution passed as most of the other Council members voted in favor of the proposal. Anticipating that the people would be upset and would protest, many of the white Council members had decided to turn the microphones off and to leave the auditorium immediately with a police escort after the resolution passed. Council members Jerry Blanchard and J.O. Patterson Jr. recognized that the Council had certainly made a mistake in doing this. The Union Representatives,

\footnote{367}Ibid.
the Civil Rights leaders, and the sanitation workers were enraged and felt that they had been betrayed and duped. 368

Disappointed that the majority of council members decided that they would not even listen to a proposal for a dues check off and had disrespected the Union leaders, the workers, and local ministers and advocates by turning the microphones off and refusing to listen to them, Reverend James Lawson and other black ministers supporting the strike proposed that the workers and supporters march from the city auditorium to Mason Temple. Councilman Patterson went to Mason Temple to open the doors of the church for them. However, when he met them at Mason Temple, the protesters entered the Temple boiling with anger and with the stench of mace on their clothes. Certainly Patterson Jr. wondered and asked what went wrong to cause some of Memphis finest respected and peaceful black ministers to be sprayed with mace. 369

According to some of the participants, the Memphis police intentionally disrupted the march. As the marchers marched to Mason Temple, some officers drove their cars close to them. Reverend Lawson encouraged the demonstrators to continue marching and to not allow the officers to incite them. Seeing that the police officers were attempting to provoke some of the demonstrators, Gladys Carpenter, City Councilman Patterson’s secretary, moved from where she was standing in the march to the location of

368 Beifuss, At the River I Stand, 84-85.

369 City Councilman James O. Patterson Jr., interview by David Yellin and Joan Beifuss, 11 September 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.; Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.
the police car. Having participated in the marches before, she explained, “I went over to keep them from running into the men. I thought they might not do it to a lady.”

Suddenly one of the patrol cars pushed against her and then ran over her foot. Some of the men near her began to rock the police car “back and forth.” The policemen reacted by proceeding to spray mace unapologetically upon all the demonstrators and by striking them with nightsticks. The march became disorderly, and several black persons including sanitation workers, union officials, ministers, and women cried as the mace contacted their eyes. Elderly black men and women were sprayed with mace. A police officer squirted Civil Rights Commission director, Jacque Wilmore, with mace, even as he faced him and showed him his badge. Believing that the Memphis police had higher respect for the clergy, many of the ministers were especially stunned and enraged after police officers sprayed them with mace. Reverends Zeke Bell and Dick Moon were having a conversation with a sociable police officer. When the ruckus broke out in the march, the police officer immediately started to drizzle the ministers with mace.

When the ministers entered Mason Temple, Patterson Jr. explained that the incident surfaced a lot of anger and hostility that he and several other blacks have for the Memphis police department and police departments throughout the United States that engage in police brutality. That evening after the incident occurred, NAACP representatives, labor representatives, and some black ministers met in a conference room at Mason Temple and organized a new organization, the Community On the Move for


371 Ibid., 89-91.
Equality (COME). Mr. Jesse Epps, a leader of the union, and Reverend James Lawson facilitated the meeting on February 24, 1968.\footnote{372}

Elder G.E. Patterson, the son of Bishop William Archie Patterson Sr. and Mary Louise Patterson and the nephew of Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. and the cousin of J.O. Patterson Jr., was one of the COGIC leaders present at this initial developmental meeting of COME. G.E. Patterson recalled entering Mason Temple reeking with mace on his clothes, and he explained that all of the leaders present were upset and that COME formed in the heat of that moment.\footnote{373} While a number of COGIC leaders and members participated in the strike in different ways, G.E. Patterson’s participation stands out among COGIC ministers. He experienced salvation during a revival at Holy Temple COGIC in Memphis at sixteen years of age, and he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in 1956 during a Sunday evening worship service. Within months after experiencing spiritual baptism, he accepted the call to ministry, and Bishop J.S. Bailey ordained him as an elder in COGIC on August 28, 1958. While in Memphis, he served as the co-pastor of Holy Temple COGIC with his father. Patterson’s dynamic oratorical and preaching gifts helped Holy Temple experience significant growth in membership during the 1960s.\footnote{374}

\footnote{372} City Councilman James O. Patterson Jr., interview by David Yellin and Joan Beifuss, 11 September 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

\footnote{373} Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

After forming COME on February 24, Patterson and other community leaders present that night agreed to invite ministers from their respective denominations and circles to attend a meeting the next day at Mason Temple. COME brought COGIC leaders into the forefront of the Sanitation Workers Strike such as Bishop Patterson, G.E. Patterson, and Elder Willie Porter along with other well-known ministers in the city from other denominations. The day after COME was formed Bishop Patterson Sr. joined Reverends Lawson, Starks, and Bishop B. Julian Smith for a televised press conference. During the live press conference, Bishop Patterson Sr. ensured the community that the new organization was not “a bunch of outside agitators and rabblerousers” but consisted of more than 100 prominent ministers who endeavored to pursue the best course of action for the sanitation workers. On the same evening Bishop Patterson appeared on the news with other Memphis Civil Rights leaders, nearly 600 persons attended a rally at Mason Temple. Still fired up about the police brutality that had occurred the day before, the attendees shouted, “Boycott!” and “Buy no new clothes for Easter.” Supporters passed around large garbage cans to collect money to support the needs of the striking sanitation workers.

In addition to spearheading the rally at Mason Temple, COME leaders also organized an economic boycott, which included several downtown stores. The sanitation workers picketed downtown Main Street on February 27. On March 1, 1968, Mayor Loeb announced that he had obtained an injunction against the strike. During a televised


376 Honey, Going Down Jericho Road, 220.
press conference with Bishop J.O. Patterson and Reverend Lawson, COGIC Elder Gilbert Patterson responded to a reporter’s question about Loeb’s injunction. He expressed that he did not fully understand the injunction, but he adamantly insisted

…If the injunction means that to demonstrate and to picket and to show that we have a right not to spend our money unless we choose to do so, we are saying that the Negro community and the whites who sympathize with us are too numerous to find a jail to contain us.377

In essence, G.E. Patterson argued that he and others had the freedom to demonstrate and march, and that he and many other blacks and some whites were willing to go to jail to stand for justice and equality.

Elder G.E. Patterson initially heard about the strike on television while on vacation in Atlanta with his wife. He told his wife that they needed to return to Memphis because a few members of his church worked in the sanitation department. Nelson Jones, a member of Patterson’s church, was one of the shop stewards in the Sanitation Department. Jones had informed Patterson about the poor conditions in the Memphis Sanitation Department before the strike commenced. As a concerned pastor of some of the sanitation workers and a citizen of Memphis, Patterson says he desired to return to Memphis to “see really what was going on.”378

When Patterson made it back home, he visited the Firestone Union Hall and noticed that it was packed with men who were


378 Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, transcribed tape recording, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.
united around a common cause. Understanding that the men would need some assistance with basic living expenses, he solicited donations on his radio broadcast, asking his listening audience to help meet the basic material needs of the sanitation workers. Throughout the strike, he endeavored to sustain the morale of the workers by maintaining a strong presence at the Union Hall.\(^{379}\)

The police brutality that G.E. Patterson witnessed as well as the false reports the media made about the disrupted march on Main Street made him heated. On Sunday, February 25, a few days after police sprayed mace on the nonviolent marchers, Patterson determined to set the record straight by recording a prophetic sermon from the Gospel of John that he later played during his radio broadcast. His text was: “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” In the sermon, he exclaimed that the truth was that the Memphis police instigated the event that happened on Main Street and that the police wanted to hamper black progress. He told his listeners that prior to this time, the ministers had done their best to prevent riots and to promote peace. Still heated about the incident, he insisted that the ministers are not going to promote riots, and he continued, “I doubt that we will discourage it either. When we see that there is no justice that can be found in this city at the northern tip of Mississippi.” He then encouraged his audience to participate in the boycott and not support anything bearing the name Loeb.\(^{380}\) As G.E. Patterson had a strong reputation for his preaching ability in the city of Memphis, several COGIC persons likely listened to G.E. Patterson’s radio broadcast. Sister Jackie, who

\(^{379}\) Ibid.

\(^{380}\) Ibid.
participated in the downtown boycotts, says that she listened to civil rights leaders talk about the Movement via various media outlets. She remembered, “They told us to hold your money because that is the way you can hit them.”  

In addition to participating in boycotts and other demonstrations, Patterson served as a member of the nine-person strategy team that brought a vast array of different Civil Rights activists to Mason Temple during the Strike. The Strike had persisted for several weeks, and Mayor Henry Loeb had not budged an inch. Explaining that many of the ministers, including himself, were new to the Civil Rights Movement and did not possess significant experience with leading Civil Rights demonstrations, Patterson says the committee felt that they should invite veteran activists. Hence, the committee extended invitations to renowned civil rights leaders such as Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin, and Martin Luther King Jr. Jessie H. Turner, the local NAACP Branch president, booked Wilkins and Rustin, and nearly 9,000 persons packed Mason Temple on March 14, 1968 to hear them. Although they were busy organizing for the Poor People’s Campaign, Dr. King and some SCLC members accepted the committee’s invitation to come to Memphis. During his second visit to Mason Temple on March 18, 1968, King addressed an audience of more than 12,000 persons. He encouraged the strike supporters to “escalate

381 Ms. Jackie (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, tape recording, Memphis, TN, 10 August 2012.


383 King had previously spoken at Mason Temple during a political rally in 1959.
“12,00 Fill Up Mason Temple For King Talk,” *Memphis Tri-State Defender*, 23 March 1968.


Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007); Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand,*
historians to locate. His Civil Rights activism did not receive significant coverage in the local newspapers. Local newspaper photographers often snapped pictures of the renowned local and national Civil Rights leaders. For example, a photo from the Memphis *Press-Scimitar* highlighted figures such as Dr. King and Reverend James Lawson (Figure 4). However, a host of other civil rights leaders who were standing behind them are not visible. If a researcher were to only focus on pictures from newspapers, he or she would not have a complete picture of other leaders involved.

Second, the person(s) who assembled the catalog transcripts records for the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Worker’s Strike Film and Videotape at the University of Memphis Library did not recognize G.E. Patterson. The video transcript guide listed the leaders sitting from left to right as “Reverend James Lawson, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. H. Ralph Jackson, and Reverend Henry Starks” and the persons standing behind them in the video as “Jesse Epps of AFSCME, community activist Cornelia Crenshaw, Dr. Vasco Smith, Rev. Baxton Bryant, P.J. Ciampa, others unidentified.” G.E. Patterson was the unidentified person standing behind King during the press conference (Figure 5).[^387] I am not certain of why G.E. Patterson’s name was left out. Perhaps it was because he was relatively new to the local Civil Rights struggle and was not as renowned as activists such as Reverend James Lawson Jr. who had been deeply involved in the movement in Nashville and Memphis. Nevertheless, archival research shows the larger picture.

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Figure 4: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Center) held a press conference on March 28. Rev. James M. Lawson Jr. (left) and Dr. H. Ralph Jackson (right) joined him. Although not pictured here, Bishop G.E. Patterson was present at this press conference held on March 29, 1968.
Source: Jack E. Cantrell, *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, University of Memphis Special Collections

Figure 5: Unlike the photograph in the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, this image from the video press conference footage shows that G.E. Patterson (standing, second person from left to right) was a member of the leadership of COME. The video footage captures more of the leaders involved.
Source: 1968 Sanitation Worker Strike Videotape, University of Memphis Special Collections
Archival research helps disprove the assumption that COGIC members and leaders were not involved in the movement. The film footage indicates that G.E. Patterson was a leader who worked directly with King and other activists.

During the press conference, King said he assumed Memphis was “unified” and that he was not cognizant of “the friction among the young militants.” If he had been aware of it, he would have postponed the march so that he could establish a rapport with the militants. He insisted that there was a communication breakdown between the leaders of the demonstration and the militant youth that disrupted the march. Rather than making the youth the scapegoat as the media did, King insisted unjust social conditions were largely responsible for the anger of the young militants. G.E. Patterson expressed similar sentiments as King and explained that many people in Memphis misunderstood the militants. He too did not blame the violence that happened on them. He argued that accusing discontented blacks does not help advance freedom and justice. He agreed with other leaders of COME that the militants should be allowed to participate in the organization, which aspired to be a community organization that included representatives from diverse groups who were interested in advancing the greater common good. He held that all blacks should work together to advance the struggle, and that every black group could play an important role, including militant black youth who embraced the philosophy of black power.

388 Ibid, 56-57.
389 Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, transcribed tape recording, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.
Patterson understood the growth of the black power movement in Memphis. Though he viewed love and nonviolence to be the “Bible way and the righteous way,” after witnessing the police brutality in Memphis he said “it’s hard to keep saying ‘Love,’” when everything that goes on…every move that’s made by the city officials was designed, looks like, to make you hate.” Still, G.E. Patterson deemed that King’s philosophy of nonviolence is the only feasible strategy and that violence only breeds more violence. Though he did not condone violence, Patterson acknowledged his anger, frustration, and indignation.

Being on the air everyday with the exception of Sunday, Patterson utilized his radio broadcast to speak passionately about the injustices that he saw and to deliver prophetic sermons. Disturbed by this, the white manager of the KWAM radio station accused Patterson of violating FCC regulations by talking about the strike. The manager disparaged the Union as “black Yankees,” and he advised Patterson that he and other ministers should encourage the strikers to return to work and to listen to the mayor. Patterson determined to tell the truth even if it meant violating FCC regulations. Because he went against the grain and the power structure, Patterson had difficulty purchasing and securing time on the radio during the Christmas holiday season. Patterson said, as long as blacks do not trouble the waters in Memphis, Memphis is the place to be. With a hint of sarcasm, he said blacks have the freedom to go anywhere, but the only problem is that their mobility is limited because of a lack of economic resources. He continued that once blacks in Memphis began to wake up and recognize economic injustice and started
making strides to overcome it, then the power structure attempted to stymie their progress. The powers that be would rather invest millions of dollars in “law enforcement” to maintain the status quo than “to spend $200,000 to try to raise the standard of the black community.” Prior to the Sanitation Workers strike, G.E. Patterson mentioned that he had not been directly involved in Movement. He says that he avoided the Movement because he felt that the civil rights struggle was not his fight and that God had ordained specific persons like King to be civil rights leaders. However, he explained that the events that happened during the Strike prompted him to recognize that “God wants all of us to be Martin Luther Kings.”

