# Chapter 1

## Emergence of What is African

*All of us are bound to mother Africa by invisible but tenacious bonds . . . All of us have roots that go deep into the warm soil of Africa; so that no matter how long and traumatic our separation from our ancestral home has been, there are things we are often unable to articulate, but which we feel in our very bones, things which make us, who are different from others who have not suckled the breath of our mother, Africa.*

Desmond Tutu[1]

In this chapter I set forth my argument that the Black Church is constituted by a communal spirituality. I do this first by contrasting "African" and "Western." Secondly, I briefly explore the sociohistorical context in which the Black Church emerged. My primary concern with such a context is to see the vital essence of community and its corresponding meaning to African sensibilities.

### African Warnings

I began with a first warning. Western readers in search of what is African must beware of the perspective that they may bring to this text. I think the non African[2] reader and the reader of African descent can benefit from learning about African American Christian spirituality that moves beyond European Enlightenment categories of individualism. When Western persons, formed in the worldview of the sole importance of personal responsibilities, encounter a person formed in the sensibilities of African spirituality, they meet therein someone whose experience of the self is distinctly different. What I mean is this. In contrast to Western persons, African persons do not exist apart from the community. The classic phrasing of this intrinsic relationship was started by John Mbiti and carried on by Desmond Tutu. I call it an Ubuntu sensibility, namely "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[3] The person is part of the whole, and personal identity flows from corporate experience

and never in isolation from it, since it is the community which defines who one becomes, and who one becomes defines community.

My continued use of Tutu's Ubuntu doctrine will make sense to African Americans only in the context of a communitarian understanding of making connections and moving between different worldviews. Ubuntu is a crucial African concept that displays the symmetry between African culture and Christian conceptualizations of God and humanity. Herein is the thesis of my book: African American Christian spirituality inherits from African spirituality practices and a worldview for how the uniqueness of each person is affirmed and acknowledged in community. Such inheritance informs the Black Church in America – how one's own individuality and freedom are always balanced by the destiny of the community (e.g., the civil rights movement).

The Black Church in America believes this after all, because such communal spirituality is the very Christian image of the triune God, whose persons create monotheism through the interrelation of three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In other words, God's image is community rather than the typical individualistic notions of God spread throughout Western Christianity. The Black Church tries to live into a different *imago Dei* through the balanced destiny between individual and community displayed in worship, theology, and the civil rights movement. In Chapter 6 I discuss the impact of the civil rights movement, in particular through Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of the Beloved Community.

A second warning concerns the concept of the communal. What are the phenomenological practices or lifestyles that make the African American church community a more communally based church? Some may argue that my answer to this question resides in the abstraction that African Christian understandings of God, prayer, humanity, and the created universe maintain interpersonal balance within the community, but that they simply remind us of a cosmology of community, instead of being its essence. This becomes a crucial worry of the book. How does one discuss the nature of community within the Black Church context and then expand this outward into cogent examples?

One way to address this problematic is through discussions of the retention of African practices by the slave community (Africanisms).[4] Therefore, I spend a good deal of time teasing out how Africanisms carry over into African American Christian spirituality. One vivid example of such Africanisms is the Garifuna peoples of Central America. Although these discussions within African American studies are largely resolved to some degree, I will take into account the historic debates of African retentions versus their destruction in relationship to spirituality.

By taking into account a stronger communal focus, my study increases the "diversity" of the African American church experience, as opposed to the monolithic Black Church moniker so commonly written about in historic studies. In using such an approach, we are able to imagine the deep contributions of the Black Church's nature to welcome the stranger. Wendy Haight illustrates this aspect of the Black Church through her developmental psychology of the African American community, often harassed and called "You dirty, black niggers!" She concludes: "I often wondered how children of any ethnicity could develop optimally within racist communities. As I listened more closely, it became clear that, for Mrs. Hudley [a 73-year-old African American woman], human development is rooted in spirituality."[5] My observation that Black spirituality is communitarian – as opposed to the Western outlook, which is mainly individualistic – is more of a basis upon which connections to other worldviews can be made.

My notion that Black Christian spirituality is communally oriented is essential to this reasoning of making connections to other worldviews. Perhaps this is why I chose to describe my introduction as "amphibious," as the genius of the Black Church is in her ability to move between worldviews (e.g., Western and African, Black and White). Howard Thurman's spirituality may also be described in this way, as it makes connections across worldviews in the form of "a practical mysticism."[6] Making connections between spirituality and social witness is key to understanding the communal nature of African American spirituality. Thurman was the mentor of Martin Luther King, Jr. on spirituality, resulting in King's deep connections between a Beloved Community and nonviolence. King is even said to have carried Thurman's book in his briefcase as he traveled.

By means of this amphibious sensibility of the Black Church to make connections and move between worlds, I argue that there is a direct relationship between African American Christian spirituality and the struggle for racial and social justice in the US. Such a relationship between spirituality and justice includes the change in systemic health issues relating particularly to African Americans. The communal sensibility of the Black Church cannot prevent her nature from continuing to make connections and build bridges, so that new identity can emerge from oppressive formations of identity.[7] This book will do more than suggest these connections. The importance of the subject of this book for global justice is apparent. Until Western people realize the connectedness of religious experience beyond privatistic and individualistic experiences, the problem of religious wars and so-called terrorism will not be solved. Other black theologians have been in general agreement on this position

that European Enlightenment religion will have to wake up to a diversity of worldviews, most of which contain communal notions of existence. The onus of this research is to pay more attention to how and why African American Christian spirituality lends itself to communitarian sensibilities in some referenceable framework. To this end there needs to be an appeal to scholarly reflection, both in Africa and her diaspora.

