

THE BLACK CHURCH...THE SOURCE OF NECESSITY? **(PART II)** (Opinion, *The Community Informer*, Greenville, SC, September 3, 2014, 1B.)

In my last article, we were introduced to two scholars (Professors Eddie Glaude, Jr. and Anthony Pinn) who argued that the Black Church has become more conservative, less relevant than it once was, stuck on the glories of the past, and incapable of thinking and speaking beyond the language of faith, heaven, and Jesus. After sharing these points, I left you with several questions on which to contemplate in determining whether the Black Church is needed in our lives today: where do you stand on the necessity of the Black Church? Is it up to the task in confronting and responding to the problems around us? Does the Black Church have a prescribed vision to stir a lasting remedy for our world?

Now that we are up to speed, I will argue why the Black Church should be that source of necessity for our society. Dr. Walter Earl Fluker, editor of the book *The Stones that the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition*, affirms my defense well:

Throughout American history, the black church has provided the pool of leadership that led to the creation of social institutions and organizations that have prophetically challenged the nation to move toward a 'beloved community'. Because of the black church's distinctive sociocultural location [as an independent Black institution] and long history of producing ethical leaders despite inadequate material and social resources, it is a prime candidate for offering direction for the ongoing debate over religion and public life. Moreover, the black church has played a significant role in shaping the moral languages of this nation, and consequently, can serve as a strategic resource in the formation of ethical leadership for national and international communities (Fluker, 1998, 7).

What is Dr. Fluker saying here? He claims that the Black Church has proven its worth in this country by responding to the social conditions of its time, especially beyond the four walls. It has done so by equipping and educating prominent leaders (e.g.: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard Thurman, Harriet Tubman, and more) for prophetic, priestly, and selfless service in the world. Additionally, the Black Church has been responsible in creating Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), seminaries (the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA), businesses, civil rights strategies, and more to extend its voice. Furthermore, it is important to note that because of the Black

Church's influential witness, German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer "deeply appreciated its resistance to racism, the power and passion of its preaching, and the joy mixed with sober melancholy reflected in its music" (Ellingsen, 1999, p. 340) while attending the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, NY. Hence, he returned to Germany, putting the Black Church's commitment to social justice to practice as he fatally fought the Nazi regime.

Now that we have been reminded of this historical significance, what are we going to do with this history (our history)? How will we use it to reclaim, recover, and redeem the Black Church's activist role in our world? How will we equip, educate, and empower our people for selfless service inside and outside the church? How will this tradition meet and respond to the social ills around us today (i.e.: racist violence, economic inequality, family stability, etc.)? I look forward in us unraveling the obstacles and challenges to the Black Church's vision and mission to become a re-invigorated source of ethical and moral leadership.