Patterson and several COGIC persons of different age ranges were also present at Mason Temple when King returned to the Temple for the third and last time on April 3, 1968. Though he was only fifteen at the time, Timothy Graves remembered that the building was so packed that he had to stand outside in the vestibule of the Temple. He recalled seeing large “barrels” passed around the church to collect money for the workers. Bishop Mason’s widow, Elsie Mason, donated $90 to the workers. Mother Elsie Shaw, an elderly COGIC church mother, was present at Mason Temple when King delivered his last sermon (Figure 6). Elder W.L. Porter was also a COGIC minister who was standing on the podium with Dr. King when King spoke at Mason Temple (Figure 7).

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391 Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, transcribed tape recording, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

Figure 6: Dr. King with Mother Elsie Shaw (a COGIC member, pictured behind King’s right shoulder), during a Memphis Sanitation Workers’ rally at Mason Temple (1968).
Source: “A Memphis Corporate Salute,” Program Pamphlet, 2 August 1994, Center for African American Church History and Research, Lancaster, Texas

Figure 7: Elder W.L. Porter, (front left corner) was standing on the podium with King during his final sermon. He served as COGIC’s Assistant Director of the National Public Relations Department.
Source: The Whole Truth, Spring 1996
Porter was the superintendent of COGIC properties and COGIC’s Assistant Director of National Public Relations. Porter marched with other COGIC leaders and members during the Sanitation Workers Strike. Besides Shaw and Porter, other COGIC members were also present. One COGIC member said that he attended the meeting with his brother. Another member recalled having difficulty getting into the Temple, saying, “It was so crowded. You had to push your way in.”

Although I have not been able to identify all of the specific COGIC persons in the audience at Mason Temple, based on my archival and oral history research, I have indicated that both COGIC leaders and members were present. Mason Temple was not just a venue that hosted activists from other denominations during the Strike, but saints participated in the rallies.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Although many scholars deemed Pentecostals to be apolitical, Memphis COGIC churches such as Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple were centers of political activity. Mason Temple hosted political rallies, civil rights strategy meetings, labor union meetings, NAACP membership drives, etc. Civil Rights activists marched to Mason Temple on several occasions. Yet, some historians have inaccurately reported that King’s final speech occurred at a Masonic Temple or Clayborn Temple African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, rather than Mason Temple.

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393 Memphis COGIC member, Wayne Jones (False Name), interviewed by author, 26 August 2012.; COGIC member interview, Timothy Graves (False Name), 21 August 2012; Patricia Rogers, The Whole Truth, Spring 2006, 28-30.; “A Memphis Corporate Salute,” Program Pamphlet, 2 August 1994, Center for African American Church History and Research, Lancaster, Texas.

394 Elder Scott Bradley, “Reflecting on Emmet Till’s Role in the Civil Rights Movement,” The Whole Truth (Fall 2005): 32.
A power broker within the city of Memphis, Bishop James O. Patterson Sr. was central to the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. Though much of his leadership of the Movement took place behind the scenes, Patterson was very active in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement, and prominent local activists such as Reverends Henry Bunton and James Lawson worked with him. He defied racial injustice through mobilizing members of COGIC to participate in the democratic process and using his influence to serve on his son’s campaign team, through working with the NAACP, and through engaging in boycotts and protest marches during the Sanitation Workers Strike. Many COGIC men and women in Memphis, especially members of Pentecostal Temple, respected his leadership and followed his example, especially at it relates to joining and supporting the NAACP as well as participating in the Sanitation Workers Strike. Some COGIC leaders, including J.O. Patterson and G.E. Patterson, were recognized as being Civil Rights leaders and were at the forefront of marches and rallies along with black Baptist and Methodist leaders.

Though I have identified some direct ways that Memphis saints engaged in the Civil Rights Movement, it is impossible to identify all of the COGIC leaders and members that participated in political protest campaigns in Memphis. The Civil Rights Movement occurred several decades ago and many of the persons who might have been involved have passed. Furthermore, the newspapers did not give the names of every single person who participated in protest marches, sit-ins, boycotts, etc. Several of the COGIC men and women in Memphis that I interviewed contributed to the Movement, but their contributions were not documented in the press. Despite these limitations, utilizing archival resources and oral history interviews of COGIC leaders and members, I have
indicated that a variety of persons from the COGIC tradition contributed to the Memphis Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement was an ecumenical, interreligious, and interracial movement. When King delivered his final sermon at Mason Temple, he proudly remarked, “We have Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, members of the Church of God in Christ and members of the Church of Christ in God . . . we are all together.” Although considered otherworldly and not concerned about political or social matters, Memphis saints participated in the Movement in a variety of ways. In addition to the archival and oral history research presented in this chapter, which has pinpointed COGIC’s involvements in the Movement, in the next chapter I discuss what COGIC leaders and members thought about the Civil Rights struggles. Giving attention to the perspectives of non-activists and activist members, I examine how COGIC members’ theology affected their postures towards Civil Rights activism.

395 Honey, Going Down Jericho Road, 296-97.
Chapter 4: Theo-Ethical Analysis of Memphis Saints’ Postures Toward the Civil Rights Movement

Through galvanizing members of black Christian churches to fight for justice by leading mass nonviolent demonstrations throughout the South and ultimately becoming a key symbol for black Christian activism, Dr. Martin Luther King helped respond to many blacks’ disillusionment with black Christians’ lackluster social justice efforts. Through galvanizing members of black Christian churches to fight for justice by leading mass nonviolent demonstrations throughout the South and ultimately becoming a key symbol for black Christian activism, Dr. Martin Luther King helped respond to many blacks’ lackluster social justice efforts. Memphism COGIC members actively participated in the Memphis Movement with several members from other black churches and with King. Despite the successful strides of the Movement, emerging revolutionaries from the Black Power Movement, the Black Panther Party, and other groups viewed the nonviolent, Christian-centered approach as being incapable of enabling blacks to seize equality, freedom, and justice. Situating Memphis saints within this context, I contend that Memphis COGIC activists such as J.O. Patterson Sr. protested the abandonment of King’s nonviolent and Christian-centered methods and advocated that spiritual presence and empowerment were indispensable to blacks’ quest for social equality and justice.

Adopting theologian George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic understanding of theology, I view theology as the grammar or doctrines that serve as “rules of discourse, 

396 Some African American groups such as the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party were critical of traditional black churches; As a black Muslim minister, Malcolm X labeled many black Christian leaders as Uncle Toms and house Negroes who committed to Christian ideas and nonviolence.; Gayraud Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983, orig. 1973), 174.
attitude, and action” that are authoritative for particular communities.\(^{397}\) This understanding of theology makes a clear connection between theology and ethics, defined in this chapter as black Christians’ response to social oppression.\(^ {398}\) According to Juan Floyd-Thomas and Carol B. Duncan, “For African American Christians, ethics is implied in theology, and, conversely, theology is made evident in ethics; to be right theologically is to right ethically.”\(^ {399}\) I employ the term theo-ethics to underline ways in which communities’ theological doctrines inform their choices and actions. Furthermore, since COGIC doctrine affirms the authority of the Bible, and Memphis saints, including activist and non-activist members, emphasized that the Scriptures provided them with an ethical guide for living, I analyze different biblical texts members employed when discussing their postures toward Civil Rights activism.\(^ {400}\) Biblical scholar Rudolph Bultmann explains that diverse interpretations of the Bible exist among Christians because interpreters cannot avoid bringing their cultural and personal biases, “presuppositions,”

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\(^{399}\) Ibid.

\(^{400}\) Julia Petersen expressed that she is a member of COGIC because COGIC doctrine lines up with the Bible, and that the church believes in preaching and teaching the “unadulterated gospel.” Jackie Washington explained that the COGIC church taught her to follow “bible orders.” Timothy Graves insisted that COGIC leaders “teach and preach against the things that are wrong according to the Scripture, not just according to what we think or what we want to think, but according to what the Lord said.”; Julia Petersen (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 24 August 2012.; COGIC member interview, Timothy Graves (False Name), 21 August 2012; Jackie Washington (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 10 August 2012.; Range Jr, ed., *Official Manual*, 40-41.
and backgrounds to the biblical text. Critical biblical exegesis allows me to interrogate some saints’ engagement in proof-texting, defined as appealing to isolated scriptural passages to justify pre-established theological doctrines.

In the first section, I provide a historical discussion and analysis of ways C.H. Mason’s theoethical commitments to the Christian gospel, holiness, and prayer and spiritual empowerment informed COGIC members’ diverse responses to racial and economic inequality and injustice. I explain how some Memphis COGIC members’ biblical interpretations and incorporation of C.H. Mason’s theology steered them to disavow political protest struggle and oppose racism in alternate ways. In the second section, I discuss ways in which Mason’s Holiness-Pentecostal theoethical commitments also factored in some COGIC members’ decision to join the Civil Rights Movement. Memphis COGIC activists found that King’s approach to social justice resonated with Scripture and their holiness-Pentecostal heritage. Seeking to understand and articulate COGIC Civil Rights activists’ unique viewpoints toward the Civil Rights struggle, in the third section I examine Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr.’s sermons and his reflections on many blacks’ adoption of secular methods for pursuing social change in the late 1960s and their ostensible dwindling confidence in Christian-centered approaches for social justice. Though Patterson defended King’s Civil Rights program and encouraged black Christians


\[402\] I focus on Patterson because he played a highly significant role in the Memphis Movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and he was an influential figure within the COGIC denomination in general and among Memphis COGIC churches in particular.
to value academic enrichment, he argued that striving for spiritual presence and power is essential to blacks’ struggles for equality and justice. This means that Patterson engaged in political protest activism but maintained a strong commitment to Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs.

**C.H. Mason’s Theo-Ethical Commitments**

*Challenging Racial Injustice in Ecclesial Spaces*

After experiencing the baptism in the Holy Spirit while attending the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California, in 1907, Mason embraced the radical interracial vision promulgated by William Seymour, the leader of the revival and a founding pillar of Pentecostalism. As pinpointed in Chapter 2, Seymour opposed southern segregation customs. Unlike his mentor Charles Parham, Seymour welcomed persons of different races, classes, and gender to worship God and seek for spiritual baptism at an integrated altar. At Azusa, many black and white Pentecostals temporarily put aside their racial differences and began to view each other as members of the same spiritual family. Mason embraced Seymour’s vision and preached to blacks and whites, ordained white ministers, and had several whites who were members and leaders in COGIC.  

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405 Ibid.

aspired to overcome racism through sharing the gospel with whites and through seeking
to promote interracial Christian community.

James Delk, a white COGIC pastor who was a dear friend of Mason and was
ordained by him, mentioned an occasion when one of his white friends disparaged blacks
telling him, “I love a negro in his place.” Delk sarcastically asked him: “Do you love a
white man out of his place?”, and he further insisted: “Whenever we get Jesus in our
hearts, nick-naming people and hating people, segregation and Jim Crow vanish away
like the smoke of the hour.” Rather than interrogating racism as a systemic and
structural issue, Delk here viewed racism as being a personal, moral issue. He asserted
racist white persons that truly received the Christian gospel would be cured of racial
bigotry. Yet, despite Delk’s belief that sharing the gospel could cure whites of racism,
white Pentecostals who professed to be Christian believers, sanctified, and spirit-baptized
distanced themselves from Mason in 1913 and formed a separate denomination, the
Assemblies of God.

Though Delk believed God could deliver whites from racism and
other personal sins after they accepted the gospel, his proposed evangelistic cure does not

26, Fall 1987: 277.; Ithiel Clemmons, The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic
Movements Revised and Expanded Edition, edited by Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,

407 Delk, “When I First Met Senior Bishop C.H. Mason” in Smith, “Lest We Forget: Sermons in
Part by Elder CH Mason,” Special Collections, n.p.; Clemmons, International Dictionary of Pentecostal
and Charismatic Movements, 866.; I also present the material regarding Delk in a previously published
journal article; Jonathan Langston Chism, “‘The Saints Go Marching’: Black Pentecostal Critical
Consciousness and the Political Protest Activism of Pastors and Leaders in the Church of God in Christ in

408 Estrela Alexander states, “By the end of the Twentieth Century, white congregations in the
COGIC had all but disappeared, though some individual white members continued to frequent COGIC
worship services.”; Alexander, Black Fire, 170-180.
address or provide a remedy for institutional racism. The main problem with racism has not been its mere existence in the personal “hearts” of individuals but its deep roots in social institutions such as public schools, the courts, and the political system.

Rather than addressing structural evil directly within society, Mason embraced Seymour’s interracial and inclusive vision for Christian community and focused primarily on establishing ecclesial communities of faith and love. Seymour contended that the Spirit fostered kononia, an ardent sense of community among believers, and allowed them to promote egalitarianism within their congregations (Ephesians 4:3; 2 Cor. 13:13). 409 Frequently employing familial language and referring to each other as Brother, Sister, Mother, COGIC members envisioned the church as being the family of God. Many early COGIC members referred to Bishop Mason as “Dad Mason.” Mason taught that every “congregation was a family of brothers and sisters,” and “within the family, all members are respected and heard.” 410 Bishop Charles Pleas, a senior leader of COGIC, argued the church does not believe “in church members going to law with each other before the unjust [taking each other to civil court] 1 Cor. 6:1-3).” 411 Instead the church admonishes members to resolve disputes in the Spirit of God’s love. 412 When COGIC was becoming divided following the death of Bishop Mason because different COGIC


411 Pleas, Fifty Years Achievement From 1906-1956, 104.

412 Ibid.
leaders were contending to become Mason’s successor, Pleas reminded COGIC leaders that God wanted the church to be “united,” saying: “Jesus prayed for us to be one…St. John 17:21.”

Although Pleas was calling for unity within COGIC, which was a predominantly black church at the time, COGIC’s ultimate hope and ideal for oneness within the body of Christ ties to Seymour’s Pentecostal vision for interracial unity between blacks, whites, and other races and between men and women.

In her reflection on Jesus’ prayer in John 17:26, Sister Naomi Parks stressed that Jesus prayed for the unity of the church during his final prayer. She wrote:

> Let us love each other that the world will know that the last prayer of Jesus was answered. However, the very thing he prayed for did prevail later.

> When answered they were with one accord. Acts 2:1. Even the signs following that last prayer were answered. The world has yet to discover in our day what a church can produce if in perfect unity.  

Like Pleas, Parks reiterates that Jesus’ final prayer was for unity among his followers. She interpreted the spiritual outpouring that occurred in Acts 2 as being an indicator of what can happen when believers are on one accord. Though Parks endeavored to explain Christ’s vision for the church, she acknowledged that the church in general has fallen short of this ethical vision. She calls for the saints to bring Christ’s vision into fruition by

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413 59th Holy Convocation COGIC Souvenir Book and Official Program, November 8-18, 1966, Retrieved from the University of Southern California Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive, Dr. Mattie McGlothen Library and Museum.

loving each other. Rather than seeking to oppose racism and other social ills in society at large, many black Holiness-Pentecostals have concentrated on tearing down racism within the Christian community. Saints endeavored to promote righteousness and reconciliation among church members, admonishing members to live peaceably with all persons and to love and respect each other.\(^{415}\) Parks envisioned that if the church embodies the ethics of Jesus and is united through love, then the church can be an exemplar of God’s presence in the world and can be used by God in productive ways that have yet to be seen.