A third warning is in the obvious exchange of terms between "Black" and "African American." Are we talking about Black Church studies or African American Church studies or even African Church studies? Some would say it is an extraneous discussion to use the constant reference and repetition of the difference between "White American" and "Black American." Since the historical context of African American spirituality contains within itself this tension of description between Black and African, it becomes redundant to remind the reader of a Black and White Church. As I learned from my relationship with Desmond Tutu, Black identity becomes further complicated in its extrapolation in contexts outside of North America.[8] The seeming shift from Black identity in the United States to African American identity is a case in point. Although I use the terms "Black" and "African American" interchangeably, an interesting dilemma develops when white South Africans (especially Afrikaners – which means African) immigrate to the United States. Could their identity one day be conceived of as African American? If not, what prevents such fluidity in the character of being African American?

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation hearings in the 1990s produced a transfiguration that has carved out a new national identity based no longer on race but on geography. The goal now is how to be a nation-state instead of a dominant race. My study of the South African context teaches me that descriptions of Black and White do not accurately describe the complex communities that these names seek to describe. Black and White relationships cannot easily translate into other contexts that have multilayered identities couched not only in race but also in cultural and linguistic groupings. In other words, there are at least twelve Black identities in South Africa and two White identities.

I hold up African identity, especially as crafted in South Africa, primarily for the purpose of arguing that African American identity can prove to be just as Western as European identity if there is no particular connection to Africa. The genius of African American identity can be seen in the way the American Dream is always wrestled out of individualism by the "African" focus of communal spirituality. African American identity has allowed more positive responses to the question: "What does it mean to be an American?"

In light of this third warning, I am aware of the difficult connection between the African and the African American worldviews. For example, black scholars have long argued that African cultures did not survive slavery. E. Franklin Frazier states:

> In studying any phase of the character and the development of the social and cultural life of the Negro in the United States, one must recognize from the beginning that because of the manner in which the Negroes were captured in Africa and enslaved, they were practically stripped of their social heritage. Although the area in West Africa from which the majority of the slaves were drawn exhibits a high degree of cultural homogeneity, the capture of many of the slaves in intertribal wars and their selection for the slave markets tended to reduce to a minimum the possibility of the retention and the transmission of African culture.[9]

In this book I contest the premise that African culture did not survive the North Atlantic slave trade. As an African American myself, who lived for two years in South Africa with frequent returns, I have learned through primary experience the survival of African culture in the Western world. In fact, much of the attention of this book is given to the diverse contexts of how African spirituality has survived in African American spirituality per se. African Americans came from the center of Africa, by means of the Middle Passage. The typical notion is that it was during slavery that those who eventually became known as African Americans encountered or further embraced the Christian faith. I argue, however, that to some extent the North Atlantic slave trade was not the first time Africans encountered Christianity. In fact, the heart of Christian spirituality developed in Africa as the desert tradition developed.[10] The collective memory of this Christian history is crucial to Black experience and our sense of identity as a people. In other words, more careful thought needs to be given to why African Americans embraced Christianity so readily.

The knee jerk argument that Christianity was forced on African slaves does not hold in light of current trends in the Southern hemisphere, which is increasingly Christianized. What makes many other peoples around the world convert to Christianity who are not forced into slavery?[11] Regardless of whether or not this was the first encounter between Africans and Christianity, the fact remains for those who emerged as African Americans that their Christian religious experience developed largely in a Eurocentric context. This leads to the problematic of what can be named innately as African American Christian spirituality.

While Christian experience is assumed in African and African American spirituality, I assume that a particular communal spirituality develops

among African American Christian spirituality. Such a communal sensibility makes African American spirituality well suited to be a leader in peacemaking and reconciliation. It is here that I think the problematic of what is innately African American spirituality is named through a communal spirituality of nonviolence and reconciliation. Such spirituality, however, did not develop without African roots.[12]

Because of this communal spirituality rooted in Africa, African American spirituality can never be defined as exclusive or for black people only. Many of the older generation of black theologians have had to study and lecture in several African countries, thereby causing them to revise exclusivist hermeneutics in Black theology. This occurred in the course of direct dialogue with African thinkers such as Mbiti, Pobee, Tutu, and other African Church persons and scholars. However, the understanding of African Christian spirituality as being inherently communal meant connection with the excellent sources which African American religious scholars have already produced. Therefore, I will not reinvent the wheel in an endeavor to unearth what is in fact African/African American spirituality. Instead, I offer a more systematic look at the communal nature of African/African American spirituality. In those cases where the reader wishes a more detailed historical study of other aspects of this spirituality, I will point them in the direction of work already done. This will be especially important for those who seek more of a comparative religious or phenomenological approach to African spirituality.

A fourth warning has to do with "spirituality," a difficult term to define. Instead of looking for spirituality only in interior places, my goal is to provide readers with an understanding of what spirituality in community means in the African American context. Black theology, African American religious history, and African American literature have only recently fit into the "acceptable" academic canons of universities and colleges. What remains to be accepted is the study of Christian spirituality as it relates to African cultures. I argue in this book that Christian spirituality broadly seeks to express the theory and practice of the communal Christian life.[13] This theory and practice necessarily shows the maturity of individuals and communities through historical, cultural, and environmental change. Herein is the problem, however.