**Transcending Racial Injustice through Holiness**

In addition to upholding the gospel message, particularly Christ’s vision for oneness within the Church, Mason was firmly committed to Christian perfectionism and stressed that believers should strive to live free from sin and live “sober, righteous, and godly in this present world.”\(^{416}\) Believing in the doctrine of biblical authority, the COGIC Statement of Faith explicitly states, “We hold the Word of God to be the only authority in all matters and assert that no doctrine can be true, or essential, if it does not find a place in this word.”\(^{417}\) Mason held that the Scriptures contained instructions for

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\(^{416}\) Bishop C. H. Mason, “Affirmation of Faith C.O.G.I.C” *The Yearbook of 1926* in “Lest We Forget”: Sermons in Parts by Elder C.H. Mason” compiled by Anna Smith, General Recording Secretary, n.p. #

\(^{417}\) As with Pentecostals in general, George Eaton Simpson contends that the majority of African American Holiness-Pentecostal denominations teach that the Bible is: 1) “The inspired Word of God and its content is infallible divine revelation,” and 2) “The infallible rule of faith and conduct, and is superior to
living holy and provided believers with a guide to unlock the spiritual power needed to live victoriously over all forms of evil. He held that the keys to personal and social transformation are contained within the biblical text.\(^\text{418}\)

Though some scholars have contended that Pentecostals’ strong commitment to holiness or living according to the Bible led them to focus attention on personal moral issues such as “homosexuality, alcohol abuse, pornography and abortion” rather than social justice concerns, some saints viewed their holiness tradition as a means of transcending racism and pursuing social transformation.\(^\text{419}\) According to Vickie Walters, Mason taught the saints to “overcome and transcend injustice” through striving for holiness and becoming “spiritually, economically, educationally strong within our segregated community.”\(^\text{420}\) Mason encouraged saints to have high self-confidence, to recognize their human value, and to strive to “fight discrimination through high achievement.”\(^\text{421}\)

Despite his humble beginnings as the son of former slaves and growing up during the era of white supremacy, Mason became a leader of a global flourishing denomination,
garnered respect among blacks, whites, and other ethnic groups, and was upwardly mobile.\textsuperscript{422} He believed that the saints, the holy people of God, were distinguished children of God and that they should carry themselves with grace. During the Holy Convocation meetings in Memphis in the 1960s, COGIC leaders instructed saints to display and walk in a dignified manner at all times. For example, a section entitled, “Convocation Manners Information for Delegates,” inculcated saints:

The Bible says: The representatives of the Church at Antioch were called Christians, also saints of God. This distinguishes us from the rest of the people. Our conduct, superior manners, conduct in public places are the marks of a well-bred person.

We should be careful of our dress, how we smell, how we talk, act and attend the services….Be courteous and well mannered at all times. Do not laugh or talk loudly in public places.\textsuperscript{423}

For the saints, holiness was not only a personal standard or merely about their private relationship with God. Holiness was also a set of expectations or biblical standards that leaders and members of the church held each other accountable to attempting to meet.  

\textsuperscript{422} The COGIC yearbook (1959) indicated that COGIC had nearly 400,000 members in the United States, not including the members worldwide. The \textit{Memphis Press Scimitar} reported that COGIC had more than one million members, including members in the United States and in foreign countries, when Mason died in 1961.; Weaver, “‘Mark the Perfect Man’: The Rise of Bishop C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ,” 287-288. Calvin L. Burns, “Past and Present: The Church of God in Christ’s Impact on the Holiness-Pentecostal Movement” \textit{The Whole Truth} (July/August/September 2005): 8.; “Bishop Mason is Dead: He Founded a Church that has a Million Members,” \textit{Memphis Press Scimitar}, 17 November 1961.

\textsuperscript{423} 61\textsuperscript{st} Annual Holy Convocation of the COGIC, Souvenir Book and Official Program, Nov. 5\textsuperscript{th} – 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1968), University of Southern California Digital Library, Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive.
Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham contends that black Baptist women dressed in certain ways to maintain a “politics of respectability,” which means they sought to present themselves in respectable ways in white society. However, COGIC Christians stressed having “superior” dress, conduct, speech, etc., because they held “saints of God” should be distinguished from persons who are not saints. COGIC members’ clothing was an indicator of their affirmation of their sainthood and dignity as the people of God. COGIC women proudly wore dresses and hats that reflected their sense of confidence as holiness women. Bishop Mason frequently wore a suit and a bow tie and carried himself in a professional manner. COGIC members believed sanctified folks should look, smell, talk, and behave with a high level of class and moral refinement because they were set apart by God and filled with the Spirit of God.

Repudiating talking and behaving in undignified ways, some Memphis saints lost their jobs because they said “yes sir” and “yes mam” to whites and refused to say “yessa” to whites. Albert Williams recalled that whites would say to them, “You think you know something; you’re a smart nigger.” Rather than retaliating with violence, he says that many COGIC members simply ignored whites’ attempts to denigrate them and showed whites respect and love nonetheless. According to Williams, some Memphis whites could not comprehend why saints would love their enemies or be kind to persons

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425 Albert Williams (False Name), Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author 26 August 2012.

426 Ibid.
who mistreated them. For example, he remembered an occasion when Memphis saints influenced white city officials to open up hotel accommodations to COGIC persons coming to Memphis to attend the annual national convocation. He accentuated, “Dr. Martin Luther King and the Civil Right Movement didn’t do this [influence city officials to open up hotels to saints]. This was because church folk had come to town.” He stressed that the saints influenced whites with their love and kindness, and he insinuated that some whites were actually “afraid” of what God might do to them if they continued to mistreat the saints who were kind to them.427 “The saints,” he reiterated, were determined “to treat everyone right,” to love their enemies, and to pray for those who mistreated them (Matthew 5:43-48). Respecting Paul’s admonitions in Romans 12, the saints aspired to live peaceably with all persons and not to allow anger to lead them to seek revenge against their enemies (Romans 12:17-19). They trusted God would work on the hearts of people who mistreated them, and they believed that God could enable them to overcome evil with good. Hence, rather than fighting social evil through engaging in political protest demonstrations, Williams argued the saints “won” many battles through demonstrating “kindness and love.”428 He explained: “…we didn’t have to march so much. We demonstrated the love and kindness of God in spite of what whites did. We demonstrated kindness and love, and we won.”429 By saying, “we won,” Williams is

427 Ibid.
428 Ibid.
429 Ibid.
referring to the saints who influenced the city administrators to open up hotel accommodations for them.

While Williams contended the saints’ demonstration of love and kindness influenced local officials to give them access to the hotels during the convocation meetings, there were other factors at work. Historian Elton Weaver has pinpointed that Bishop Mason influenced city officials to accommodate the saints by giving them an ultimatum that warned them if they did not open up Memphis hotels to COGIC members that he would relocate the convocation to another city. Mason essentially threatened to boycott. This move forced the government leaders to relax segregation laws and meet the demands of the saints. Hence, Mason did more than simply “demonstrate love and kindness” to white city officials. Yet, Williams was not conscious of Mason’s behind the scenes negotiations. Many members of COGIC such as Williams may have been more apt to see Mason as a spiritual leader since Mason performed his pastoral duties in public. Several saints who heard Bishop Mason pray and preach admired the spiritual life he lived and exemplified. Yet, his involvement in secular affairs was often more private than in the open. Although he invited secular officials to national convocation meetings, there is not much recorded about Mason’s undisclosed conversations and engagements with government and business leaders.

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430 Weaver, “‘Mark the Perfect Man’: The Rise of Bishop C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ,” 267-270.

431 Ibid.

432 Ibid.
Some COGIC members considered political protest activism to be a worldly approach to social change that was unbecoming of the saints of God. In a letter addressed to the “Saints of God,” Bishop William Archie Patterson, the father of Bishop G.E. Patterson and the brother of Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. discussed in Chapter 3, wrote:

Stop! And think how the world is reacting to unrest. Forces without often affect forces within. Do you want the members of the CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST marching – carrying signs reading “DOWN WITH ?????” and chanting, “WE WANT ---???? WE WANT----????, etc. Some may say saints will not do that. I wonder why do you think they will not. Many of them are doing a number of other things exactly like the world!433

Born April 30, 1898, W.A. Patterson was a first generation minister who led several COGIC churches in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Michigan and was appointed as a bishop in COGIC under the leadership of Bishop Mason. The above quote comes from Bishop W.A. Patterson’s autobiography, which was published in 1970 a few years after Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. was appointed as the first presiding Bishop of COGIC. The COGIC denomination experienced division among its leadership following the death of Bishop C.H. Mason. Some leaders felt that the office of Senior Bishop should continue after Mason’s death and should be passed on to Bishop O.T. Jones Sr., and other leaders felt that the office of Senior Bishop should be dissolved and that a presiding Bishop should be elected and serve as the executive leader of the General Board of Bishops. Bishop

W.A. Patterson was one of the Bishops who held the former position. In his autobiography he argued that COGIC was headed in the wrong direction because the church had “departed from the Holy Scriptures” and “substituted a constitution and set by-laws in the place of God’s Holy Word.” He suggested that the church should get back on course by affirming its commitment to holiness. It is not exactly clear what Patterson intended to insert in the blanks or “???” of the aforementioned quote. Given the historical and social context in which he was writing, it is reasonable to infer that Patterson may have been referring to the chant: “We Want Black Power.” The Black Power Movement had started to become popular in 1966 following James Meredith’s “March Against Fear.” Furthermore, Patterson did not specify whether he was totally against civil rights demonstrations, was a supporter of the nonviolent aspect of the Civil Rights Movement, or rejected the Black Power Movement. Yet, the above quote indicates that he judged marching and carrying signs to be a “worldly” response to social unrest (I will discuss COGIC’s Civil Rights activists perspectives toward the Black Power Movement later in this chapter). He deemed that the saints’ response to social problems

434 Ibid., xv. In addition to Bishop W.A. Patterson, Bishop Claiborne Jones of New Orleans, Louisiana wrote in 1967: “In spite of the revolution taking place everywhere, there is plenty of room at the top. Get down before God and close your eyes and ears to all the false lights and the noises that surrounds you and get in touch with God through prayer. Hold on to Him until you get into the Acts, just like the apostles did…Close your eyes to everything else and keep God and his love in your every activity. It is the only way that we will ever get back to the will of God and so let the world know that God yet lives in us to will and to do his good pleasure.”; Claiborne Jones, “Back to Pentecost” *The Whole Truth* Vol. 1, No. 8 (September 1967): 2.

should be different than the world’s response. The saints’ reaction should be informed by their spiritual relationship with God and based on the teachings of Scripture.

Some COGIC leaders did not embrace political protest activism because they felt that certain biblical passages prohibited them from defying the government. June Johnson, a member of COGIC who came of age during the Civil Rights era, explained that she wanted to become more involved in the Movement, but she felt she could not overtly participate because of her church’s stance against civil disobedience. Her COGIC leaders felt civil disobedience clashed with Paul’s admonition to respect God-ordained governments and institutions. Paul wrote:

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

According to Paul, Christians should respect and submit to the state because God has placed government officials in their position of authority in order to maintain law and order. Paul held that the Roman government was a “servant of God” that had a divine mandate to uphold the Roman law. Consistent with this Pauline text, Article 17 of the COGIC Constitution, concerning “Political Governments,” states:

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436 June Johnson (False Name), COGIC member, telephone interview by author, April 2011.; Jonathan Langston Chism, “‘The Saints Go Marching’: Black Pentecostal Critical Consciousness and the Political Protest Activism of Pastors and Leaders in the Church of God in Christ in the Civil Rights Era” *Pneuma* 35 (2013), 8.

We believe that governments are God-given institutions for the benefit of [hu]mankind. We admonish and exhort our members to honor magistrates, and the powers that be, and to respect and obey the civil laws. Instead of admonishing members to hold lawmakers accountable to creating just laws, the COGIC Constitution encouraged members to respect the laws of the land and to trust that God appointed lawmakers and civic leaders. Upholding the COGIC Constitution’s position regarding respecting political governments, Bishop E.B. McEwen, a prominent COGIC leader in Memphis who was close to Mason, encouraged COGIC members in his jurisdiction not to engage in political protest or civil disobedience.

Though the COGIC Constitution admonished Christians to submit to the government, it is important to note that the COGIC Constitution also gives members the freedom to affirm their right to disobey laws that conflict with their religious commitment. As noted in Chapter 2, Mason refused to enlist in World War I because he was committed to obeying the biblical injunctions against taking human life. This means that COGIC’s Constitutional position concerning political governments contains accommodationist and resistance threads. That is to say, on one hand, the Constitution encourages saints to respect and submit to the governing authorities and the powers that

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be. On the other hand, the Constitution authorizes saints to defy and reject laws that they consider in conflict with their Holiness-Pentecostal convictions.

Opposing Racial Injustice Indirectly through Prayer

In addition to positing they could rise above racism through holiness, many COGIC members also believed the saints should respond to social injustice through prayer. Mason gave primacy to the power of God via the Holy Spirit to overcome oppression. Holding up a potato “held in bondage by a small iron rivet,” he preached: “The bands of wickedness around man, only God is able to break. . . When you find yourself under the bands of the world, humble yourself and God will take you out of your distresses.” Perceiving oppression as fundamentally spiritual, he emphasized that God’s presence and power could enable blacks to overcome evil. His visual image intended to emphasize that “only God” could free persons, families, and communities from bondage. Persons needed to humble themselves to ask God for help before they could experience deliverance.

Mason believed he could influence divine healing of various diseases through prayer. Several persons who knew him recalled that he spent several hours a day praying. His daughter, Lelia Mason, says he would get up and get fully dressed to pray every morning from 7 am to 9 am. Bishop Louis Ford, a COGIC bishop who had a strong rapport with Mason, noted Mason sometimes prayed for three or more hours and fasted

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for four to five consecutive days. Mason was well known for being a conduit of divine healing. People came to him and asked him to pray for them. Many people testified of being healed as a result of his prayers. He often prayed:

Heal the sick everywhere.

Heal here, heal everywhere.

Heal! Heal today!

The Word of your wonder, heal!

The Word of your will, heal! According to the *Whole Truth*, Mason “prayed until people who had been diagnosed with terminal illnesses were miraculously healed” and until “the lame threw down their crutches and leaped from their wheelchairs.” During the early 1930s in the midst of much public frustration and panic as a result of the Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression, Bishop Mason encouraged the saints “to pray the Kingdom of God to come into the hearts of men. That His peace and glory might, be the portion of all nations (Hos. 1:7).” Mason envisioned that peace could exist on earth only when humans turned to God.


445 Ibid.

446 Ibid.

447 *The Whole Truth*, 7, no. 10 (1931).
Embracing Mason’s belief in the efficacy of prayer, many Memphis COGIC persons endeavored to resist racial injustice through asking God to intervene in the social arena. Jackie Washington explained: “We prayed for their beliefs, for the Dr. King movement…our stance was just more or less pray, than to be actually involved.” Wayne Jones said that when he attended worship services, he vividly recalled his pastor leading the congregation to pray for the Movement and for the safety of Civil Rights activists.448 COGIC members placed a strong accent on prayer because they believed that the prayers of righteous persons could influence divine intervention in the world (James 5:16).449 They deemed that through prayer God could heal persons from diseases and physical ailments.450 In addition to being a means to cure human bodies, many saints believed that prayer was important to the healing of social problems. A COGIC evangelist wrote in 1970:

Prayer changes things…may I urge you, brothers and sisters who are not praying to get busy, look at your newspaper, turn on your radio or television, and

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448 Jackie Washington (False Name), Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 10 August 2012.; Wayne Jones (False Name), Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 26 August 2012.

449 According to the writer of the Epistle of James, the prophet Elijah, “a human being just like us,” prayed to God for a drought to prove that the God of Israel controlled rain and fertility instead of Baal, the storm god (James 5:16-17). God heard Elijah’s prayer and it did not rain for three years and six months on the earth. The writer of James was making reference to 1 Kings 17 and 18, NRSV: Wayne A. Meeks, ed. The Harper Collins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1989), 547.

450 James 5:16, NRSV
you can see how we must pray earnestly and ask God to forgive our sins and heal our land (2 Chron. 7:14).\textsuperscript{451}

The evangelist held that the saints needed to call upon God to heal the land, the diseased social body. Since the text in 2 Chronicles 7:14 has been frequently quoted by COGIC members when discussing spiritual solutions to social problems, I posit that it merits critical analysis. Although members have frequently quoted verse 14, verse 14 is a clause and is not a complete sentence by itself. It connects with the previous verse and fits within a broader context: The passage, 2 Chronicles 7:13 and 14 states:

> When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.\textsuperscript{452}

God spoke these words to Solomon after Solomon finished his prayer of dedication, in which he invited the Lord to inhabit the new temple that the people of Israel had erected for God. Perceiving that the people of Israel would sin and subsequently experience Yahweh’s wrath, during his prayer of dedication Solomon asked the Lord to have mercy


\textsuperscript{452} NRSV
on his people when they humbled themselves, returned to the temple, and confessed and repented of their sins, defined here as their violation of Yahweh’s laws.\footnote{2 Chronicles 6:26-29, NRSV}

The text, 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, is essentially God’s response to Solomon’s prayer. Yahweh promised Solomon to forgive the children of Israel of their sins and to stop punishing them after they humbly confessed and repented of their sins.\footnote{Ralph W. Klein adds: “Yahweh’s promise to hear from heaven is exactly what Solomon prayed for in chap. 6 (vv. 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 33, 35, 39)...The third of Yahweh’s responses to repentance is described by his healing of the land.”; Ralph Klein, \textit{2 Chronicles: Commentary} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 111.; John Jarick’s interpretation of this passage also aligns with my reading. He states, “Yahweh’s words are a reassurance and a warning. The reassurance is that, as Solomon had requested in his prayer in the previous chapter, Israel’s god will indeed ‘hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land’ (7:14) whenever the people of Israel humble themselves and seek their god at this temple.”; John Jarick, \textit{2 Chronicles} (Sheffield, TN: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 50.}

God was specifically referring to Israel, the people that Yahweh had chosen or elected.\footnote{Klein notes that the Yahweh was not referring to people from foreign nations who were mentioned in 2 Chronicles 6:32-33.; Klein, \textit{2 Chronicles}, 111.}

The COGIC evangelist’s employment of this particular passage to encourage saints to repent of their sins so that God could heal the world of contemporary social injustices such as racial injustice is problematic. In the Hebrew Bible God punished the Israelites because they disobeyed God’s laws.\footnote{Ralph Klein indicates that the “three specific disasters” mentioned in verse 2 Chronicles 7:13 “appeared in 2 Chronicles 6:26 and 6:28, except now they are not disasters that happen ‘naturally,’ but specific punishments brought about by Yahweh.; Klein, \textit{2 Chronicles}, 111.}

Juxtaposing the passage with blacks’ struggles with racial injustice indicates that black Christians should be careful of employing this passage to deduce that blacks’ repentance of sin and turning back to God is the solution to blacks’ experience with systemic racism:
If interpreted within its historical context and correspondingly applied to blacks’ contemporary struggles with racism, the passage suggests that God is punishing blacks for racism. During the antebellum period, some white Christian defenders of slavery utilized the story of Noah and the cursing of Ham and his son Canaan to argue that blacks were the cursed descendants of Ham. In essence, they used the Bible as justification for the enslavement of blacks. Although blacks have suffered tremendously historically because of white supremacy, I do not conceive that blacks are responsible for the history and legacy of racism in America. Subsequently, I am hard pressed to believe that the existence of racial inequality and injustice constitutes punishment from God for blacks’ sin. As mentioned, this was basically the view of many white Christians who theologically defended chattel slavery by arguing that the African race was inferior and cursed because of the sin of Ham. Hence, employing 2 Chronicles 7:14 to suggest that

457 “And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.” Genesis 9:20-25, NRSV; Anthony Pinn, Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 7.
prayer and repentance on the part of blacks is necessary for God to cure America of racism is unsound. Doing this is a form of victim blaming that makes the oppressed victims of racial inequality responsible for racial injustice.\(^{458}\)

In addition to praying for God to heal America of racism, some COGIC members prayed that God would fight their battles. Wayne Jones states: “See the Church of God in Christ always believed that the Lord would fight your battles for you.”\(^{459}\) This Hebrew Bible theme, which I refer to as the *Battle is the Lord’s* motif, places a strong accent on divine intervention in human affairs. This biblical motif occurs in several different Hebrew Bible passages, including Exodus 14:14, Deuteronomy 20:4; 1 Samuel 17:47; and 2 Chronicles 20:15-17. After God had miraculously delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage in earlier chapters in Exodus, in Exodus 14, the people of Israel were fearful because the Red Sea was preventing them from advancing in their journey and Pharaoh’s army was chasing them. Moses encouraged the people, saying: “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today…The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”\(^{460}\) According to the passage, Moses stretched his rod over the sea and God miraculously parted the sea and allowed the Israelites to cross the water, walking on dry ground. Although Pharaoh’s

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\(^{459}\) Wayne Jones (False Name), Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 26 August 2012.

\(^{460}\) Exodus 14:13-14, NRSV
army pursued the Israelites into the sea, God “threw the Egyptian army into panic,” causing the Egyptians to say, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.” During this instance, according to the passage, God literally fought for the people of Israel in a supernatural way. The exodus story was a major point of emphasis for enslaved blacks and has been a prominent motif in African American Christianity. According to biblical scholar Allan Dwight Callahan, enslaved African Americans “read and retold the story of the Exodus more than any other biblical narrative” because it told a story of God freeing persons from slavery. Many browbeaten enslaved blacks felt powerless and incapable of overcoming their social situation. They embraced this passage because it gave them the hope that God would one day miraculously free them as God did for the people of Israel.

During the Civil Rights era, some COGIC persons’ reading of the battle is the Lord’s motif within the exodus narrative led them to deduce that God wanted them to stand still, pray, and wait for God to miraculously fight Jim Crow and other forms of racial injustice. Historian David Daniels says that African American Holiness-Pentecostals “relish political outcomes where God’s intervention can be seen as

461 Exodus, 14:24-25.

miraculous. Many enslaved blacks’ appropriation of the battle is the Lord’s theme in
the book of Exodus is understandable because their freedom and agency were severely
restricted, and the Exodus story provided them with much needed hope. Yet, the use of
this Exodus battle is the Lord’s motif by black saints during the Civil Rights era is
troublesome because it debilitating their agency and inhibited them from affirming their
capacity to fight injustice directly with their own bodies and creatively with their minds.
Black Christians possessed far greater freedoms and agency during the Civil Rights era
than enslaved black Christians did during the antebellum period.

Although the battle is Lord’s motif occurs in Exodus, the motif also occurs in
other biblical texts such as Deuteronomy 20:1-4, 1 Samuel 17:47; and 2 Chronicles
20:15-17. In stressing that God fights with Israelite soldiers as they physically engage
and battle their enemies, these passages of Scripture do not constrict human agency in the
same way as the Exodus narrative in which Yahweh supernaturally overcomes the
enemies of Israel with God’s hands. For example, the battle is the Lord’s theme occurs
in 1 Samuel 17 when David physically fought against the Philistine giant Goliath. The
Philistine giant said, “Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight
together.” Saul and the army of Israel were afraid to step up to the challenge. Biblical
scholar David Toshio Tsumura explains that the Israelite army “had sufficient reason to

\[463\] David Daniels III, “‘Doing All the Good We Can’: The Political Witness of African American
Holiness and Pentecostal Churches in the Post-Civil Rights Era,” in New Day Begun: African American
Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America, ed. R. Drew Smith, (Durham, NC: Duke
University Press, 2003),176.

\[464\] 1 Samuel 17:10, NRSV
be *greatly dismayed and frightened* of Goliath’s large stature and of the superior weaponry of the Philistine army.⁴⁶⁵ Yet, despite these advantages, David courageously fought Goliath, saying: “…and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand.”⁴⁶⁶ The Lord used David’s “human experiences” and skills as a young shepherd to defeat Goliath.⁴⁶⁷ The *battle is the Lord’s* motif empowered David to have courage to face and fight Goliath. David believed God was spiritually fighting with him. It is in this sense that I argue that prayer can and has functioned as a means of resistance for saints who have struggled daringly against the tremendous enemy of institutional white supremacy.

Although prayer is not activism, the prayer tradition aligns with Wilmore’s survivalist tradition, “a culture of human survival in the face of legal oppression and forcible acculturation.”⁴⁶⁸ COGIC members perceived their prayers as constituting a means of empowerment for struggle and for survival. Eliza Mason, C.H. Mason’s mother who lived during the era of slavery, felt a sense of personal empowerment and hope after praying.⁴⁶⁹ Her prayers helped her to face boldly her daily life challenges as a black

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⁴⁶⁶ 1 Samuel 17:47, NRSV


⁴⁶⁸ Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 222.

⁴⁶⁹ Weaver, “‘Mark the Perfect Man’: The Rise of Bishop C.H. Mason,” 36.
woman during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{470} Spiritual traditions such as prayer helped enslaved blacks physically and mentally survival the brutal system of slavery. Additionally, prayer has helped African Americans create paths of freedom for themselves and other enslaved blacks.\textsuperscript{471} Referencing a variety of biographies and autobiographies written by notable African Americans, Harold Carter discusses ways African American abolitionists such as Harriet Tubman and revolutionary insurrectionist leaders such as Nat Turner asseverated that prayer had a strong influence on their respective pursuits for freedom and justice.\textsuperscript{472}

Though I have discussed some problematic uses of the prayer tradition within COGIC, namely the misapplication of 2 Chronicles 7:14 to blacks’ experience of racial oppression and the use of the Exodus battle of the Lord’s motif to justify retreatism, I have noted that prayer also has been an empowering resource for saints and for black Christians by helping them to have the courage to resist and oppose racial oppression directly. Political scientist Frederick Harris argues that Christian traditions such as prayer factored in black Christians’ mobilization during the Civil Rights Movement, providing them with the “psychological strength” to put their bodies and lives at risk.\textsuperscript{473}

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{471} Harold A. Carter, \textit{The Prayer Tradition of Black People} (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1976), 100.
\textsuperscript{472} Ibid., 100-109.
Memphis Activist Saints’ Theological Affinity with King’s Direct Christian-centered Activism

Although some saints used the Bible and COGIC doctrines to justify not directly participating in the Civil Rights Movement, some Memphis COGIC members I interviewed employed Scripture and their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs to justify their participation in the Movement. Since Martin Luther King was a highly influential figure within the Civil Rights Movement and his publicized speeches and marches reached a broad audience, I center my discussion of the non-violent phase of the Civil Rights Movement on King. Several Memphis COGIC members who I interviewed were acquainted with King and highly respected him because he was a minister and a Civil Rights leader. I argue that some Memphis COGIC members joined the Civil Rights struggle because King’s civil rights rhetoric aligned with Mason’s theo-ethical commitments discussed above.

King’s rhetoric “wove together” the survival and liberationist traditions of black Christian faith.\textsuperscript{474} Intending for his discourse to reach white and black Americans, King was fundamentally committed to integration and racial harmony, and he optimistically believed that blacks could achieve equality and justice in the United States through swaying the moral conscience of white Americans.\textsuperscript{475} To appeal to white Americans, he appealed to the political ideas of justice and freedom for all in the Declaration of

\textsuperscript{474} Wilmore, \textit{Black Religion and Black Radicalism}, 232.

\textsuperscript{475} Fredrik Sunnemark, \textit{Ring Out Freedom: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement} (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 73.
Independence as well as to Western literary writers and philosophers. However, to galvanize black Americans, he appropriated the black preaching tradition and the Bible.\textsuperscript{476} His vocal inflections, poetic style, and utilization of the black call and response tradition, appealed to the emotional center of his black audience. His ability to preach the Bible, which is reflected in his collections of sermons \textit{Strength to Love}, gave rhetorical power to his discourse for black American Christians. King utilized theological and biblical hermeneutical tools to encourage black Christians to seek to overcome social evil through employing agape love.\textsuperscript{477} His theological anthropology stressed that God and Jesus were fundamentally loving and just and that humans can be in right relationship with God by imitating Jesus’ model of love and justice.\textsuperscript{478} He argued that the life of Christ supports the philosophy of non-violent resistance and provides humans with the blueprint for creating an inclusive, integrated beloved community and promoting justice, righteousness, and peace in society.\textsuperscript{479} His life and rhetoric made a strong impression on some saints during the Civil Rights era.