The approach of traditional Christian spirituality implied an agreed upon theological language in reference to the Christian life which no longer applies. For example, Denise Ackerman recounts how the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape Colony was faced with a dilemma in the early nineteenth century. It was able to solve its dilemma through its own common understanding over against the understanding and practices of the indigenous people:

> Race proved to be stronger than religion. In 1857 the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church passed the following resolution:
> The [Dutch Reformed] Synod considers it desirable and scriptural that our members from the Heathen be received and absorbed into our existing congregations wherever possible; but where this measure, as a result of the weakness of some, impedes the furtherance of the cause of Christ among the Heathen, the congregation from the Heathen, already founded and still to be founded, shall enjoy its Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.
>
> For "the weakness of some" read the racism of some white settlers. Thus the separation of believers along race lines began, a separation which ultimately led to the theological justification of apartheid.[14]

What is commonly understood to be the Christian life today is drastically different from what was commonly understood to be the Christian life yesterday. No longer is it publicly tolerated in mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches that Christian faith be determined by European culture. The epistemology of salvation is no longer in the control of white people. Thus, the catholic (universal) church is currently in the throes of debate as to what Christian spirituality looks like across cultural boundaries.

It is my contention that African spirituality offers a definition of Christian spirituality that is relational and communal. Christian spirituality that is relational and communal (in addition to personal and interior) is much needed, as Ackerman notes: "For those of us who have been used to dominant power or whose souls and minds are closed by rigid ideologies and fear of the other, an epiphany is needed. Without an epiphany we live in a state of solipsism – quite literally as the sun of our own individual universe. Reality is merely and only the reality of my own consciousness."[15] I want to go a step further and claim the epiphany to be African Christian spirituality. The diasporic community of Africans encompasses Africans and African Americans, and these populations from the Caribbean to Europe, the Americas and other areas, play the crucial role in discovering new meanings and practices for Christian spirituality.

What I mean by spirituality is meant to engage contemporary issues facing the world, both in Christian and non-Christian settings. As already indicated, one needs to be very careful not to juxtapose fixed definitions of spirituality (i.e., Black or White Christian spirituality). Even more, spirituality must recover from its insular definition in the context of the Western world as intelligible only in a personal way.[16] Until now, the primary focus on interior Christian spirituality has mainly been influenced by European and Asian cultures. The primary focus of this book,

however, is on how those of African descent contribute toward the definition of communal Christian spirituality.

When one reads any scholarly book one reads not simply one person's view but a collaboration of ideas which, in turn, can achieve a synthesis of ideas and concepts and lead to new insights. This is my hope for readers here, for we will interact with how various sources pertaining to African American spirituality have informed my structuring of this book. The goal is collaboration, although my thesis surrounding the particularity of African Christian spirituality may disturb some. For example, a scholar may base her assumptions on Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, in which scholars who hold to a high Christology may have difficulty being in full collaboration with other scholars with less of a Christology or no Christology at all. Not to fully incorporate more "confessional" research into the conversation, however, would cause readers to miss out on the rich tradition of Christian spirituality that scholars like myself bring to the conversation about spirituality and community. While still bearing in mind my admonition about spirituality, I aim to seize upon a neglected area of contemporary theology as expressed among black theologians. Seldom do we find in theological research conducted in major academies any focused attention on spiritual commitments and practices. The volatile subject of religion post-September 11, 2001 requires that research academics revisit the premise that theology is never done objectively, but always from a particular perspective. Honest work that considers how spiritual commitments and practices need not lead toward disparate worldviews or worse – legitimation of violence – is crucial for peacemaking and stable societies.

This particular perspective has grown out of my own experience as a theologian and Episcopal priest. I have selected a particular aspect of African American Christian expression which is lifted up in my own ministry and teaching; namely, spirituality. Many books have been written by (black) scholars in the last three decades on religion and theology, but there is a scarcity of volumes on this vital aspect of African American spirituality. In this endeavor to maintain my own spiritual commitments and practices while pursuing the vital work of connecting them to other worldviews, I think it wise to delimit this study by stressing the centrality of communal Christian spirituality. There are those who are Islamic, Jewish, humanistic, etc., who claim a "spiritual" dimension to their experience and who can offer a more thorough perspective of spirituality from their worldview. This study, however, covers the segment of African American believers shaped and formed by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the triune God. I know of no other study like this

from the perspective of a Black Episcopalian.[17] To a fault, much of the Black Church is understood only in her Protestant sensibilities. My Anglican worldview enables theological discourse that increases connections to many others who seek intercultural, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue. In short, much of Black Church studies has never been catholic (global) in scope. I attempt to open such a global window.

The black philosopher-theologian Howard Thurman devoted his long career to Christian spirituality that sought connections to other worldviews. Thus far we have not seen a theologian-successor to Thurman. Perhaps this book can make an in-depth contribution to his work. Thurman received much of his inspiration from Indian (Hindu) mysticism, the Quakers, and Black slave songs (the spirituals). Like Thurman, I propose a holistic treatment of African American spirituality in light of the particularity of communal sensibilities surviving from African cultures. This treatment of African American Christian spirituality is consistent with African Americans who continually seek our "African roots," as I seek to appropriate the nature of spirituality in communal ways of knowing reality and God.

In sum, I believe that this study is unique and very much needed, not just in the African American church and community but also in the world at large. As a priest and theologian I seek to make the crucial connections between community and spirituality as displayed in the African American community. I hope that this book, as well as the Blackwell series to which it belongs, can make a real contribution toward understanding spiritual practices that are often neglected in the US and the world community. My prayer is that it will become a welcome addition to an often ignored and neglected dimension of religious experience. My principal argument – that the Black Church in America is largely defined by a symmetry between the personal and communal – is certainly not meant to be an exclusivist thesis that leaves out those uncommitted to Christian spirituality. Rather, I hope only to remind many of the brilliance of a Black Church that seeks to connect people to the notion of community. The fact that this book is part of a series on religion in America presumes major reliance on scholarly forebears. Classic African American religious texts by Gayraud Wilmore, C. Eric Lincoln, Vincent Harding, Peter Paris, and others, as well as the writings of African thinkers John Mbiti and Desmond Tutu, established the notion of community in the dialectical relationship between the "I" and the "we." Clearly, however, I intend to be even more attentive to the interpersonal than has typically been the case in most works on Black religion in America.

The question that has to be answered is this: to what degree does African American Christian spirituality address the balance between the

personal and the communal? This question is crucial and controversial because it recognizes and acknowledges that the Black Church has not in all times and in all circumstances lived up to or out of the best practices of community.[18] In other words, there will be challenges to the thesis that African American Christian spirituality is by nature communal. I rely on my ongoing interests in African communal notions (especially Ubuntu) to respond to these complexities. One prominent black intellectual recently told me that the Black Church in America has waxed and waned on meeting the needs of its people and the wider world. Some say that at its best it has been the exemplar of the faith in the United States and the moral compass of a nation. At its worst it has simply mirrored the foibles of the Church at large. I argue, however, that Christian spirituality has sustained the Black Church through time and region, both with respect to her inner dynamics and external tensions.

The overall structure of the book aims for a communal view of African American Christian spirituality and its varying impacts. It cannot be stated strongly enough, however, how important it is to illuminate the Black Church as a fluid entity, constantly wrestling with the tensions of her inherent sense of purpose, manifested sometimes magnificently, and other times failingly. The emphasis in Chapter 4 will bear this out, although I may not convince everyone that the Black Church's purpose is to create community, especially between the Western and African worlds. Certainly, however, most readers will agree, not to the exclusion of events in the African and non-Western world in general (formation of independent states, symbolic meaning of Ethiopia, etc.), that more work can be done on understanding the connections between the non-Western world and Africa.

Chapter 7 is tremendously important and subtly speaks to the kind of shadings needed throughout. It broaches a number of current needs and concerns. Issues of Christian commitments and health are terribly vital. By discussing eight convictions of the Black Church, I commend sensitivity as I embark upon the contemporary relevance of the Black Church for her future existence. An additional item should not be overlooked: the relationship between the Black Church and youth culture, the hip-hop generation, which in many respects is forming its own set of spiritual criteria, drawing upon but not limiting itself to the Christian tradition. To some extent Chapter 6 addresses the relationship between African American Christian spirituality and contemporary music, but extensive work remains to be done. This leads me to return to my earlier question in a different form: can African American Christian spirituality be contained within the confines of the institutional Black

Church? Has it ever been? This is a vital question to ponder in light of numerous sectarian movements and the increasing attraction of African derived traditions and Islam, etc., which have permeated the community for at least the last century. I propose that within such particularity there also exists the universal. Thus, readers from all backgrounds are invited to see relevant interconnections for how all people are made in the image of God. Remembering that "the personal is political" will also help us remain true to the "balance" of community broadly defined as African Christian spirituality. This means identifying the historic and creative tensions between the sociopolitical and the individual that have always been present, no less than the conflict between institutions and personal manifestations of faith.

In Chapter 2 I set forth my argument that the Black Church is constituted by communitarian and interpersonal spirituality. I do this first by briefly exploring the sociohistorical context in which the Black Church emerged. In the West, especially from the time of the Enlightenment, the self has been understood as a distinct individual, with unique value and distinct rights. Persons have the right to make something of their lives, to take responsibility for their life direction, to use their talents and gifts to the full. Such emphasis puts supreme value on the right of self-determination, self-achievement, and self-satisfaction. What is weak in this dimensional worldview, according to African American Christian spirituality, is the bonding of the person with the community. Particularly in White America, individual self-determination has been exalted over the needs of the community, giving rise to the "individualism" which found its most skewed expression in the "Me Generation" – my needs above all else. This racial and cultural value has profoundly influenced all facets of North American life, including spirituality.

In Chapter 3 I offer a contrasting cosmology to that of Western spirituality, through the emergence of slave religion in America and its new particularity of worship. Such worship demonstrates that the meaning of human life in the Black Church flows from the community to the person; whereas in White America there is often an inverse flow of meaning originating in the individual that sometimes leads to community. Instead of the latter Cartesian epistemological method, worship in the Black Church constitutes new identity, in which the individual becomes conscious of herself only through social interaction. It is from such communal epistemology that I construct a more communal way to understand the Black Church, one of the great legacies of American religious experience.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the profound effect of Black theology in relation to how African American Christian sensibilities have tended

toward the correct relation of personhood. Radical, moderate, and conservative voices in Black theology all sought consensus of thought for how black people could relate fully to fellow human beings in light of the oppression of racism in America. African Christians would not allow African American Christians to become disconnected from the communal pursuits of Christian spirituality. Such consensus from African Christians comes from a spirituality in which persons act in concert with the community and not apart from it. Despite the arguments even among Black Christians about how racism should be addressed, there remained a consensus of Christian identity that demanded the following spiritual practices: confession, forgiveness, and repentance. There was an understanding that when good was done, it was good for the whole community, including all socioeconomic contexts; and when evil was committed, the shame affected the same.