\textit{Mason and King’s Promotion of Racial Reconciliation}

King’s emphasis on integration between blacks and whites was in line with the Mason’s theo-ethics. Despite the injustice and inequalities that they experienced, Daniel

\textsuperscript{476} Ibid., 74-81.
\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., 31-45.
\textsuperscript{479} Ibid., 28, 55-57.
Davis stressed that his Holiness-Pentecostal parents “never taught us to hate white folks” and that Jesus “had come to teach forgiveness and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{480} Notwithstanding the damage that white supremacy has done to blacks throughout the centuries, Davis emphasized that it is important for whites and blacks to be able to come together as brothers and sisters. Similarly, Elder G.E. Patterson, a COGIC Civil Rights activist discussed in the previous chapter, held that Jesus was the solution to racial injustice. During a live radio broadcast delivering during the 1968 presidential election between the nominees Richard Nixon (Republican), Hubert Humphrey (Democrat), and George Wallace (American Independent), Elder Patterson declared: “I nominates Jesus.”\textsuperscript{481} Though Patterson had worked directly with King during the Memphis Sanitation Strike, he deemed that civil rights initiatives and campaigns would not by themselves fix America’s social problems.\textsuperscript{482} He contended that the only real solution to social evil was for the political establishment and for whites and blacks to embrace fully the gospel and teachings of Jesus. He held that Jesus was the only one who could heal racial strife and division within America.

Stemming from its Azusa Street roots, COGIC placed a strong emphasis on racial reconciliation and interracial unity among blacks and whites. Mason openly

\textsuperscript{480} Daniel Davis (False Name), COGIC member, interviewed by author 3 September 2012.

\textsuperscript{481} Bishop G.E. Patterson Timeline, Memphis, TN, Bountiful Blessings, Inc. Retrieved from \url{http://www.bbless.org/g%20e%20patterson.html} (accessed March 28, 20014).

\textsuperscript{482} Gilbert Earl Patterson, interview by Joan Beifuss and Modeane Thompson, 4 June 1968, Sanitation Workers Strike Special Collections, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.
fellowshipped with white ministers during the period of Jim Crow, and he welcomed whites to be a part of COGIC churches and to even serve as bishops and high ranking officials within the denomination. Mason’s quest to advance Seymour’s inclusive and interracial vision of spiritual harmony between blacks and whites through sharing the gospel with whites and contending that God could heal whites of racial bigotry reverberates with King’s vision for beloved community and his aspiration to challenge racial injustice through swaying the moral conscience of white Americans. The parallel between the visions of these Christian leaders factored in some COGIC members decision to join the Civil Rights Movement.

*Mason and King's Commitment to Biblical Principles: Nonviolence, Equality, and Justice*

COGIC activists also joined the nonviolent phase of the Civil Rights Movement because they found the movement to be in line with the Bible and their theo-ethical commitment to holiness. King’s emphasis on non-violence, equality, and justice was attractive to COGIC Civil Rights activists, who held these themes to be in line with biblical teachings. Daniel Davis explained that he was supportive of King’s nonviolent approach because it was the method that Jesus taught. He supported his point by referencing a passage from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which states: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist and evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also…I say to
you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” He held that the nonviolent philosophy that undergirded much of the Civil Rights Movement was consistent with New Testament passages. Mason emphasized taking the moral high ground, not fighting fire with fire, and overcoming hatred with love. COGIC doctrine asserted that Christian perfection applies to believers who imitate God in “loving and doing good to others.” As God loves everyone and allows the sun to rise for those who are evil and good, Christians should strive to love everybody, including racist whites.

Davis also recalled that his parents, who embraced holiness after attending the Azusa Street Revival, instilled in him that “there are no inferior or superior races” and that racism is wrong because blacks and whites are equal in God’s sight. He explained that he was conscious of the need for equality and justice for blacks and “knew firsthand the meaning of poverty and segregation… the meaning of the legacy of corruption and the inequalities that black people suffered.” Mason also was cognizant of injustice and inequality within his community. He spoke against racial injustice in a sermon he preached in the 1920s, contending that God worked through a storm to judge and “completely destroy” a small town for its racial bigotry and discriminatory practices.

483 Matthew 5:38-44, NRSV
484 Memphis COGIC member, Brother Albert Williams (False Name), interviewed by author 26 August 2012.
486 Daniel Davis (False Name), COGIC member, interviewed by author 3 September 2012.
487 Ibid.
Not only did he preach against racism, he openly defied segregation customs because he believed that blacks and whites were equal in God’s sight and should treat one another as such. \(^{489}\) Though he encouraged saints to challenge racism passively through sharing the message of Christ with whites, living holy, and praying and seeking divine intervention, it is important to note that Mason was indubitably an advocate for racial equality. The Civil Rights Movement presented COGIC members with an opportunity to further pursue Mason’s vision for equality and to challenge structural racism directly.

\textit{Mason and King’s Affirmation of Prayer}

Additionally, several Memphis saints I interviewed expressed that King appealed to them because he was a spiritual leader and a prolific preacher of the gospel. For instance, Wayne Jones explained:

I respected Martin Luther King because he had faith in God and believed that God would change this...And Martin Luther King was going by praying and waiting on the Lord to send help.\(^{490}\)

\(^{488}\) Elsie Mason, \textit{The Man...Charles Harrison Mason}, 23. Reverend James L. Delk states, “Brother Mason attended college very little, but has a wide experience with human nature and an understanding of his fellow man such as no other man seems to have.”; James L. Delk, “When I First Met Senior Bishop C.H. Mason” in \textit{Lest We Forget: Sermons in Part} compiled by Anna Smith, (photocopy) p. 8, Special Collections, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO.

\(^{489}\) Whereas many blacks have spoken of justice and equality, COGIC members have often reversed the order and placed a strong emphasis on equality. I posit that this is because of Mason’s connection to the Azusa Street revival, which emphasized spiritual unity and equality among the races.

\(^{490}\) Memphis COGIC member, Wayne Jones (False Name), interviewed by author, 26 August 2012.
As a black Holiness-Pentecostal believer, Jones found King’s belief in prayer and divine intervention to be important. Besides being a political protest activist, King was a pastor who was deeply committed to prayer and frequently communicated with God before and after delivering sermons and speeches.\textsuperscript{491} King was also a powerful and dynamic preacher who skillfully and creatively expounded the gospel and espoused spiritual ideas. Jones said that he was eager to attend civil rights meeting in Memphis when he received word that King was going to be the keynote speaker. Gloria Johnson also acknowledged King’s leadership and explained that she was “very, very impressed with his sermons” and how he “could capture” his listening audience.\textsuperscript{492} Jackie Washington insisted she “always admired Dr. King” because she felt “he was a man of God that really didn’t want the violence and the bloodshed.”\textsuperscript{493} Each of these Memphis COGIC activists stressed that they appreciated King’s spirituality. They acknowledged that he sought divine guidance during the Movement and appeared to have sincere faith in God. According to Lewis Baldwin, King viewed the civil rights movement as a “spiritual movement,” and he prayed when leading mass marches, demonstrations, and other civil rights activities.\textsuperscript{494} I argue that King’s beliefs and commitments to the black prayer tradition resonated with

\textsuperscript{491} Lewis V. Baldwin, \textit{Never to Leave Us Alone: The Prayer Life of Martin Luther King Jr.}, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 41.

\textsuperscript{492} Ms. Gloria Johnson (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 17 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{493} Ms. Jackie Washington (False name) Memphis COGIC member, interviewed by author, 10 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{494} Baldwin, \textit{Never to Leave Us Alone}, 7, 69.
the saints’ beliefs in the power prayer has for influencing personal and social transformation.

**COGIC’s Official Endorsement of the Nonviolent Civil Rights Movement**

Finding King’s Civil Rights philosophy to be consistent with Mason’s theological commitments, Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. played a role in spearheading changes to COGIC’s *Official Manual* as it relates to the church’s involvements in Civil Rights struggles. There is much consistency between the basic doctrines in the COGIC Affirmation of Faith written by Mason in 1926, the 1957 Official Manual of COGIC, and the 1973 Official Manual. However, in the Foreword of the 1973 edition Patterson explained that the revised manual endeavored to stress that COGIC needed to “relate itself to the secular world.” While Patterson advocated holiness and deemed saints should be different from the world or “in this world and not of it,” he contended the saints should address civic and social matters such as “poverty, unemployment, and racial tensions.” The revised manual acknowledged “the social revolution” of the 1960s and affirmed nonviolent protest, saying:


496 Elder C.F. Range Jr., ed. *Official Manual with the Doctrines and Disciplines of the Church of God in Christ* (Memphis; Board of Publication of the Church of God in Christ, 1973), vii-viii.; This material is also presented and discussed in Chism, “Saints Go Marching,” 16.

497 Ibid.
The Church is aware of the social revolution that exists at this time in our history and recognizes the need for total involvement of the Church in the affairs and movements directed at securing for all men, without regard to race, creed, color or national origin, those human and natural rights that are by the natural law of our creator bestowed upon all of mankind equally. The concern for involvement in and dedication to the principles of equality of rights, justice and opportunity in all segments of our society should be considered as a basic and integral part of the every day Christian ministry of all members of the Church. This is so, not because of the governmental proclamation that ‘all men [and women] are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights’ but because of the more fundamental Christian philosophy of the brotherhood of man. The Church believes in, supports and encourages continued peaceful Christian persuasion in behalf of establishing in our creator’s kingdom here on earth equality of rights, opportunity and justice for all humankind.498

In making this official statement, Patterson and other COGIC leaders desired for members of COGIC to commit to being involved in Christian-based movements for equality and justice. COGIC’s theological emphasis on racial equality, racial solidarity, and nonviolence are reflected in the statement above. The words equal and all occur multiple times to stress the point that persons from every race, gender, and social group are equal in God’s sight and as such are entitled to fair and equitable treatment. The writer asserts that Christians should not only fight for equality and justice because it is

498 Ibid., 130.; This material is also cited in Chism, “Saints Go Marching,” 16.
God’s will for humans to have equal rights, but Christians should also uphold equality because the church teaches that all men and women are brothers and sisters. This reflects COGIC’s Azusa heritage and vision for racial unity between persons from multiple cultural groups. Lastly, the statement incorporates Mason’s vision for the saints to pursue social change and justice in a “peaceful” manner that is consistent with the saints’ theo-ethical commitment to holiness and living according to biblical laws and principles.

Bishop James O. Patterson Sr. Protests the Dechristianization of the Civil Rights Movement

Besides explaining how Mason’s theo-ethics has influenced saints’ various postures toward the Civil Rights Movement, I also hold that it is important to engage Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists’ perspectives regarding the Movement. Rather than simply joining the movement and agreeing with the social justice perspectives of King and other Civil Rights leaders, I argue some Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists had their own distinct perspectives toward the struggle. Though individuals and groups can have similar angles of vision, persons simply do not see things the same way. To explore and examine activist saints’ viewpoints toward the Movement in more depth, I focus on the theological perspectives of Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. Although I do not assume or argue that his perspective is representative of all COGIC members, as his view is distinctive, I concentrate on him because he was a prominent figure within COGIC in Memphis and COGIC at large. Being elected as the first presiding bishop in denomination in 1968, his message reached thousands of saints who traveled to Memphis from regions throughout the United States during COGIC Annual Convocation meetings. Most significantly, as noted in Chapter 3, he was actively involved in Memphis politics,
the NAACP, boycotts, marches, and the Sanitation Workers Strike. To explore and examine Patterson’s outlook regarding the struggle for social justice, I give attention to various sermons he delivered during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During his sermons, Patterson upheld Mason’s theological commitments to evangelism, holiness, and spiritual discipline and empowerment, and he protested the deschristianization of the Civil Rights Movement, defined by Gayraud Wilmore as “the separation of black radicalism from its Christian roots,” that was taking place as King’s Christian-based philosophy of nonviolence was slowly losing ground to Stokely Carmichael’s philosophy of black power and other unchristian approaches.

While Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists supported the nonviolent wing of the Civil Rights Movement that resounded with their holiness-Pentecostal teachings, they were far less inclined to endorse the black power movement because they considered black power philosophy to be antithetical to their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs. Black power was a political philosophy developed by leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks, during their leadership of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, an all-black independent third party in Alabama that successfully enabled several black candidates running for local offices in the county to defeat several white democrats and to gain control of the county

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499 In this section, I quote J.O. Patterson Sr. extensively rather than succinctly paraphrase his words because Patterson’s voice and perspective, unlike Bishop Mason, has not received significant attention among religious and civil rights historians.

500 Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 188.
courthouse.\textsuperscript{501} Carmichael and Ricks introduced the slogan “black power” into the Civil Rights arena during the James Meredith “March Against Fear” from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, in 1966.\textsuperscript{502} Carmichael and Ricks held that white government officials were not genuinely concerned about issues relevant to black communities, despite the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in 1964 and 1965. According to Carmichael, black power was essentially a call for blacks to seek to improve their communities by uniting together and defining and establishing their own political, social, and economic goals and agenda.\textsuperscript{503} Proponents of black power urged blacks to take pride in their history and culture. From the moment the slogan was introduced into the Civil Rights movement, the slogan was controversial and was misconstrued by the media and many whites as being reverse racism or a call for black militancy.

Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. was highly critical of black power philosophy and considered black power rhetoric as being antithetical to COGIC teachings regarding nonviolence and racial reconciliation. During the Annual COGIC Convocation in Memphis in 1969, he publicly denounced black power, referring to the “raised fists” of black power advocates as “the salute of a black militant [violent] group.”\textsuperscript{504} Furthermore,


\textsuperscript{502} Taylor Branch, \textit{At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 486.

since COGIC embraced interracialism, Patterson rejected what he perceived as the racial separatism of the black power movement. That is to say he felt the black power movement only focused on helping to empower underprivileged blacks instead of all poor people. Patterson held that the emphasis on “long haircuts, African garb” and “knotted-up hair and a shaking body” prevented youth from seeing that the black struggle for freedom really needed to center on the pursuit of equality and justice for all people, not just black people. During his message, he said that if black power youth really wanted to have real power and help black people, then they needed to focus on getting right with God. It was becoming clear to Patterson that many youth were being attracted to black power and were not pursuing social change through focusing on seeking God or spiritual power but through concentrating on acquiring economic and political power.

As a whole, Patterson’s sermons can be seen as an objection to blacks’ veering away from King’s Christian nonviolent methods of social change toward secular approaches during the latter part of the 1960s. In his remonstrance to this change, Patterson emphasized that “the perfect answer” to social justice does not lie in “politics, marches and demonstrations, boycotting, burning and looting, white power, black power

505 Tucker, Black Pastors and Leaders, 151.
507 Ibid.
or African attire.” He insisted that COGIC was proud to have the “answer and solution” to a vast array of social concerns, including “broken homes, hippies and yippies, racial strife and tension, marijuana smokers, cocaine and glue sniffers, drunkards and dope addicts.” He argued that the solution is in God, accepting the message of God’s son, practicing God’s Word, and seeking God’s presence and power. The overarching thesis of his sermons is that social justice responses and efforts that do not attend to the spiritual dimension of reality do not provide a sufficient remedy to blacks’ social concerns.