In Chapter 6 I discuss the political impact of the Black Church in America. Because the spirituality of the Black Church is interpersonal and communal, the civil rights movement was a natural action derived from the history, worship, and theology of the Black Church. Seldom known, however, is that many of the major Black Church leaders (who *de facto* were leaders of the civil rights movement) were also inspired by communitarian spiritualities coming out of the Eastern world, such as Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement and more currently the Dalai Lama's concept of compassion for all. This leads me to believe that the communitarian sensibilities of the Black Church extend beyond the United States. Will the Black Church continue to be the major context from which major civil rights leaders emerge, especially in light of some of the more radical political voices of some African Americans? The extent to which the Black Church in America continues to explore how individual and communal fulfillment are inextricably tied together is the extent to which the Black Church in America can continue to be a light to the nations.

## What is African?

The link between community and African spirituality becomes obvious in the discovery of human identity. Although I seek to make such a discovery in more of a theological sense, a great deal of positive work has already been done in connecting Africa to human identity.[19] Of course, such positive work has been done through the efforts of paleoanthropologists (the study of human origins), who agree with Desmond Tutu that human origin derives from Africa.

One of the most hotly debated issues in paleoanthropology focuses on the origins of modern humans, *Homo sapiens*. Roughly 100,000 years ago the world was occupied by a morphologically diverse group of hominids. In Africa and the Middle East there was *Homo sapiens*, in Asia *Homo erectus*, and in Europe *Homo neanderthalensis*. Around 30,000 years ago this taxonomic diversity vanished and humans everywhere had evolved into the anatomically and behaviorally modern form. The nature of this transformation is the focus of great deliberation between two schools of thought: one that stresses multiregional continuity developing out of Africa, and the other that suggests a single origin for modern humans out of Africa. The one thing each school agrees upon is that there is a common link for humanity: African ancestry.[20]

Instead of the often shortsighted debate about the validity of evolution in Western Christian churches, it seems to me that theological discourse as it relates to African Christian spirituality has a great deal to learn from this paleoanthropological assumption. Most of all, what we have to learn is that human identity cannot be separated from the fullness of African identity. I describe such identity as fullness because of its variegated and dynamic nature. I want to recover both the fullness of African identity and relate such fullness not just to "black" people, but to the deeper understanding of human and divine community. In this sense, African American Christian spirituality does not exist for itself alone, but in a real sense, displays a catholic reality of interrelational spirituality.

What does the fullness of African identity look like? I assume here that any attempt at definition requires contrasts. My contrast of Western and African views of the human person does not seek mutual exclusion; rather, it attempts to invite the reader into understanding the wider view of the communal person in the African perspective, instead of the naturally assumed Western worldview. No doubt, some will be unsympathetic to this contrasting of Western and African worldviews, thinking that such determinations are much more complicated than I can display. (This is a worthy criticism that subsequent chapters will seek to address.) For example, an initial reviewer accurately noted that a "Western Enlightenment worldview" is certainly different from a "Western" view. My method of contrasting African and Western sensibilities, however, attempts to show why human identity can never be separated from communal identity. The following question makes our discussion more concrete: does Augustine count as an African – or is he Western? This is a crucial question for me because Augustine is often identified as initiating the "Western" Christian view of the self. My answer, in light of my thesis for a catholic Black Church, is that

Augustine is both Western and African. So, when we encounter the contrast between Western and African, mutual exclusion is not assumed. In light of the above example and my desire toward the fullness of African identity, my account of African spirituality must find congruent relationship to other Western treatments of the "self," such as Charles Taylor's, whom we discuss below. What this book seeks to affirm is that communal spirituality and its links to Africa can no longer be treated as accidental and peripheral, especially in Christian theology. Let us now delve into this discussion.

As discussed above, in the West, especially from the time of the European Enlightenment, the self has been understood in ways lacking relationality. Such emphasis puts supreme value on the right of self-determination, self-achievement, and self-satisfaction. What is weak in this dimensional worldview, according to African American Christian spirituality, is the bonding of the person with the community. To illustrate what I mean, here is correspondence from a student at my African Christian Spirituality class at Duke University:

> Dr. Battle
> Yesterday as you spoke on African Christian spirituality that must be embodied, contrasting it with a Western disembodied spirituality, I thought about Jungian psychology, of which I know very, very little. (Want to do some reading there one day.)
> (1) Is the Jungian idea of a collective consciousness a disembodied spirituality?
> (2) Given that African spirituality is embodied, and that God(s) exist throughout creation, where was God in "the beginning" – before creation? Or am I not clearly separating "spirituality" (which seems to me to be practicing the presence of God) with "spirit being," that could be "seen" like the invisible man movies – if sprayed with powder, would be more visible?
> (3) Is the ultimate end of the idea of physical embodiment of spirituality that God is within us collectively, and not also among us collectively? Are we talking about a shift in thought about the transcendence of God? Again, I realize that I could be confusing God as spirit with spirituality. And yet we as Christians are to exhibit the radiance/fragrance of God, are we not? That's pretty embodied.
> (4) Are these questions tangential to your point and I am not even in the ballpark of what you're setting forth? Is it easier for you to see it, despite a westernized upbringing and education, because you've experienced Africa in more than a touristy way?
> Thanks and have a great day!
> Blessings.
> Becky[21]