“Jesus is the Answer”

Upholding Mason’s theo-ethical commitment to evangelism, Patterson contended that the gospel of Christ provided a solution to racism and other forms of social injustice, which he deemed to be rooted in sin. According to COGIC doctrine, sin is “volitional transgression against God and a lack of conformity to the will of God.” Salvation is being cured of pride, bitterness, anger, and anything that pulls persons from God’s will. He argued that one of human’s “most stubborn and tenacious foes” is the “SELF” or the

508 J.O. Patterson Sr. unpublished sermon notes and transcript, date not included, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archive, J.O. Patterson Sr. Papers. Although these sermon notes do not have a title and are not dated, it probably was delivered during the COGIC Holy Convocation in 1972. The theme of this convocation was “Pentecost at Any Cost.”; “Pentecost at Any Cost,” 65th Annual Holy Convocation Program Booklet, Church of God in Christ, Inc., November 7-17, 1972, University of Southern California Digital Library, Dr. Mattie McGlothen Library and Museum Collection, Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive.

509 Ibid.

human ego, which leads person to reject God and to refuse to live by God’s laws. Only Christ can save human beings from their deprived and selfish nature and regenerate their hearts and minds.

For Patterson salvation was not merely about experiencing personal transformation, but there was also a spiritual dimension to the salvation of society. Although social movements and programs mean well, he contended they are not capable of addressing the spiritual roots of humans’ problems. Social and political activists are “misguided” if they think they can possibly eradicate racism and other social ills purely through social and political means. He proclaimed that “the world’s only remedy” for sin (personal and social) is the gospel of Christ that restores the hearts and minds of humans and reconciles them to God.

In a speech prepared for black and white students at Oral Roberts University, Patterson acknowledged that some blacks did not accept the gospel because they perceived Christianity to be “a white man’s religion,” which had been given to enslaved blacks by their slave-owners as a means of keeping slaves docile and content with their

511 Ibid.
512 J.O. Patterson Sr. unpublished sermon notes and transcript, date not included, p. 4-5. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archive, J.O. Patterson Sr. Papers. Although these notes are undated, his discourse relates to theme of the 1973 COGIC Convocation, “Reaching the Lost through Pentecost.” 66th Annual Holy Convocation Program Booklet, Church of God in Christ, Inc., November 6-16, 1973, University of Southern California Digital Library, Dr. Mattie McGlothen Library and Museum Collection, Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive.
513 Ibid., 6.
514 Ibid.
515 Ibid., 6-7.
social situation. Though he recognized that this was true in some instances, he asserted that Christianity is not a white man’s religion because many blacks had accepted Christianity on the African continent long before they came to the Americas. Referencing the work of church historians such as Henry Hart Milman, Patterson discussed the African presence in the Bible and in the history of the church. He mentioned that African bishops such as Augustine, Tertullian, and Cyprian contributed significantly to the shaping of Western theology. He included blacks such as William Seymour and Charles H. Mason in the history of the Christianity noting that they were largely responsible for the spread of Pentecostalism throughout the world. He concluded that Africans’ presence in the Bible and throughout the history of the Church proves that Christianity is not the “white man’s religion” nor the “black man’s religion,” but it is simply a religion available to all human beings who desire to be a part of God’s family. He told his audience “the time has come, and long since past, for those who name the name of Christ to renounce their prejudice, separation, and their snobbish superiority” and to accept God’s plan of redemption for the world. Quoting the words from a hymn written by John Oxenham, also known as William Arthur Dunkerly, an English poet and hymn-writer, he said:

In Christ there is no East or West,
In him no South or North;
But one great fellowship of love

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516 J.O. Patterson Sr. unpublished sermon notes and transcript, date not included, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archive, J.O. Patterson Sr. Papers. The sermon was delivered at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

517 Ibid.
Throughout the whole wide earth.\textsuperscript{518}

By quoting Oxenham, Patterson was making the point that if blacks and whites accepted Christ’s vision, practiced his teachings, and followed his example then race relations would improve. Patterson called for blacks and whites not simply to be nominal Christians but to obey Christ’s message and to do away with racial separatism and division. In line with Mason, Patterson believed that Christ endeavored to advance love, unity, and peace throughout the globe, and Patterson held that Christ desired racial harmony between blacks and whites and all persons, particularly those who considered themselves to be followers of Christ’s teachings and example.

Despite the efforts to advance the Christian gospel, racial injustice and inequality have persisted. Patterson proffered a utopian vision for racial harmony and solidarity that was akin to King’s dream. However, theologian James Cone notes that King’s dream was eventually “shattered” during the latter part of the 1960s as he began to become more realistic in his assessment of the depths of systemic racism in the United States and to recognize that many whites in the United States were not sincerely supportive of equality and justice for blacks and other marginalized groups.\textsuperscript{519} Patterson’s vision does not acknowledge the deep and pernicious roots of racial prejudice. It is questionable if “one

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid.; The theme of the 63\textsuperscript{rd} Annual COGIC Convocation, “Christ the Universal Need,” also stressed that the gospel of Christ provided a solution to social problems. 63\textsuperscript{rd} Annual Holy Convocation Program Booklet, Church of God in Christ, Inc., November 3-13, 1970, University of Southern California Digital Library, Dr. Mattie McGlothen Library and Museum Collection, Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive.

\textsuperscript{519} James Cone, \textit{Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 232.
great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth” will ever occur in history on a large scale. Agreeing with Reinhold Niebuhr’s realistic philosophical perspective, which acknowledged the atrocities that occurred during World War II and critiqued the social gospel movement’s utopian dream for achieving the kingdom of God, I hold that the nature of evil within humans and social systems make the actualization of a perfect society an impossibility.\textsuperscript{520}

Although Patterson’s vision for racial harmony was romantic, I view his effort to hold both black and white Christians’ accountable to practicing the ethics of Jesus as being significant to the improvement of relationships between blacks and whites. Patterson held that black and white Christians should love one another as Christ commanded them, and they should forgive each other and reconcile their differences.\textsuperscript{521}

Affirming his Holiness-Pentecostal heritage, Patterson stressed that racial division should not exist within the Christian church or among the people of God. Viewing racial animosity as antithetical to the Christian gospel, Patterson endeavored to hold black and white Christians accountable to fully embracing and practicing the teachings of Jesus. This means that whites who profess to be followers of Christ should not exhibit hatred


\textsuperscript{521} Similar to Patterson, theologian J. Deotis Roberts viewed reconciliation as being central to the gospel message. Though Roberts held black liberation to be blacks’ first priority, he insisted that reconciliation between blacks and whites should be an ultimate goal.; J. Deotis Roberts, \textit{Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology} (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971), 8-9.
toward blacks, especially black Christians. Likewise, black Christians should not be hostile or vengeful toward whites in general and white Christians in particular. As with his Holiness-Pentecostal forbears, Patterson asserted that Christ’s followers had a responsibility to work to enact Christ’s vision for unity within the church.

“Holiness is the Answer”

Besides admonishing blacks and whites to embrace the message and vision of Christ, Patterson upheld Mason’s theo-ethical commitment to holiness, and he insisted that “holiness is the only answer” to social problems. When addressing the saints during the 64th Annual Holy Convocation, he admonished them “to return to genuine HOLINESS,” saying:

As we go on into the complicated 70s, that are so filled with challenging issues that are wide open for an adequate answer, as your presiding officer I have come to thrown down the gauntlet of personal and collected HOLINESS. 522

He argued that the world was advancing a “new morality” in which “anything goes” and people can live as they please. He predicted that this new morality, which does not respect biblical moral principles, has the world on a path toward destruction. Holiness, defined as being right with God and living according to God’s laws and Christ’s teachings, is the “only one panacea” that could restore health and wholeness to the

522 Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., “Holiness is the Answer or (The Doctrine of Holiness Defended), unpublished sermon manuscript, undated, no page numbers. Although there is no date recorded on the manuscript, the sermon was likely delivered in 1971 during the 64th COGIC Convocation since the theme was “Holiness is the Only Answer.” 64th Annual Holy Convocation Program Booklet, Church of God in Christ, Inc., November 9-18, 1971, University of Southern California Digital Library, Dr. Mattie McGlothen Library and Museum Collection, Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive.
world. He asserted that there is “no substitute for holiness” and that it is the only proven and effective means of dealing with challenging issues in the world.

Explicating his sermonic text, Zechariah 14:20, which states, “In the day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar,” he explained that the holiness upon the bells of the horses was significant because under the Mosaic Law only a “few individuals,” “places,” and “things” including for example the high priest, the temple, and the “hem of the Robe of the High Priest” could be holy. Patterson contended that Zechariah’s prophecy anticipated that Christ’s redemptive work on the cross would eventually make holiness accessible to all persons and even allow holiness to be “bestowed upon common things” such as the bells of the horses. Furthermore, God’s holy presence would permit the people of Israel to be victorious over their enemies and to “return from the battle fields with bells ringing on the chariots and horses of strangers.”

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523 Ibid.
525 King James Version; This scriptural quotation appears in J.O. Patterson Sr.’s sermon notes. Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., “Holiness is the Answer or (The Doctrine of Holiness Defended), unpublished sermon manuscript, undated, no page numbers. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archives.
The ringing bells were a sign to let all know that God had fought for Israel and given them victory. He closed his sermon on a celebratory note, saying:

So let us ring the bells of the Gospel Message, From Bridle and Saddle of Salvation

Ring it out until every Nation shall bow and every Continent shall pray Crying our Father

Ring the Bells of Holiness until every Mountain shall become a Holy Mountain, And every Hill shall become a hill of Zion.

Ring the Bells until every river shall become a living stream, And every Brook a Brook of Kedron.

Ring the BELLS, until every Tree shall become as a Palm tree planted by the rivers of Waters.

Every rose a rose of Sharon.

Every lily a Lily of the Valley.

Every Spring an Eternal Spring.

Every Well like a Well of Salvation.

Every Street a Via Dolorosa.  

The conclusion to Patterson’s sermon closely resembles the conclusion of King’s “I Have a Dream Speech” delivered on August 28, 1963 in Washington, D.C.

527 Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., “Holiness is the Answer or (The Doctrine of Holiness Defended), unpublished sermon manuscript, undated, no page numbers. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archives.
Juxtaposing these two sermonic conclusions allow a clearer understanding of Patterson’s message. In his conclusion to his “I Have a Dream” speech or sermon, King exclaimed:

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.
Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.
Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.
But not only that:
Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
From every mountainside, let freedom ring.\(^{528}\)

In exclaiming “let freedom ring,” King was calling America to put into practice its democratic ideals of liberty and justice. He argued that America had failed to uphold the freedom for all of its citizens, especially persons of color.

In contrast to King’s call for America to “let freedom ring,” Patterson held that the key to allowing freedom to ring was sharing the gospel with the world and leading persons to surrender their lives to God. In beckoning the saints to “Ring the bells of holiness,” Patterson was inviting them to treasure God’s presence and power in their lives. He envisioned that through “ringing the bells of holiness” the saints could change

the world by inviting God’s presence within it. In his poetic closing, he asserted that peace, tranquility, beauty, and life could exist only through the holy presence of God inhabiting the world. Patterson’s point was that freedom would not ring or become a reality within the United States unless persons sought God’s presence in their lives and surrendered totally to God. In delivering this sermon, Patterson was likely cognizant of King’s cry for freedom. He endeavored to encourage saints that true freedom could not come without “personal and collected holiness” or without individuals, families, communities, and nations sincerely seeking God’s presence and following God’s Word.

Patterson’s message of holiness appears to focus solely on personal sin and exclude attention to social and structural evil. I view his statements, “Holiness is the only answer” or the “only one panacea” for healing in the world, as being emphatic rather than literal. That is to say Patterson’s participation in the Memphis Movement indicates that he aspired to pursue social justice through multiple means. Yet, his main objective was to emphasize that “holiness” and submission to God’s presence is a prerequisite to the advancement of justice. He understood that equality and justice could not come through purely religious means and without some measure of coercion or else he would not have participated in the Memphis Movement. Yet, he equally held that equality and justice could not come without maintaining a firm commitment to holiness and a sincere hunger for spiritual power.

“We Need a Pentecost!”

Besides accentuating that the answer to social problems was in the gospel and in the advancement of the holiness message, Patterson also stressed that the solution to
social ills was in seeking a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He imbibed Mason’s beliefs regarding spiritual empowerment. During the 65th national COGIC Convocation in Memphis in 1971, Patterson preached from the theme, “Pentecost at Any Cost.” He argued that there is a need for a “NEW PENTECOST,” saying:

We NEED A PENTECOST that would bring us ALL TOGETHER…

We NEED A PENTECOST that will not only fall upon the ‘Upper Room,’ but into the hedges, the highways, the by-ways, the lanes, the streets, the alleys...  

Echoing Acts 2:1-2, which suggests that the Holy Spirit filled the disciples when they gathered together in the upper room waiting in anticipation for the Holy Spirit, Patterson desired for the people of God to seek for the Spirit to fall upon them, their communities, and the world. As with Mason, he envisioned that the outpouring of the Spirit could provide a solution to racial division and a remedy to a host of social concerns plaguing the world. Still, Patterson was adamant that spiritual revival would not occur unless people felt the need for it and desired to be filled with divine presence. The Spirit would not come upon believers as it did in Acts and at Azusa until they sincerely sought for it with all their heart and waited in expectancy. Patterson endeavored to encourage saints to maintain their hunger for God and to admonish others in the world to seek persistently and tenaciously to experience spiritual outpouring.

529 Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr., unpublished sermon manuscript, undated, no page numbers. Although there is no date recorded on the manuscript, the sermon was likely delivered in 1972 during the 65th COGIC Convocation. The theme was “Pentecost at Any Cost.” 65th Annual Holy Convocation Program Booklet, Church of God in Christ, Inc., November 7-17, 1972, University of Southern California Digital Library, Dr. Mattie McGlothen Library and Museum Collection, Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive.

530 Patterson was conscious of the COGIC tradition of tarrying discussed in Chapter 2.
He contended that believers who come to possess the power of the Holy Spirit have the authority and the power to fight all forms of evil, including racism, crime and drug addiction. This power is not accessible to those who merely join the church, but only to those who receive Spirit baptism. Appropriating German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s critique of “cheap grace,” Patterson deemed that the Holy Spirit was a costly resource for the spirit-baptized Christian. Saints should not take the indwelling of the Spirit for granted or lightly. However, he argued that saints should aspire to walk in the fullness of this power by submitting to the Spirit and unequivocally following the Spirit’s guidance. Contending that some Spirit-filled Pentecostals had become powerless because they failed to obey the Spirit, he encouraged the saints that the “only hope” for social stability lies in the children of God humbly following the directions of the Spirit.