Becky's questions are in response to the difficult dilemma of the White Western mind trying to understand the African worldview. Some say that this dilemma between the individual and community is illustrated by Western narcissism. Once upon a time, a beauty named Narcissa committed the sin of being choosy. As punishment, the gods had her fall in love with her own reflection, thus wasting a perfectly good wardrobe, as she was the only one to admire it. A thousand years ago, when the earth was reassuringly flat and the universe revolved around it, the ordinary person had no last name, let alone any claim to individualism. The self was subordinated to church and king. Then came the Renaissance explosion of scientific discovery, humanist insight and, as both cause and effect, the rise of individual self-consciousness. All at once, it seemed, the Western self had replaced God at the center of earthly life. And perhaps more than any great war, invention, or feat of navigation, this upheaval marked the beginning of our modern era. There are now 20 times as many people in the world as there were in the year 1,000. Most have last names, and many of us have a personal identity or reasonable expectation of acquiring one.[22]

Counter to the narrative of Narcissa, Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher, and Stanley Hauerwas, the American theologian, help me articulate the need for the communal self not only in African cultures but also for Western ones. Taylor's method helps me keep my African claims modest and descriptions concrete. What I use Taylor to show are the strong connections between a sense of identity and a concept of relationality.[23] He describes how identity became separated from frameworks and sources as procedural reason and an Enlightenment view of nature marginalized sources like theological worldviews. For example, Taylor shows that when William James made theology, philosophy, and ecclesiology secondary, he never gave intelligibility to his discussion of the religious experiences of individuals.[24]

A similar point is made throughout Stanley Hauerwas's Gifford lectures. For Hauerwas, natural theology divorced from a full doctrine of God cannot help but distort the character of God and thus of the world in which we find ourselves. Taylor gets to this same point differently. Where Hauerwas criticizes the natural theologian from a narrative approach to theology, Taylor criticizes the natural theologian from a more philosophical approach. That is to say that while both Hauerwas and Taylor criticize those caught in extreme individualism, Hauerwas argues that they (like William James) need more of a narrative display of communal spiritual experiences so that individuality becomes intelligible.[25]

Taylor critiques the problematic of modern self understanding and instead argues for the deeper human desire to be a part of a community.

He writes: "Talk about 'identity' in the modern sense would have been incomprehensible to our forebears of a couple of centuries ago."[26] Taylor's perception of forebears may be solely European. Desmond Tutu's claim in the epigraph to this chapter that we are all African by virtue of human origin in the continent of Africa expands the meaning of Taylor's insight to see a deeper communal self. This helps my argument for an African communal self that does not repeat the mistake of assuming the primacy of European forebears. Just as Taylor refutes reductive claims of knowing self-identity without reference to the context of "a self" in a good society, so too African Christian spirituality resists claims of knowing that do not take into account how true selfhood can only be known in communal settings. Perhaps this is why so many African societies were conducive to the "other" coming to them through colonialism and missionary movements.

Taylor uses the terms "self" and "identity," each of which has been defined in multiple ways by sociologists, psychologists, and theologians, as well as by philosophers. Like Taylor's, my work does not attempt to be a sociological or psychological analysis of the self. Although Taylor tends to slip into European causal explanations of the development of modern self-identity though his history of ideas, this is not his conscious intent. No doubt, the reader could say the same of my writing – that I slip into African American causal explanations, though this is not my intention. Thus, you, the reader, are extremely valuable in interpreting my intentions from my blatant mistakes. So, too, we must all find deeper appreciation of those traditions outside of our own. For example, African cultural worldviews could greatly enhance Taylor's argument for a more communal self.

Taylor organizes his book *Sources of the Self* in three parts. He begins by outlining his philosophical-moral framework. This framework puts moral evaluation at the center of human identity. Persons understand who they are in large measure by evaluations they make about what is good, and how that understanding will direct their lives. He ends the book with a twofold assessment of the modern situation: (1) a consensus on morals such as universal human rights, the demand to reduce suffering, the ideals of freedom, equality, and self-determination; and (2) a lack of moral sources or agreed upon constitutive goods to undergird that consensus. Taylor devotes the bulk of the book to a historical development of three themes that influence the modern identity: (1) a radical turn inward, (2) the affirmation of ordinary life, and (3) a view of nature as a source for moral evaluation and self-identity.[27]

In exploring these themes Taylor shows how the notion of self changes through Western history. In the modern era, identity and the good

commingle, but major developments change the character of both. This occurred because of the idea that reason, as a proper procedure of thought, became unrelated to a reliable world of order. Reason itself was now divided, as practical reason became subject to one's personal world alone. In the modern era, communal truth, so necessary to earlier theistic views of the self, could no longer be assumed, but now had to be related to one's inward journey. It is important to realize that when Taylor discusses the modern era, he is attempting to describe both a consensus on morals and a poverty of moral sources.