As with his convictions regarding holiness, Patterson’s language is dogmatic. Is he arguing that Pentecostal striving is the only remedy to social problems or that Pentecostal outpouring is a panacea? Or is he intimating that social problems cannot be cured without seeking for God’s power and spiritual direction? As it relates to the first question, I hold that Pentecostal experience has limitations and does not by itself lead persons to become politically or socially conscious. There are many Pentecostals who have spoken in tongues who did not become advocates of the poor and oppressed, and

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531 Ibid.
532 Ibid.
533 Ibid.
who in the case of Charles Parham, one of the founders of Pentecostalism, continued to practice segregation and discrimination towards blacks. It is an illusion to conclude that spiritual experiences such as speaking in tongues will spark political activism among saints or motivate them to oppose directly structural and systemic evils.  

Rather than holding that Pentecostal striving is the only solution to social problems, Patterson’s participation in the Movement leads me to deduce that Patterson was suggesting that social problems could not be cured without spiritual striving. On one hand, his participation in political campaigns and protest struggles indicates that he did not believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit was alone sufficient for the acquisition of political and economic power. On the other hand, though he supported the movement, Patterson deemed that political demonstrations or political tactics did not and could not provide a sufficient remedy to social problems. Agreeing with Mason, he held that social evil could not be overcome without seeking and surrendering to God’s power.

534 Recently, some Pentecostal scholars such as such as Wynand de Kock and Dan Prakash have questioned if Spirit baptism by itself induces all believers to become engaged in social activism. De Kock argues that it is questionable whether spiritual encounter “will always have the same effect on believers.” As an example, he mentions that both Peter and Paul had experienced God deeply and spoken in tongues, but Peter continued to grapple with “ethnocentrism when he considered the Gentiles as ritually unclean” while Paul on the other hand was more open and inclusive to the Gentile. In addition, he adduces that Seymour came to recognize speaking in tongues did not completely cure all believers of racial bigotry after he recognized some whites, including his Pentecostal mentor Charles Parham, that spoke in tongues continued to harbor a spirit of racial bigotry. Hence, a person who experiences spiritual baptism will not necessarily be led to support liberal agendas or become involved in social or political activism, regardless of whether that baptism is “authentic” or not. Prakash also demystifies the assumption that Spirit baptism will inspire believers to become involved in social justice. He states, “Idealistically ‘the confession of the being Spirit baptized should lead to a passionate concern about justice, enhancing public morality and changing the plight of the underprivileged and marginalized,’ but in reality it does not work that way.” Wynand J. de Kock, “Empowerment Through Engagement—Pentecostal Power for a Pentecostal Task” Ex Auditu 12 (1996): 137-140.; Dan Prakash, “Toward a Theology of Social Concern: A Pentecostal Perspective” Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies 13:1 (2010): 65-97.
“Academic and Spiritual Preparedness”

Although Patterson maintained a strong commitment to Mason’s theology and stressed the significance of the gospel, holiness, and spiritual experience and empowerment for the struggle against injustice, Patterson considered both “academic and spiritual preparedness” to be important to the social and political advancement of black communities. While Mason was not anti-intellectual, he did not strongly endorse liberal education in general or liberal theological education in particular. During his tenure, the denomination established COGIC schools such as Saints Literary and Industrial School, and he also welcomed educated persons with college degrees and training in the bible and theology such as Bishop David Young, Robert Hart, E.R. Driver, and Lizzie Robinson and Lucinda Bostic to serve in important leadership roles in COGIC. Yet, Mason promoted an education that centered on training ministers in the Bible and spiritual development rather than seminary or schools of theology. He held that the Holy Spirit could direct persons, even uneducated persons, to see spiritual truths and “teach them all things” including how to interpret the Bible appropriately (John 16:13). Upon a few months after enrolling in the Arkansas Baptist College, Mason insisted that Dr. C.L. Fisher’s new higher critical teachings were disconcerting for him. He subsequently left the program saying, “The Lord showed me that there was no salvation


in schools and colleges; for the way they were conducted grieved my very soul. I packed my books, arose and bade them a final farewell, to follow Jesus, with the Bible as my sacred guide.\(^{537}\) As Mason was primarily committed to studying and teaching the Bible, COGIC did not establish any divinity schools or seminaries during his tenure.

Significant changes occurred in COGIC’s stance toward theological education post-Mason, as Patterson and other COGIC leaders desired for COGIC ministers to become more informed about the black religious heritage and black Christians’ historical commitments to black communities and social justice.\(^{538}\) Bishop Patterson explained:

> Let us be realistic, we are overdue for a theological seminary or school for the training of our ministers… We need some training with the Holy Ghost. I know that God can use a consecrated penny, but I also know that God can do more with a consecrated million than with a penny.\(^{539}\)

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\(^{539}\) Kelly and Ross, *Here Am I, Send Me: The Dramatic Story of Presiding Bishop J.O. Patterson*, 98.
Patterson held that the Spirit did not exclusively enable Pentecostal pastors to maximize their effectiveness in ministry. He believed that COGIC ministers could be more effective in their preaching and outreach to black communities through acquiring seminary training. Theological education gives black ministers the intellectual space to grapple with what it means to be Christian and to be black, with the truth of Christian witness, and with how Christian faith should be enacted in their context.540 Established in 1970 during Patterson’s tenure, the Charles Harrison Mason Theological Seminary, a graduate institution of higher theological education associated with COGIC and a member of the International Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia, focuses on teaching its predominantly African American students to be spiritually empowered and politically and socially conscious.541

Patterson affirmed both the place of spiritual and intellectual striving in African Americans’ struggle for equality and justice in America, saying, “If our people are to be integrated into the mainstream of American life, then the emphasis should be on academic and spiritual preparedness. . .”542 By validating the significance of academic enrichment, Patterson acknowledged that black Pentecostals should employ additional


means beyond experiencing the Baptism of the Spirit and engaging in spiritual practices to oppose social demons such as institutional racism, sexism, and classism. Another way of thinking of education as it relates to social activism is through the concept of conscientization or critical consciousness formation, defined by Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire as “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions” and to act against oppressive realities. Freire helped elevate the consciousness of poor, uneducated adults in Brazil through teaching them to understand their history and social context so that they could engage in transformative action.

Critical consciousness development is learning that empowers action. Though this type of learning does not only occur in institutions of higher learning, the academy is frequently a breeding ground for critical consciousness development.

Sociologists C. Eric Lincoln and Lincoln Mamiya have indicated that persons who have obtained higher levels of education are more predisposed to engage in social and political activities. Ethicist Robert Franklin argues that higher education not only elevates the political consciousness of church leaders, but it provides them “greater access to data, more sophisticated analysis, and alternative action strategies.”


544 Ibid.

pastors who have obtained higher degrees of learning, such as Charles Blake and Eugene Rivers, have reconciled black Pentecostalism with social and political activism. Both of these leaders have collaborated to form the Pan-African Charismatic Evangelical Congress (PACEC), a Pentecostal activist organization that seeks to join “protest and direct action” with other political strategies, such as “influencing public policy, developing programs, focusing on measurable results,” and establishing coalitions with other organizations while maintaining its political independence. These leaders did not engage in this activity only because they experienced the Holy Spirit; however, their critical consciousness greatly enhanced their ability to understand the complexity of social oppression and to pursue social transformation through creative means.

Though Patterson affirmed theological education and higher education, he was skeptical of educational programs that dismissed “the spiritual values connected with vital relationship with Christ.” He argued many students who graduate from school have not received Christ or “spiritual refreshing” in their soul and as a result are spiritually dead. Though he cheered intellectual growth and academic excellence, he encouraged


547 Blake is the current COGIC presiding bishop and pastor of West Angeles COGIC 18,000 member megachurch. His church provides a plethora of ministries to the West Angeles community. Eugene Rivers is the pastor of the Azusa Christian Community, and he has been an active leader of the 10 Point Coalition, a social activist ministry in Boston.

548 Daniels, “Doing All the Good We Can,” 175.

549 J.O. Patterson Sr. unpublished sermon notes and transcript, date not included, p. 4-5. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archive, J.O. Patterson Sr. Papers. Although these notes are undated, his discourse relates to theme of the 1973 COGIC Convocation, “Reaching the Lost through Pentecost.”
young persons not to exclude or forget God as they learn, saying: “Get your learning but don’t lose your burning.”⁵⁵⁰ This means that saints should continue to prioritize investing in their personal relationship with God as they pursue educational enrichment.

Patterson viewed himself as an intermediary between the older and younger generations of COGIC members.⁵⁵¹ While he completely embraced Mason’s Holiness-Pentecostal message, he was also attentive to the changes taking place in the 1960s and 1970s. He was cognizant that many socially conscious younger COGIC members had decided to switch their membership to other denominations or leave the church because they deemed that COGIC leaders were not progressive and genuinely concerned about helping blacks overcome racial and economic oppression.⁵⁵² Patterson aspired to convince youth coming of age during the 60s and 70s that they could be COGIC and simultaneously engage in the struggle for freedom and justice and pursue higher learning. However, though Patterson acknowledged that seeking political power and education were important, he held that grasping for spiritual presence and empowerment was most vital to the advancement of black communities.


⁵⁵⁰ J.O. Patterson Sr. unpublished sermon notes and transcript, date not included, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archive, J.O. Patterson Sr. Papers. The sermon was delivered at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

⁵⁵¹ The Whole Truth (June 1970); The Whole Truth (November 1970); The Whole Truth (September 1971); Kelley and Ross, Here I Am, Send Me, 98.; Tucker, Black Pastors and Leaders, 150.; Cited in Chism, “The Saints Go Marching,” 16.

⁵⁵² Tucker, Black Pastors and Leaders, 149-151.
Summary and Conclusion

My brethren, you all know I was a vital part of the civil rights struggle under the leadership of Martin Luther King. One of the problems we faced was whether our struggle was social or spiritual…We must not let this be our problem. We need both prayer and political and social power. All that we have as a people came essentially through prayer, through spiritual power, and the application of this power to life. Let us therefore bow our heads and spend these closing minutes in prayers. Brethren, we need the presence of God in our efforts.\footnote{Carter, \textit{The Prayer Tradition of Black People}, 114.}

Reverend Jesse Jackson, a renowned Civil Rights activist, spoke these words during a meeting of black clergy regarding the role of the black church in responding to social concerns affecting black communities. In line with Jackson’s quote, Memphis COGIC activists have strongly affirmed the spiritual aspect of the freedom struggle. Some COGIC activists I interviewed mentioned that they became involved in the movement because it was a spiritual movement. Yet, during the Civil Rights era, this aspect of the freedom struggle was often not appreciated by some revolutionary blacks that were ostensibly eager to pursue social transformation without seeking God’s direction or help. Nevertheless, Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists such as Bishop J.O. Patterson stressed that the desire for black political empowerment should not trump the hunger and quest for spiritual empowerment.

Extending the Apostle Paul’s metaphor of the church as one body consisting of many members with different roles and functions, COGIC scholars have argued that various denominations within the Christian church at large have different gifts and roles. Historian Ithiel Clemmons holds that Black Methodists have advanced education among black Christians; Black Baptists have spearheaded social justice efforts; and Black
Holiness-Pentecostals have endeavored to inspire blacks to recognize the need to grasp for spiritual presence and power.\textsuperscript{554} Memphis saints who engaged in the Movement argued that the Christian faith, the teachings of the Bible, and the experience of the Spirit have value and meaning for blacks’ struggles for equality and justice.

Though I have occasionally endeavored to separate some of the wheat from the chaff within COGIC theology by indicating problematic ways some COGIC members interpreted biblical texts such as 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the \textit{battle is the Lord’s} motif in Exodus 14, my primary aim in this chapter has been to be descriptive. That is to say I have fundamentally aspired to outline saints’ postures towards the Civil Rights struggle and to document and critically engage their distinct voices and perspectives. Saints that marched and participated in politics continued to emphasize and uphold spiritual presence and empowerment as being essential to the advancement of black communities and to the improvement of black communities and the world. Activist saints such as J.O. Patterson Sr. maintained a spiritual or “otherworldly” focus while esteeming and engaging in this-worldly social justice pursuits. Yet, these Memphis COGIC activists’ Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs did not prevent them from supporting the Movement. For some saints their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs provided a means for them to connect with the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement, typified by the leadership and rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. COGIC Civil Right activists joined the nonviolent Movement

because it resonated with their beliefs but rejected and opposed some black activists’
ostensible loss of faith in biblical and Christian-centered approaches to social justice.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation has challenged some religious scholars’ categorizations of black Holiness-Pentecostals as apolitical and otherworldly. These classifications have led many scholars to assume saints did not actively engage in the Civil Rights Movement. In Chapter 2, I indicated that saints primarily perceived their religious, racial, and national identities as compatible despite experiencing persecution on account of their religion and race. That is to say many COGIC saints affirmed their identity and rights as citizens of the United States of America and actively engaged in democratic processes and American civic life. Furthermore, moving into the heart of the dissertation, I focused upon the saints’ involvement in the Memphis movement in Chapter 3. I indicated ways Memphis saints participated in the establishment of black political coalitions such as the Ministers and Citizens League, in civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) and the Community on the Move for Equality (COME), and in direct nonviolent political protest initiatives such as downtown boycotts, sit-ins, move-ins, marches, and the Garbage Sanitation Workers Strike. Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple, two COGIC locations, factored prominently in the Memphis Movement. In chapter 4, I discussed ways that saints’ theo-ethical beliefs affected their postures towards the Civil Rights struggle. While I acknowledged that many saints did not participate in the Memphis Movement, I explained ways in which saints aspired to oppose racial and economic injustice in alternate ways such as through sharing the message of Christ with whites, through transcending racial injustice through practicing holiness and Christian perfection, and through praying for God to change
social conditions. Hence, these saints did not merely accommodate to the status quo, but they aspired to oppose injustice through spiritual means. I argued that Memphis COGIC activists who joined the nonviolent Movement typified by King did so because King’s civil rights philosophy resonated with their Holiness-Pentecostal theo-ethics. Furthermore, as King’s Christian based strategies of resistance had begun to wane in the late 1960s as black power philosophy started to emerge, I contended that Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists such as J.O. Patterson Sr. endeavored to encourage black Christians to embrace and not disregard the significance of spiritual presence and empowerment in their pursuit of justice.