Taylor outlines three options for developing moral sources for the modern ethic: (1) a no-longer-assumable theistic basis, (2) the power and dignity of the human person, and (3) expressivistic resonances within the self. He encourages the search for moral sources especially in the expressivist area, combining deep personal insight with visions of the good that may connect with outside sources. While we may lack a public consensus on moral sources, moral sources indexed to a deep personal vision could be convincing for some. At the same time, Taylor wonders if modern moral sources can be sustained without a vision of hope or a religious dimension, "a love of that which is incomparably higher than ourselves." Having jettisoned traditional theism as a moral source, moderns are left with disengaged reason alone to search for a metaethic.

Taylor thinks that the modern moral predicament is dangerous. He suggests that the gap between moral sources and their articulation must be closed in order to provide strong reason to be a good person. Part of our humanity, he argues, is denied by the modern tendency to reject and deny deep spiritual aspirations and intuitions. Without deeper moral sources, benevolence exacts a high cost, both in commitment and in a sense of guilt for not living up to its high ideals. On the other hand, linking an ethic of benevolence to religious or nationalistic ideology has led to destructiveness, not only in past centuries but also in our own. Taylor insists that avoiding this problem is impossible; we must risk one danger or the other, and neither choice is without cost. On the one side we risk stifling the human spirit, and on the other we risk the potential dangers of the power of religious faith.

Taylor's task is an important one for understanding my project to describe the context of the Black Church. He astutely follows the center of the discussion about identity and the good through its carriers in theology, philosophy, philosophy of science, literature, and the visual arts. Taylor also works against a sense of chaos and disintegration in modern life by finding moral threads and weaving them together. His book celebrates rather than laments modernity, offering creative insights into furthering the search for moral sources.

However, are there other sources that Taylor neglects? Any rendering of history is selective and gaps should be pardonable in such a vast work. But the absence of anything on African spirituality leaves the reader without connecting links between Europe and Africa. Taylor limits his apprehension of moral sources in another way by tracing the history of a monological self. Although he is aware that (to put it in his own terms) "the community is also constitutive of the individual" and that "common meanings are embedded in our institutions and practices,"[28] somehow in this work he loses touch with the communal dimensions of moral self-interpretation. Although he refers to communities and moral practices, the modern moral sources he points to focus on a disengaged individual self. This is where the Black Church could help him.

Taylor wants to utilize personal resonances of the modern self in order to get in touch with an outside order, since no public consensus on that order is possible. His hunch is that theism may be necessary for an adequate account of moral sources and this route leaves open that possibility. He stresses the individual self, although he insists that a disengaged self offers a wrong view of agency, and he agrees that the self is socially constituted. If Taylor understands this, it is puzzling that he focuses so exclusively on modern moral sources that arise from a disengaged view of the self. I suppose European history itself moves one in this direction. Or perhaps he is trying to utilize modern self-perceptions of a disengaged self as a point from which to develop new possibilities. In either case, African traditions that focus on communal understandings of the self might have opened Taylor to socially oriented moral sources. The narrative theology of African American slaves is an example.

If the dilemma of risk is as serious as Taylor claims it is (and I think it is), these additional modern moral sources must be seriously considered. An inability to articulate moral sources may result in a consensus sought through persuasion or even coercion in the absence of reasons related to moral sources. Disparate values are linked together, conflicts among goods concealed, and moral sources that could aid evaluation of those goods remain unexplored. Taylor's illumination of some of the history behind this moral predicament is a tremendous gift to those of us who would like to understand better the concept of self and the moral sources that make such identity more compelling for an understanding of the Black Church.

Dale Andrews' book *Practical Theology for Black Churches* provides the transition for how the above discussion on the problem of Western individualism affects the very identity of the Black Church.[29] For Andrews, the effect is a deepening chasm between the varying perspectives of

Black theology and Black churches for knowing the Black Church's identity. Like Taylor's display of the modern era's confusion of knowing what transcends the individual without a framework and moral sources, Andrews puts his finger on this same problem in the African American community. The resulting identity crisis looks like this. On one hand, Black theology sees only a refuge image in Black churches, in which escapism prevails. On the other hand, Andrews describes a critique of black theologians who root themselves within African American folk religion instead of faith identity. He argues that a faith identity paradigm of Black ecclesiology emerges historically as the churches interpreted their own formation and life. Hence, there should be no contradiction between pastoral and prophetic ministries in Black churches, since there is the crucial function in both ministries to maintain faith identity.

The work to resolve the identity crisis in the Black community is for Black churches to learn from black theologians to resist escapist spirituality that ends up being the effect of Western individualism. And the work of black theologians is to construct a better liberation or prophetic theology that is not detached from the spiritual life of diverse communities. I commend this work of Andrews as he tries to synthesize the prophetic and pastoral dimensions within the Black Church. His notion that the prophetic office of Black theology is now required to ground itself in practical theology is much needed. My criticism of Andrews, however, is in his simple conflation of Black churches into American individualism.

Andrews believes that as Black churches "focus preaching and pastoral ministries on personal salvation, inner spirituality, and religious piety, the ideology of American individualism invades their sense of corporate identity and communal responsibility. The irruption of corporate identity and communal responsibility only increases amid the struggles for socioeconomic advancement conditioned by individualism in a systemically racist society."[30] No doubt Andrews would have difficulty with my ubiquitous claims of communal spirituality within the Black Church (or even naming a single entity as Black Church instead of Black churches). For him, there is a great bifurcation of the Black community reflected in the emerging Black middle class, and Black urban youth or hip-hop culture. Andrews' genius is in his narrative of the complexity of the Black community in America. Such complexity of identity is especially reflected in the debates of the African American icon Bill Cosby, now known for caustic remarks against hip-hop culture. He lambasted the language of Black urban youth, decried their decorum, and panned their parenting. Needless to say, Cosby's remarks have created a stir in

the United States, especially within the African American community. Were his words a legitimate reminder of a prophet's wake-up call, or a misguided attack, lacking pastoral sensitivity?[31] Black intellectual Michael Eric Dyson illustrates the other side of the debate by defending hip-hop culture.[32] Cosby's message has stirred up a whirlwind of controversy over social identity and responsibility in the African-American community. How does one get at defining such identity and responsibility?

Where I think Andrews could go deeper in his attempt at answering this question is through a questioning of his own social scientific foundation. For example, he uses Erik Erikson's life-stage analysis along with David Augsburger's quadrangular schema to form the foundation of his judgments for Black churches, Black theology, Black urban youth, and the Black middle class.[33] So, on the one hand, Andrews thinks that Black churches need the voice of prophetic inspiration to hold preaching and ministries of care accountable to the reflexive mandates of revelation;[34] on the other hand, he concludes that his "ultimate goal is to reground the liberation ethics of black theology in a prophetic role more convergent with religious folk life in African American churches."[35] He seems to assume that something nostalgic like a religious folk life may somehow be understood apart from an accompanying faith commitment. Andrews himself admits this as weakness: "What prevents this project from becoming an exercise in nostalgia?"[36] His final conclusion is helpful in validating his book as important: "I try . . . to clarify the critical impediments to mutual resolution of the dissension between black theology and black churches."[37] My only concern for Andrews is that such mutual resolution cannot occur without Taylor's pursuit of sources that sustain our self-understanding. In other words, there should be theological analysis of prayer and practice of God's presence by African American people if he is going to attempt to describe practical theology for Black churches. But there is no such display. His claim, however, that Black churches have been displaced as a central socializing force of Black humanity because of American individualism is a vital discussion that must take place (and not only for Black churches). It is to such a discussion that we now turn.

## Notes

1 Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

2 Non-African identity is a complicated description since most respected anthropologists conclude that all human beings have ancestry in Africa.

3 See Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997).
4 For a good treatment of the problem of Africanism, see Joseph Holloway, "The Origins of African-American Culture," in *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
5 Wendy Haight, *African-American Children at Church: A Sociocultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 4.
6 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976). See also a more recent selection of Thurman's writings: Walter Earl Fluker et al. (eds.), *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998).
7 For interesting work regarding the African Church for such connections, see Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). Gifford analyzes African Christianity against the backdrop of Africa's social ills.
8 See Battle, *Reconciliation.*
9 E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 9.
10 Not much research has been done on Christian influence coming from other African cultures, especially North Africa. See J. E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
11 See my conversation with Philip Jenkins about his book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): "Second Coming of Christianity" on National Public Radio, Wednesday, September 18, 2002 (The Connection). My comments can be accessed in the archives of www.theconnection.org.
12 It must be noted here that besides Jesus' movement, the nonviolent movement started in Africa under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership.
13 For a more thorough discussion, see my essay on "The Christian Life" in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William Placher (Louisville, KY: WJK publishers, 2003).
14 Denise Ackerman, "Becoming Fully Human: An Ethic of Relationship in Difference and Otherness," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (November 1998).
15 Ibid.
16 See Michael Battle, *A Christian Spirituality of Nonviolence* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004).
17 Historical works have been produced by Harold Lewis: see his *Yet with a Steady Beat* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1996). Works of social ethics have been produced. See Robert Hood, *Begrimed and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994).
18 Examples of this are persistent struggles with patriarchy, sexism, classism, and treatment of open homosexuals.

19 I say "positive work" because a great deal of "negative work" to disassociate human identity from African identity has also been done. We will look at this problem later.
20 For more detailed discussion of this debate, see Donald Johanson, *Origins of Modern Humans: Multiregional or Out of Africa?* (American Institute of Biological Sciences, 2001); *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981); *From Lucy to Language* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Johanson is best known for his discovery of "Lucy," a 3.2 million-year-old *Australopithecus afarensis* skeleton he found in 1974 in Ethiopia.
21 From Becky Huguley, November 15, 2000.
22 "The Me Millennium," *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 1999.
23 See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
24 Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
25 See Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001).
26 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 28.
27 I am indebted to Frances Adeney's review of Charles Taylor in *Theology Today* 48:2 (July 1991).
28 According to Taylor, persons can "only develop their characteristically human capacities in society. That claim is that living in society is a necessary condition of the development of rationality . . . or of becoming a moral agent . . . or of becoming a fully responsible, autonomous being." See Charles Taylor, *Atomism, Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 190–1.
29 Dale Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).
30 Ibid, p. 58.
31 Bill Cosby's actual interview was on National Public Radio, "Talk of the Nation," with Lynn Neary, July 7, 2004.
32 On National Public Radio's Tavis Smiley Show, May 27, 2004.
33 Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, p. 72ff. See Erick Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980); David Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling across Cultures* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986).
34 Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, p. 105.
35 Ibid, p. 107.
36 Ibid, p. 129.
37 Ibid.