**Methodological Challenges Considered**

Given that the Civil Rights Movement occurred several decades ago, it is difficult if not impossible to identify all of the COGIC persons who participated in the broader Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. Several COGIC men and women in Memphis that I interviewed contributed to the Movement, but their contributions were not documented in the local newspapers. Furthermore, when looking at the records of Civil Rights organizations and other archival materials, it is difficult to denote the denominational background of specific members outside of the recognizable names of prominent leaders within the denomination. Hence, though my research methods enabled me to indicate ways that some COGIC members participated in Movement, I have not denoted the contributions all saints made to the Memphis struggle.

Sociologists Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian’s collective behavior theory helps me to explain the difficulty and sheer impossibility of identifying all the individuals from
COGIC and other black denominations who may have participated in mass civil rights demonstrations in Memphis. According to the collective behavior theorists, a social movement has an “indefinite and shifting membership” and often lacks defined procedures for choosing and “identifying” participants. Although the local branch chapter organized and led many of the demonstrations in Memphis, the Memphis Movement was not limited to the local branch. Both members and non-members of Civil Rights organizations may have participated in a boycott, joined a march, or attended a rally. The Memphis NAACP secretary took copious notes and minutes of local branch meetings. Yet, civil rights leaders did not pass around sign-in sheets or take a roll call prior to engaging in a protest demonstration. The participants were simply those who showed up to support the cause. Furthermore, while photographers such as Ernest Withers took several snapshots of mass marches and demonstrations, many of the names and identities of the persons who participated in the marches are anonymous. Although the race and ethnicity of demonstrators can be assumed from looking at photographs, their religious background is not clearly discernible.

Besides not being able to locate every member who participated in the Movement, I acknowledge that there are some saints who may have engaged in the Movement that I was unable to interview for various reasons. Several persons who lived during the Civil Rights era have died. COGIC activists such J.O. Patterson Jr. and G.E. Patterson passed away within the past decade. Thankfully, I was able to utilize archival resources and oral

history interviews from previous researchers to glean insights into their involvements in the Movement. My rearing in COGIC and acquaintance with the traditions and culture of the church enabled me to develop a rapport with some saints in Memphis. Many of the members I interviewed appeared to be comfortable discussing their experiences with me, and some members even prayed for me following our conversation. Yet, some COGIC members who may have participated in the Movement were hesitant to share their story or perspectives because they were uncertain as to how I would represent their views. One individual that I asked to interview declined, explaining that he or she did not want to distort the views of their church leaders or the denomination. Despite these challenges, through utilizing archival methods and interviewing some local Civil Rights activists, I was able to meet my aim to explore and examine multiple ways COGIC members participated in the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. Furthermore, my research methods enabled me to document COGIC leaders and members’ unique perspectives toward the Memphis Civil Rights struggle as it was taking place.

**Research Implications and Contributions**

In indicating ways that members of COGIC were involved in the Memphis Movement, I am careful not to exaggerate the roles that members of black churches played in the Movement at large. Martin Luther King criticized many black clergy, even ministers from within his Baptist tradition, for not supporting the Movement. King and other black leaders organized the Progressive Baptist Convention in 1961 because Joseph Jackson, the leader of the National Baptist Convention (the largest black denomination),
did not sanction the political and social engagement of black ministers.\textsuperscript{556} Jackson deemed that black ministers should focus on preaching the gospel and shepherding God’s people rather than engaging in political protest. When studying the movement in Birmingham, Wyatt Walker projected that roughly 90 percent of black ministers spurned the SCLC’s protest initiatives.\textsuperscript{557} While many black leaders played key roles in the Movement, several black Christian denominational leaders did not affirm civil rights protest as a strategy for social change especially during the early years of the Movement in the 1950s. Within the Memphis movement, Elder G.E. Patterson acknowledged that he and several other conservative ministers were not involved in the Movement prior to the Sanitation Strike.

Though some black church leaders did not initially support the movement, the Civil Rights Movement became a force to be reckoned with at the national and at the local level because masses of black Christians joined the Movement. My research analysis aligns with sociologist Aldon Morris’s argument in \textit{The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement}. Morris underlines important ways the broad “indigenous base” of the black community, which consisted of black “institutions, organizations, leaders, communication networks, and organized masses,” aided the advancement the Civil


Rights Movement. He highlights ways that black churches strengthened the movement through providing leadership, funding, and meeting space. Though I agree with Morris’s argument, I find that his discussion of black church leaders and members primarily included references to Black Baptists and Methodists. He gave limited to nil attention to saints’ involvements in the national movement.

This dissertation contributes to African American religious history and the history of the Civil Rights Movement by highlighting specific ways that COGIC churches and activists helped bolster the local Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. Connecting with Morris’ broad discussion of black church’s contributions to the National Movement, I have shown that Memphis COGIC members contributed leaders, space, and money to the Memphis movement. COGIC leaders such as Bishop J.O. Patterson Sr. and Elder G.E. Patterson worked alongside leaders from Baptist and Methodist denominations. The COGIC denomination had an extensive network of jurisdictions and churches across the United States. The denomination like other black denominations was independent and self-sustaining. Memphis COGIC leaders made their space such as Mason Temple and Pentecostal Temple available for black political rallies and for strategy meetings. The initial meeting of the Community on the Move for Equality occurred in a meeting room in Mason Temple. COGIC members helped fund the Memphis student-sit in movement and the Garbage Sanitation Workers Strike. COGIC members participated in mass


559 Ibid., 4.
boycotts. When discussing the involvements of black churches in the Civil Rights Movement, historians and scholars of religion who read this dissertation should be hesitant to leave COGIC churches and members out of the conversation.

Additionally through showing that some COGIC members were actively engaged in the movement, my research findings challenge the rigid dialectical binaries such as “accomodationist and resistance” and “otherworldly and this-worldly” that scholars of black religion have utilized to categorize black religious groups and figures. The dissertation indicates that some Memphis saints who were deeply committed to evangelism and spiritual experience were still actively involved in the Memphis Movement. Through giving more serious attention to COGIC theology, I have shown that elements of COGIC faith have inhibited the Civil Rights activism of some COGIC members and stimulated the activism of others. Some COGIC members suggested that they joined the movement because they found King’s Civil Rights rhetoric to be consistent with their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs and practices. Memphis COGIC Civil Rights activists maintained their commitment to spiritual practices such as prayer. This point relates to Evelyn Higginbotham’s “dialogic” understanding of black churches, which holds that multiple “concurrent meanings and intentions” interact with each other. For example, black women’s religious organizations “undergirded” black women’s participation in secular club organizations, and black churchwomen linked their spirituality with their activism. COGIC Civil Rights activists connected their participation in the Memphis Movement with their Holiness-Pentecostal beliefs. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 16.
Understandably religious scholars have employed the otherworldly and this-worldly classifications to compare diverse religious traditions within the Black Church. Yet, I argue that rigid employment of these categorizations may prevent scholars from deeply investigating the religious and theological diversity inherent within particular religious traditions such as COGIC. This dissertation has given attention to the resistance threads within COGIC theology. Furthermore, besides challenging the academic classifications scholars have employed to compare the political postures of black Holiness-Pentecostals to other black religious groups, I have also documented saints’ self-understood perspectives and postures toward social struggles and civil rights. Rather than describing their beliefs as otherworldly, some saints argued that Mason taught them they could transcend racial injustice through practicing holiness. This language of transcendence of racial injustice is not equivalent to experiencing heaven in the afterlife or pie-in-the-sky theology. On the contrary, for some saints transcending racial injustice equated to being successful and prosperous in this life regardless of the behavior and actions of white racists.⁵⁶¹

Lastly, through engaging the voices and perspectives of COGIC activists, this dissertation encourages black religious scholars to rethink the import of spiritual beliefs and practices for black Christian struggles for liberation in general and Civil Rights activism in particular. Although I pinpointed ways in which some members’ spiritual

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⁵⁶¹ My argument here also connects with Higginbotham’s work. She argues that by accommodating to the status quo blacks were aspiring to rise above the “limits” imposed by the dominant racial group.; Ibid., 18.
beliefs deterred them from engaging in direct action, I have also indicated that spiritual traditions such as prayer have empowered black Christians in their struggles against oppressive forces. Constructively employing the *battle is the Lord’s motif*, which when associated with the Exodus narrative prevented some saints from participating in the Movement, I suggested that this motif as found in 1 Samuel 17 emphasized that God can empower black Christians activists with the spiritual courage to enter the field of battle and oppose racial injustice directly. Many black Christian activists believed that God was with them during their struggle for equality and justice. Memphis COGIC activists encouraged blacks to seek God’s power in their pursuit of social justice.

Related to this point, a sign in Mason Temple behind and above the podium on which Dr. King spoke his final sermon reads: “GROWTH AND PROGRESS ‘Not By Might, Nor By Power, But By my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts. Zechariah 4:6.’” Inasmuch as King’s sermon is significant within the context of the history of the Civil Rights Movement, this sign, which stands behind him, is also noteworthy in that it showcases COGIC’s social justice thesis. I interpret the sign as communicating that the personal growth and the advancement of black Americans and all people will not occur by attaining political power, black power, economic power, educational empowerment, or other means of power. Though Memphis COGIC leaders such as Patterson did not dismiss the significance of acquiring these various forms of power, the saints’ main point of emphasis, which is intricately connected to Zechariah 4:6, was that seeking spiritual presence and power is fundamental to blacks’ progress toward equality and justice in the United States.
Directions for Future Research

The findings and arguments established in this dissertation can encourage additional research on COGIC’s engagements in the Civil Rights Movement in other cities throughout the United States. Though saints participated in the Civil Rights Movement, they did not have the national prestige as figures such as Martin Luther King, and their involvements were more at the local level instead of the national level. Besides Memphis, Tennessee, COGIC members participated in the Civil Rights Movement in California, Illinois, North Carolina, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Arkansas, and certainly other states. Although scholars such as David Daniels III and James Tinney have noted the names of a few persons who participated in the Movement in various states such as Bishop Louis H. Ford who was actively engaged in the Movement in Chicago, Illinois, and Bishop Ithiel Clemmons who participated in the Civil Rights Movement in New York, there is room for more focused analysis of the Civil Rights activism of COGIC persons in different states and cities. Several COGIC Civil Rights activists who participated in the Movement are still alive and may have interesting stories that they are willing to share.

Additionally, this work can prompt future studies on other important figures within COGIC and in the mid-twentieth century. Pentecostal historians have done much

research on early Pentecostal pioneers such as C.H. Mason and William Seymour. However, there were several other figures within COGIC who also contributed to the growth of the denomination. Although the dissertation does not exclusively focus on COGIC leaders’ involvement in the movement as it discusses ways that a few lay members contributed to the Movement, the study has attempted to give attention to the significant roles Memphis activist pastors such as Bishops J.O. Patterson Sr. and Gilbert Earl Patterson played in the Memphis Movement. There was a substantial amount of archival data available on these figures that until now have not been explored or analyzed. There is ample room for Holiness-Pentecostal scholars to focus on other bishops, church mothers, missionaries, and evangelists within the denomination in other cities and states that were involved in social justice initiatives in the Civil Rights era.

Lastly, I anticipate that this dissertation can serve as a resource for scholars interested in exploring black Christian ecumenical movements. As leaders and members of COGIC participated in the Memphis movement alongside other black Baptists and Methodists, the Memphis Movement was profoundly ecumenical in nature. The Civil Rights Movement was powerful because a variety of black church denominations put aside their doctrinal differences and supported blacks’ common struggle for equality and justice. In future works, scholars could analyze factors that enabled black Memphis citizens to cooperate across interdenominational lines. Exploring and understanding how

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these denominational leaders and members were able to collaborate in fruitful ways is important because there is still a contemporary need for religious groups and communities to share resources and work together to pursue equality, justice, and improved life options for various marginalized groups and individuals within American society. The struggle for equality and justice certainly continues.
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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

GENERAL PERSONAL AND THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

1) How long have you been a member of COGIC and of this congregation?

2) Why did you become a member of this congregation?

3) What does being a member of COGIC mean to you?

4) What is your understanding of God?

5) What is your understanding of sin?

6) What is your understanding of salvation?

7) Have members of your church attempted to oppose racism, sexism, and classism?
   If so, how do you think they have attempted to fight against these types of oppression?

Transition Statement - At this point during the interview, I will provide some contextual information about the Civil Rights era. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States endeavored to challenge and overturn unjust laws and social norms such as segregation in schools, public housing, and accommodations. Nationally, some key moments during the Movement were the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma to Montgomery March, and the March on Washington. As I ask you these next questions, I invite you to focus on your life and your feelings during this time rather than your life and mindset today.
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT QUESTIONS

8) Approximately how old were you when the Civil Rights Movement was taking place?

9) During the Civil Rights Movement, where you aware of the events that were taking place?

10) What were your feelings about the Civil Rights Movement in the United States?

11) What were your feelings about the Civil Rights struggles taking place in Memphis?

12) What were your feelings about well-known black leaders that you may have followed in media (newspapers, television, radio, etc.)?

   • Martin Luther King Jr.
   • Malcolm X
   • Any other national leaders

13) Were you involved in any local or national community organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, the National Council of Negro Women, etc.?

   • Follow-up Question (If the person was involved) – Please explain your role in the organization. How did you participate?

   • Follow-up Question (If the person participated) – What prompted you to become involved?

14) What were your feelings about political protest and strategies of nonviolent resistance?

15) Did you participate in any civil rights protests in Memphis or another area (marches, boycotts, sit-ins, Garbage Workers Sanitation Strike)?

   • Follow-up Question - (If the person was involved) - Please explains. How did you participate? What prompted you to become involved?

   • Follow-up Question (If the person says they were not involved – Please explain. Why did you not participate?)
16) Did your pastor or members from your local church participate in the Civil Rights Movement?

17) Did your pastor talk about the Civil Rights struggle during the worship service or while delivering a sermon?

18) How do you think some of your church leaders felt about civil disobedience and strategies of nonviolent resistance?
   - Follow-up Question – Did any of your church leaders offer reasons why they opposed these methods?
   - Follow-up Question – Did some leaders offer reasons why they supported these strategies?

19) Did you attend Mason Temple when Dr. King delivered his final speech? If so, why did you attend?
   - Follow-up Question - (If the person attended) – What do you remember about that day that has not been discussed in the media?
   - Follow-up Question – Do you know any other COGIC members in Memphis who may have attended Mason Temple when Dr. King spoke?

20) How do you feel about the level of COGIC churches involvement in the Civil Rights Movement compared to other denominations in the Black Church such as Baptists and Methodists?

21) Are there any local civil rights activists that you followed and care to discuss?

22) Can you think of anything else that you care to share about COGIC and the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis?