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The University of San Francisco

AN EXPLORATION OF WORSHIP PRACTICES AT AN
AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of International & Multicultural Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Lamont A. Francies
San Francisco, California
December 2013

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

AN EXPLORATION OF WORSHIP PRACTICES AT AN
AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH OF CHRIST

The identity of the African American Churches of Christ is deeply rooted in the American struggle for racial equality. Without a formal governing body, the Churches of Christ have survived throughout the majority of the 20th century without making an official stance on racial relations. Many leaders in the religious movement have claimed racial immunity but have not addressed the evident division among ethnic lines. This study explored the extent of cultural influence that Caucasian Churches of Christ have on African American congregations.

This study observed these influences and how they shape religious culture and tradition in Black churches. The current religious customs of the African American churches of Christ are examined through a sociological lens as a product of the Stone–Campbell movement and years of racial separation. Specifically, this study sought to explore the development of religious education in Black Churches of Christ and how that legacy shapes current practices and traditions. Also this study sought to distinguish religious tradition from scripture and to free Black Churches of Christ to more effectively engage the 21st century community.

The practices of an African American Church of Christ are examined through qualitative interviews of its congregants. This analysis is needed because it exposes Eurocentric influences and allows Black Churches of Christ to better connect with other denominations in the African American church community.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Lamont A. Francies

December 4, 2013

Candidate

Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Patricia Mitchell

December 4, 2013

Dr. Emma Fuentes

December 4, 2013

Dr. James L. Taylor

December 4, 2013

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “For I all can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”-Philippians 4:13

To my wife Tiffany J. Francies, I love you. Thank you for your understanding, together we did it! I look forward to spending more time with you. You are my number one supporter. To my children Tamia, Lamont Jr., and Leilani, all who were born during my doctoral program, thank you for being patient with me, you will have your daddy back.

To my mother, and brother, thank you for always having faith in me. You have seen me through my entire educational experience, attending every graduation with pride and offering words of encouragement.

To my congregation, thank you for all your kind words of support and prayer now let's take the kingdom to the next level! “Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think...-Ephesians 3:20

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In the spirit of collaboration, I offer my gratitude to Dr. James Taylor, Dr. Betty Taylor, and Dr. Emma Fuentes. You were kind enough to offer great insight and thoughtfulness to your comments and advice. I thank you for everything.

I want to acknowledge the Delta Bay Church of Christ for believing in a 29 year old minister with a vision of something better. I want to acknowledge Dr. David Holmes, Dr. Dewayne Winrow, Dr. Rick Hunter, Scott Montgomery, Kinwood Devore, and Isaac Sandifer for teaching me how to see Jesus in a different light. You men have instilled in me the joy of education, the value of family, and the strength to persevere.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my many friends, ministerial colleagues, and nay-sayers who emboldened me to will and push myself by walking through the valley of the shadow of death. To God be the glory!

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.

—Mark 7:13, New International Version

In some churches, traditions seem to take on a life their own. Oftentimes how one worships becomes more important than why and who they worship. Pelikan (1986) stated, “The choice we have in relation to our tradition is whether to be conscious participants or unconscious victims” (p. 8). History provides a context by which one understands one’s traditions. Traditions shape culture and the way one engages with another. Without a sense of history people remain subject to traditions.

Historically, the United States has had a tradition of racial tension and inequality. Despite the iconic words stated in Declaration of Independence—“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal”—the United States has struggled in aligning its practice with its position. Racial prejudice in the 21st century continues to pervade many aspects of U.S. culture. This prejudice has resulted in many religious fellowships self-segregating themselves, resulting in religious and racial tension. This racial tension remains evident on Sunday mornings throughout churches across the United States. Although the United States has made progress on racial issues over the last 40 years, Sunday continues to be the most segregated day in the United States (Williams, 2011). “The Worship Hour” is one that is still split along racial lines. Nine of 10 churches

in the United States are racially segregated, with a single racial group comprising 80% of the congregation (Emerson & Woo, 2006).

Most religious movements have a theology. Theology is the science of divine thinking. Theology in a religious movement is created in response to culture and climate. Historically, theology in the African American church was formed in response to slavery, racism, and segregation. Therefore theology can be studied to help one examine and understand religious tradition.

This study explored the extent of cultural influence that Caucasian Churches of Christ have on African American congregations. This study sought to observe these influences and how they shape religious culture and tradition in Black churches. This analysis is needed because it will be able to expose Eurocentric influences and allow Black Churches of Christ to better relate to other fellowships in the African American church community. Also this study sought to distinguish religious traditions from scripture, freeing Black Churches of Christ to more effectively engage in a 21st century context.

Statement of the Problem

The identity of the African American Churches of Christ is deeply rooted in the U.S. struggle for racial equality. Without a formal governing body, the Churches of Christ have survived throughout the majority of the 20th century without taking an official stance on racial relations. Many leaders in the religious movement have claimed racial immunity but have not addressed the evident division along ethnic lines (Crawford, 2008).

Few studies have examined the cultural heritage of African American Churches of Christ from a sociological lens. However Robinson (2008) synopsisized the rise of African American Churches of Christ in the United States, examining the role of White congregations in the development of the Black church. Robinson's book considers the rise of Black Churches of Christ in the context of the racially segregated Jim Crow south, offering a rich historical analysis of the movement. In this study, I sought to build on that historical analysis and explored the sociological and pedagogical effect of White Churches of Christ on their Black counterparts.

Specifically, this study sought to explore the development of religious education in Black Churches of Christ and how that legacy shapes current practices and traditions. Another study, by Allen and Hughes (1988), focused on the phenomena of Black Churches of Christ, although White scholars have conducted most studies using a historical perspective.

The current religious customs of African American Churches of Christ needed to be examined through a sociological lens as a product of the Stone–Campbell Movement and years of racial separation. The Stone–Campbell Movement, also called the American Restoration Movement, was a “religious crusade of the early 19th century that sought to unify all Christians under a restored pattern of first century Christianity” (Allen & Hughes, 1988). Few studies have focused on the cultural implications and legacy of Eurocentric theology, Jim Crow segregation, and the racial separation of Black Churches of Christ.

Background and Need for the Study

Many Churches of Christ are currently at a crossroads between tradition and culture. The Churches of Christ in the United States are currently experiencing a decline in membership. Church of Christ statistician Yeakley. (2012) stated that in 2003, the Churches of Christ had 1,276,621 members in 13,155 congregations. However in 2012 there were 1,209,259 members in 12,447 congregations. That is roughly 102,000 fewer people in the pews over the last decade and a 5.4% decline in the number of congregations. Yeakley (2012) stated the Churches of Christ are losing 33% of their young people, who leave and never return. Forty-Five percent of young people in the Churches of Christ leave once they reach adulthood; however 12% return later in life. So the Churches of Christ are unable to retain one-third of their young people and have not grown at the rate of the U.S. population over the last 32 years.

Churches of Christ are seeing the largest decline in the most “liberal” and “conservative” congregations. Those who leave liberal congregations tend to attend nondenominational community churches (rather than attending a traditional Church of Christ), whereas those who leave conservative congregations tend to leave Christianity altogether (Yeakley, 2012).

This study aimed to understand, from a sociocultural perspective, why Church of Christ membership declined in the 21st century. In this study I also explored how this overall decline has affected African American Churches of Christ. Also, I examined current pedagogy and practices that may contribute to this decline.

Church statistician Garrett (1981) identified six divisions in the Churches of Christ.

1. Mainline Group: believe in their church only, no musical instruments, and do not partake of fellowship outside the Churches of Christ.
2. Noncooperatives: congregations disagreed about supporting “The Herald of Truth” television ministry and missionary societies.
3. One Cuppers: congregationalists who believe it is an essential scriptural practice to drink from a common communion cup.
4. Premillennials: congregationalists who believe Christ will set up His millennial kingdom after the rapture and punish those left in the Tribulation.
5. Non-Sunday-School Churches of Christ: 600 congregations do not have Sunday school because it is not mentioned in scripture and so is considered unbiblical.
6. Black Churches of Christ: are separated by race from mainline churches.

Among this faction of congregations is a fellowship of Churches of Christ that are almost exclusively African American. African American Churches of Christ have separate national lectureship, college, conferences, and crusades. Fellowship between Black and White congregations has largely been a spiritual illusion rooted in scriptural unity (Foster, 2005). Contentment and culture now separate Black congregations from their White counterparts. Issues of race among Churches of Christ are often avoided or ignored. Yet after years of separation, many African American Churches of Christ largely mirror their Caucasian brethren theologically. Although there are some distinct ethnic cultural practices, religious cultures in mainstream congregations, Black and White, remain homogeneous.

This reality exists for various reasons. One reason is that theologies in colleges affiliated with the Churches of Christ were formed by White scholars (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Many African American pioneer preachers had their theology shaped by White colleagues and as a result many Black congregations have inherited many Eurocentric cultural practices. Many of these practices have gone undetected and have been mistakenly “scripturalized,” becoming part of orthodox Christian doctrine. Although many White Churches of Christ have evolved their practice and pedagogy with the changing culture, many Black congregations remain trapped in a sacred time warp for the sake of religious piety. As congregational culture was investigated, I sought to connect current religious practices to a wider ideology rooted in the American Restoration Movement.

Communion

Communion (or the Lord’s Supper) was instituted by Jesus as He and His disciples celebrated the Passover meal the night before his crucifixion. That evening in the upper room, Jesus gave new meaning to the Passover meal (celebrated up to that point by Jews). The meal was no longer going to commemorate the Death Angel “passing over” the Israelites while in Egyptian bondage because of the sign of the blood of a lamb. Now this meal would commemorate Jesus as the Passover Lamb whose blood was shed so that (eternal) death would Passover people. Communion also celebrates the believers in Christ and the community that He created (1 Corinthians 10:17). The Churches of Christ traditionally take the communion meal on a weekly basis, based on its biblical interpretation (Acts 20:7). Other religious denominations may take communion on a monthly basis based on their understanding (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Churches of

Christ traditionally believe that the practice of weekly communion is commanded and is part of the “five acts of worship,” which include singing, praying, preaching, giving, and communion. Failure to partake weekly communion is seen as a violation of God’s Word.

Acapella Music

The issue of instrumental music in worship was not unique to the Churches of Christ. Calvin opposed it during the Reformation (Holloway & Foster, 2006). U.S. congregational churches did not use instruments until after the Revolutionary War. Instrumental music was introduced to the Stone–Campbell churches (Churches of Christ/Disciples of Christ) in Midway Kentucky in 1859, by minister Pinkerton. Pinkerton brought in a melodeon to assist the “horrible” a capella singing of the congregation. Instrumental music began gaining popularity among Stone–Campbell churches after the Civil War. Instrumental music helped appeal to a new generation of worshippers. Congregations in the U.S. South primarily opposed instrumental music for economic and social reasons. Many congregations in the U.S. South were devastated after the Civil War and could not afford instruments. These southern congregations were opposed to northern congregations wasting money on instruments while the poor brothers and sisters in the South starved (Holloway & Foster, 2006). The primary objection to instrumental music then (and today) was the silence of the New Testament scriptures on the subject.

The Churches of Christ adopted Campbell’s legislative approach to scripture, which prohibits any practice on which the New Testament is silent. The Disciples of Christ (who were also apart of the Stone–Campbell movement) viewed the issue of instrumental music differently. The Disciples of Christ adopted Stone’s normative approach to scripture, which allowed for practices not outlined in scripture, as long they

did not disrupt the peace and harmony of the church. Proponents of instrumental music argued that silence permitted instruments as an aid to singing, just as silence permitted song books, song leaders, and church buildings. The argument of silence was applied differently (at times inconsistently) to various church issues, and continue to be a mark of Churches of Christ today. The issue of instrumental music was one of the main issues that led to the split between the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ. The Churches of Christ made instrumental music a test of fellowship and began to view the practice as sinful.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to (a) seek an in-depth understanding of the perceptions experienced by members of a predominately African American Church of Christ and how they have been influenced by their current worship traditions; (b) to provide a voice for congregants to explain their worship experiences in Black Churches of Christ through qualitative interviews; (c) explore religious theology in the Churches of Christ and its impact on specific worship practices and interactions in the Black church community. The study is crucial because it sought to explore to what extent predominately White Churches of Christ shaped, influenced, and outlined religious theology, pedagogy, and practice among their African American counterparts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks used in this study were Black liberation theology (BLT) and critical race theory (CRT). Both theories were used to explore current progressive African American Churches of Christ as counter stories of Eurocentric influences.

Black Liberation Theology

Black theologian Cone (1990) coined the phrase: Black liberation theology, defined as follows:

Black liberation theology argues that African Americans must be liberated from multiple forms of bondage—social, political, economic and religious. This formulation views Christian theology as a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ. (p. 5)

BLT has its roots in South American liberation theology, which applies traditional Christian theology to issues of social justice and equality. Jesus is viewed as a radical advocate for the oppressed. Proponents of BLT proposed it is an excellent tool to expose forms of bondage that seek to remain hidden in social systems. Opponents of BLT believe it is flawed, based on the assumption that biblical truth is subject to self-interpretation (Bradley, 2010). As a result of this dichotomy, hermeneutics of victimology developed, based on deconstruction, oppression, and sociocritical approaches to scripture, which steer Black theology further from the Bible (Fields, 2001). However, Cone (1990) stated that the appearance of Black theology in the United States, then, is due primarily to the failure of White religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being Black in a White racist society.

Black theology arises from the need of Blacks to liberate themselves from White oppressors. The Bible presents Jesus as one who is connected with the plight of the oppressed; therefore Blacks can see the gospel as one that is inseparable from their condition. Cone (1990) also stated that Black theology is Christian theology because it centers on Jesus Christ, arguing that White theology makes the “Jesus-event” an abstract, unembodied idea, whereas Black theology believes that the Black community itself is

precisely where Jesus is at work, enabling Blacks to throw off the chains of White oppression. Therefore, BLT is a theology of survival because it seeks to interpret the theological significance of being in a community whose existence is threatened by the power of nonbeing (Cone, 1990).

Critical Race Theory

CRT was developed progressively over the years. It was conceived in the mid-1970s by African American author Bell and Caucasian American Freeman. Both individuals were concerned with the lack of racial progress from the 1960s civil rights movement. CRT was developed to understand more hidden, institutionalized forms of racism. In defining CRT, Bell emphasized that CRT is

a body of legal scholarship, now about a decade old, a majority of whose members are both existentially people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law. Those critical race theorists who are white are usually cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege. (p. 898)

One of the principles underlying CRT is interest convergence. Advocates of interest convergence stated that elite Whites will support or advocate racial advances for African Americans as long as those advance promote White self-interest.

Supporters of CRT defined it as an interdisciplinary body of research combining philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, and history in addressing race, especially as it relates to power and social inequity toward marginalized segments of the population. CRT assumes that racism is a normal part of U.S. life. Therefore it becomes difficult to detect and often looks normal.

Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2007) acknowledged that “CRT allows us to examine the interconnectivity of race, racism, and gendered racism in higher education through a practice conventional to the social sciences, humanities, and the law:

storytelling” (p. 564). In agreement, Hayes and Juarez (2009) further elaborated that “Counter-stories reflect on the lived experiences of people of color as a way to raise critical consciousness about social and racial injustice” (p. 731). Yosso (2006) concluded that counterstories in CRT “seek to document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy” (p. 10). It is this latter sentiment that, Bell (1995) emphasized, “set some critical race theorists apart from well beyond civil rights, integration, affirmative action, and other liberal measures” (as cited in Taylor et. al., 2009, p. 49). Based on these perspectives, critical race theorists argued that CRT illuminates issues and discussions about race from a personal perspective such as counterstorytelling and challenges historical assumptions about discrimination, especially in formal systems. Bell (1995, as cited in Taylor et al., 2009) believed that culture constructs its own social realities so societal norms are not “fixed.” Those societal norms are constructed with words, stories, and silence, and by writing and speaking out against them one may hope to live in a better world.

However some researchers and members of the legal community have disagreed and continue to argue that CRT is not grounded in theory or legal scholarship. Litowitz (1997) critiqued CRT having several issues with its inclusion of “storytelling” and believed that:

Much CRT scholarship seems to be infused with the mistaken notion that blacks have a unique ability to write about how the law affects blacks, that only Hispanics can really see how the law affects Hispanics, that white judges can’t act as good judges in cases involving these “out-groups.” (p. 519)

However Litowitz did concede that CRT points out problems in the U.S. system, such as the pervasiveness of racism and the need for various perspectives to address such problems.

As CRT continued to stir debate in academia and the legal community, disagreement persisted about a common definition and application. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) attempted to broaden the definition of CRT by stating,

The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. (pp. 2–3)

CRT continues to challenge historical assumptions about discrimination, especially in formal systems.

Research Questions

Using BLT and CRT as a framework, the following broad research questions were used to examine the experience and perceptions that African American Church of Christ congregants had when experiencing a Sunday morning worship service:

Research Question 1. To what extent has traditional religious pedagogy in the Churches of Christ impacted worship styles at the Delta Bay Church of Christ?

Research Question 2. What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have about aspects of traditional Sunday worship?

Significance of Study

The implication of a study of the religious pedagogy of the African American Churches of Christ is significant for several reasons. First, this study can help those interested in the development of African American church culture understand how certain belief systems come about and how these practices affect the lives of thousands of church

attendees. Second, this study can contribute to the exploration of religious pedagogy of the African American Churches of Christ; hence, it can dramatically improve the quality and competency of religious education for 21st-century church attendees. Third, this study can aid African American churches in understanding their Eurocentric roots. Finally, this study could impact the future of African American Churches of Christ, which struggle between their racial and religious identities by allowing parishioners to socially connect with other Black religious bodies.

This study may be beneficial for educators, sociologists, and anthropologists interested in religious social movements. This study can help Bible scholars in the Churches of Christ understand the effects of culture on religious tradition and ideology. African American Churches of Christ can benefit from this study as they recognize the importance of culture in a historical religious context. This study exposes cultural practices adopted by Black Churches of Christ and how these practices have hindered the relevancy and growth of this religious body in the 21st century.

Delimitations

“Backyard” research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) involves studying the researcher’s own organization, friends, or immediate work setting. This type of research often leads to compromises in the researcher’s ability to disclose information and raises difficult power issues. I have been a minister of an African American Church of Christ for 10 years. This might present a religious and cultural bias. I am currently the minister of the Delta Bay Church of Christ and have been for 6 years. Although such an experience can be viewed as a strength in undertaking this research, it can also be perceived as having a predisposition toward the practices and pedagogy of African American Churches of

Christ. My relationships in this fellowship might present partiality and a slant toward interpreting this religious movement.

Responses by participants about their experiences or perceptions of the Churches of Christ should not be viewed as representing the perceptions of the entire religious group. Participants in this study were volunteers and self-reported their experiences and perceptions through a qualitative interview process. Data collected were used to illuminate the voices of those who have not been previously heard in Black Churches of Christ.

Limitations

Current research in the field has been limited and no personal phenomenological experiences or perceptions of members of an African American Church of Christ have analyzed and critiqued traditional worship practices using BLT/CRT frameworks. Other than published books of historical church figures and articles on race relations in the Church of Christ, this type of research is lacking in the field. Another limitation of the study is the small sample size of the participants. A few methodologists have provided sample-size guidelines for several of the most common qualitative research designs and techniques. For this study I used Creswell's (2002) recommendation of 3 to 5 participants for case-study research.

Summary

Chapter 1 of this qualitative research raised questions about the practice and pedagogy of African American Churches of Christ. In this study, I query the extent to which traditional religious theology in the Churches of Christ impacted worship styles in the Black congregation. Also I worked to discern what perceptions members of an

African American Church of Christ have about aspects of traditional Sunday worship. Many African American pioneer preachers had their theologies shaped by White colleagues and as a result many Black congregations have inherited many Eurocentric cultural practices. Many of these practices have gone undetected and have been mistakenly “scripturalized,” becoming part of orthodox Christian doctrine. This study is needed to examine traditional Church of Christ pedagogy and practice to help expose historical influences. Knowledge of these influence would help liberate Black Churches of Christ to connect with aspects of the larger African American faith community. BLT provides a solid framework to examine Church of Christ pedagogy and practices as they relate to worship, music, communion, soteriology, and ecclesiology. BLT also provides a platform to understand the experiences and perceptions of an oppressed religious group, shackled by the chains of church tradition and cultural imperialism.

Chapter 2 explores a review of the literature and provides a historical context for a proper examination of the pedagogy of the Churches of Christ. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology of this study, including overall research design, data collection, and analyses used in this research. Chapters 4 and 5 further discuss the findings, while offering the implications, conclusions, and future recommendations that contribute to the current field of research.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. ...

It is traditionalism that gives tradition a bad name.

—Jaroslaw Pelikan

The subject of this study, an exploration of the worship practices among African American Churches of Christ sits at the intersection of an extensive literature of religious traditions, theology, and Church of Christ history. As subsets of these broad overlapping topics, these three key areas appear most important in providing a framework for understanding the potential contribution of this study: (a) the historical role of the Black church and its role in the community as place of social resistance, (b) the history of the Churches of Christ in the United States as part of the American Restoration Movement, (c) Black theology and its influence in the development of religious pedagogy, (d) racism in U.S. churches, exploring the racial divide among congregations, (e) African American Church of Christ history and how it has shaped current religious pedagogy, (f) religious traditions in the Churches of Christ and how they affect the worship gathering, (g) theology in the Black Churches of Christ and how they were influenced by their White counterparts.

Historical Role of the Black Church

The African American church was birthed in pain, discrimination, and racism. It has its roots on plantation fields, as slaves would gather on Sundays to gain strength from one another. Given the demeaning nature of their labor, church gathering was the one place where Blackness was acceptable and valuable. “In worship, the mind, emotions and

other sensory capacities were engaged in transcending the banality of evil” (Franklin, 1997, p. 30).

Worship was the one place where they were free to express themselves culturally, worship God, and free from the immorality of slavery. Worship was also the place that freed slaves from the boredom of fieldwork, so worship become more than merely a mundane routine, but a supernatural experience. “For people who have been oppressed, worship has always been valued for its capacity to provide a window into the reign and commonwealth of God” (Franklin, 1997, p. 31). Black churches historically have become a place of social resistance. The Black church adheres to the Holy Scriptures in Psalms 34:17, “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all of their troubles.” Most African American churches today believe as did the slaves of old that there is deliverance found in worship.

In many African American churches there is an emotional response to the deliverance of God. “God is felt and known through a worship that engages the senses” (Franklin, 1997, p. 31). A worship that does not engage stimulation is not seen as authentic. Although most Black churches have a protestant tradition, they do not worship like their White counterparts. They have not integrated liturgical practices such as bells, incense, and silence (Franklin, 1997, p. 32).

The culture of the Black church is one that is rooted in social and spiritual oppression; the social caused by the spiritual. Black worshippers overcome through emotional responses to God, active in their lives.

During designed moments of formal worship, shouters may stand, clap their hands, walk about, dance, leap, weep, speak in tongues, kneel, hug someone, or lay prostrate on the floor in response to an overwhelming encounter with the holiness of God. (Franklin, 1997, p. 33)

Church of Christ History

The Churches of Christ have their U.S. roots in the Stone–Campbell Movement (American Restoration Movement) of the early 19th century. The movement sought to restore the church to its simplistic 1st-century roots and join all Christians in a unified body patterned after the 1st-century New Testament church. Members of this movement do not consider themselves Protestants but Restorationists. Two movements that independently worked toward restoration of the apostolic church were a group led by Stone and another group led by a parent and child team named Campbell. Stone led a group of believers called simply Christians, beginning at an 1801 revival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky. The Campbells led a group of believers called the Disciples of Christ in western Pennsylvania and Virginia (now West Virginia). The two groups had some differences but both were opposed to dogma that separated Christians, including creeds, clergy, unscriptural names, and denominational bodies. They believed that the church depicted in the New Testament was the ideal church, pure and free from all the corruption of the ages (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

In 1832 the two religious movements came together. From 1832 to 1906 the proper title for these two united movements have been historically debated (some used Disciples of Christ to describe the movement or Churches of Christ to describe specific congregations). Most historians described this united group as Stone–Campbell or Restoration churches for this period (1832–1906). Two primary issues threatened to split the Restoration churches (Disciples of Christ/Christian Church and the Church of Christ): missionary societies and the use of instrumental music. Missionary societies were opposed because they are not mentioned in scripture. These were groups that dictated

their needs to congregations, creating a type of church body beyond the local congregations. Most Restoration churches in the North supported missionary societies and instrumental music and many congregations in the South opposed them (Holloway & Foster, 2006). In 1889, Restoration church leader Sommer (1850–1940), gave the Sand Creek Address and Declaration at Sand Creek, Illinois, which pushed for a division between the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. Sommer wanted to save the movement from “innovations and corruptions,” viewed as apostasy; Sommer began to make certain practices a test of fellowship.

In 1906, differences over issues such as missionary societies and the use of instrumental music in the worship resulted in a split between the groups. The Churches of Christ were first recognized in the U.S. Religious Census as a separate religious movement from the Disciples of Christ. During the middle of the 20th century (1941–1967), the Churches of Christ became one of the fastest growing churches in the United States. Many mainstream congregations began to build new edifices and hired educated ministers. No longer were the Churches of Christ considered a rural sect of poor White southern farmers. It was during this period that members of this religious movement were entering into the middle class and it became socially acceptable to be a member of the Churches of Christ. Congregations now consisted of lawyers, doctors, and other business owners who no longer felt culturally isolated as members had in the earlier part of the 20th century (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

Along with the cultural shift came a political shift: by the early 1960s most members of the Churches of Christ, particularly in the South, moved from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. Part of this shift was due to the Democratic

candidacy of Kennedy (elected in 1960). Many Protestant southerners at that time found it difficult to embrace a Catholic president. Also the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, signed by President Johnson, gave the South to the Republican Party. Democrats were known as the party of the poor but as the Churches of Christ moved into the middle class, and embraced a political shift. Working for racial integration became a political issue to be avoided by the Churches of Christ. Opposing communism, alcohol sales, or evolution were religious issues in which the church should be involved (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

African American members of the Churches of Christ were discouraged from involving themselves in the Civil Rights Movement. When this happened increasingly, African American Churches of Christ found themselves culturally isolated from the larger Black religious community who embraced issues of social justice. Because of the many financial, cultural, and doctrinal ties to the White power establishment, various Black congregations became apolitical.

Mainstream White Churches of Christ during this period (1941–1967) may have changed politically, but not much theologically. Most congregations still taught a doctrine of exclusive salvation for members of the Churches of Christ. Unlike the previous generation, they were not so much concerned with restoring the ancient church as in the preservation of what they had preserved. The focus became defending the Church of Christ as the only true church. When the restoration process stopped, it was accompanied by the cessation of active thinking and scholarship. Pedagogy in the Churches of Christ went from investigating new ideas to defending the established order. Evangelism went from seeking and saving the lost to keeping the saved happy. Members went from becoming “*Fishers of Men to Keepers of the Aquarium*” (Harvey).

Black Theology

We shape our view of God through the lens of theology. Our theology however is shaped through our life experiences. Black theology is formed through the struggle and oppression of African Americans. Cone developed Black theology in the late 1960s out of frustration that at no point in seminary or PhD studies at predominately White schools that there was any discussion about racism and segregation in the United States (as cited in Bradley, 2010). Cone saw the struggle of African Americans as authentically biblical. For Cone, no theology is Christian theology unless it arises from oppressed communities and interprets Jesus' work as that of liberation. Author Bradley (2010) wrote,

Cone grounds the liberation motif in the biblical story of redemption by noting that: (1) God chose Israel because they were being oppressed (2) The rise of Old Testament prophecy is due primarily to the lack of social justice as God is revealed as the God of liberation for the oppressed. (3) Jesus reaffirms the preeminence of God as liberator because Jesus locates his ministry among the poor and oppressed (Luke 4:18-19) Theology, then, is the study of God's liberating activity on behalf of those who are oppressed. Assisting the oppressed, in Cone's view, is the sole reason for the existence of theology as a discipline. (p. 39)

American "White theology" is charged with failing to help Blacks in the struggle for liberation. Cone (1990) believed that White theology is not theology because it fails to connect theology to Black suffering. Black theology only exists because of the failure of White Christians. According to Cone, race defines the Christian experience. The development of Black theology is an attempt by the Black community to define what the knowledge of God means for its existence in a White racist society. It is victimology expressed in the form of Black consciousness that drives the paradigm for Black theology (Cone, 1990).

In Cone's (1990) view, Black theology is a survival theology because it helps Blacks survive in a White-dominated U.S. culture.

In Cone's view whites consider blacks animals, outside the realm of humanity, and have attempted to destroy black identity through racial assimilation and integration programs, as if blacks have no legitimate existence apart from whiteness. Black theology is the theological expression of a people deprived of social and political power. (Bradley, 2010, p. 40)

White theology simply does not affirm Blackness.

American slavery significantly influenced how Blacks practice Christianity today. The focus on the issue of slavery by Black liberation theologians hailed from Christianity being introduced to Blacks in the Americas in the context of slaveholding and slave trading (Bradley, 2010). Many slaves were converted to Christianity by European slave traders to control them. Many slaveholders at first prevented their slaves from hearing the gospel for fear that they might have to liberate them if they became Christians, but eventually taught them, assuring themselves that Blacks' spiritual state had nothing to do with their status as property. Slaveholders gave biblical justification to the institution of slavery. "From the very beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, conversion of the slaves to Christianity was viewed by the emerging nations of Western Christendom as a justification for enslavement of Africans" (Raboteau, 2001). Bradley (2010) distinctively viewed Black Christianity as follows:

Black Christianity received its distinctive "identity within the context of European enslavement of black people." In 1693 Cotton Mather developed the Society of Negroes to give religious instruction to slaves, and [a] few years later, 1702, efforts began in the South to Christianize slaves. Because of their African roots, blacks first practiced a syncretistic Christianity, mixing traditional African religions with Christianity. This intermixing had a strong influence of worship forms. Over time, however, the African elements were minimized, and Christianity was used as an opiate to suppress African elements in slave life. As a result, black religious thought is "neither exclusively Christian" nor "primarily African." Instead, it is "reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people's struggle for justice in a nation whose political, and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology. (p. 42)

One of the central roles of the Black church has been to condemn all injustice, especially racism. During slavery, White supremacy and slave ownership were mainstays of Calvinist and Puritan religious communities; even religious leaders like J. Edwards owned slaves (Bradley, 2010). However during the Reconstruction era, some White Christians made efforts toward racial reconciliation. Primarily, though, the tendency among Whites was toward racial segregation. During the civil rights era and beyond, Black Christians formed many parachurch groups, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, People United to Save Humanity, and the Opportunities Industrialization Center, specifically to combat White racism and structural sins (McCall, 1980).

Racism in Churches

It was not until the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s that many slaves were converted to Christianity. “By the beginning of the nineteenth century, tens of thousands of blacks had been converted, especially into groups that appealed to the ‘common people’-the Methodist and Baptist churches” (Holloway & York, 2003, p.133). Slaves were indoctrinated with a system of teaching that reinforced the racist notions of their subordinate status as Blacks. They were often segregated in substandard conditions at gospel revivals, forced to sit in balconies away from Whites in the house of God. Historically, White discrimination and racism among Christians have played important roles in the formation of separate Black churches (Glaude, 2000). After the Civil War, White churches went from enslaving their Black counterparts to a system of segregation and separation. For example in 1787, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was started in Philadelphia in response to the racist actions of White Methodists. In one

incident, R. Allen and other Black worshippers were pulled from their knees at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia because they were praying in a section they did not know was closed to Black Christians. It was not uncommon in those days to have "White Only" sections in White churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). White Christians often allowed their Black counterparts to have their own worship gathering, but viewed it with skepticism after Methodist preacher Vesey led a slave insurrection in 1822. White slave masters begin to become nervous about Black gatherings without supervision (Holloway & York, 2003).

After the Civil War, many Black denominations begin to emerge, as they sought to separate from their White counterparts. Among these denominations were The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1870 and the National Baptist Convention in 1886. These fellowships were in response to racist practices in churches. Separation was the result because of the White refusal of integration. Cone and others saw little progress in race relations in the church:

What deepens my anger today is the appalling silence of white theologians on racism in the United States and the modern world. Whereas this silence has been partly broken in secular disciplines, theology remains virtually mute. From Jonathan Edwards to Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr to present, progressive white theologians, with few exceptions, write and teach as if they do not need to address the radical contradiction that racism creates theology. ... White supremacy is so widespread that it becomes a "natural" way of viewing the world. We must ask therefore: Is racism so deeply embedded in Euro-American history and culture that is impossible to do theology without being anti-black? (2000, pp. 130–131)

Cone (2000) believed that racism is so deeply intertwined in the fabric of U.S. history and culture that one cannot simply get rid of by ignoring it. For Cone, to remain silent about the U.S. racist past was implicit affirmation of racism as good and revealed a certain blind sidedness that leaves open the question of whether the church is equipped to

address this issue. Partly to blame, however, for the persistence of White racist theology is the African American church and its failure to mount a persistent radical race critique of Christian theology. One of the enduring qualities of the Black church in the United States has been its role in helping Blacks cope with racism (Fields, 2001). Even in a postmodern context, White supremacy lingers, though it has been obscured by political correctness and multiculturalism (Bradley, 2010).

Fields (2001) contended that although Black theology is crucial, it cannot exist without the larger (White) theological community. Fields correctly pointed out that most Black liberation theologians are trained at predominately White theological institutions and primarily read the theology of Western (liberal) theologians and philosophers, which makes an uncontaminated break from White theologians impossible. White Europeans are significant contributors to Western Christianity in all its forms, even in Black churches. White Europeans have contributed significantly to shaping the practice and pedagogy of the Black church. Therefore it is not possible for Black theologians to be free from the restraints of the dominant theological culture. It becomes difficult to develop a distinctly racially contrived theology built from church history. Fields warned, “Serious challenges to and reformation of core beliefs will position black theology away from orthodox faith, inhibiting its contribution to the African American church and community and eventually ushering it into a state of non-existence” (Fields, 2001, p. 85).

African American Church of Christ History

Both founders of the American Restoration Movement, Campbell and Stone, opposed the institution of slavery. However, both appeared to believe in White superiority over Blacks (Blankenship, 2012). Although both Campbell and Stone

believed in the restoration of the primitive church, they still conformed to the atmosphere of racial bigotry of their time. For example, Stone's Cane Ridge church had a balcony that segregated its Black members. Names of Black members were on the rolls of Stone's Cane Ridge church by 1815, and nearly 59% of the congregation was listed as "colored" by 1838 (Blankenship, 2012).

Campbell believed that scripture only regulated slavery but did not condemn it (Hughes, 1996). By 1850 the population of enslaved Africans had grown to 3.2 million; 101,000 of them now belonged to the Stone–Campbell Movement (Blankenship, 2012). Many of these slaves were taught the gospel by their owners. As a result, their view of the gospel was shaped in a culture of White male dominance. Owners taught slaves that submission to the slave master equaled submission to God. Campbell also admitted loving the White man more than the Black man (Foster, 2005, p. 619). Campbell, like so many others of this era, had no deep familiarity with the richness of African culture. Campbell's Eurocentric influence was spread in Black congregations as they began to form. Black believers would not remain in such large numbers for long. As the Civil War approached, many enslaved Africans escaped northward and flocked behind Union lines, leaving the religion of their masters behind. By 1862, Blacks in the Stone–Campbell churches membership numbered only around 7,000 (Robinson, 2008).

Within a few years of the Civil War, most Black Christians in Restoration churches began to form their own independent congregations, often aided by Whites (Foster, 2005). Many Black church organizations favored instrumental music and extra congregational organizations. In 1878, Black congregations in Restoration churches established a national organization called the National Convention of the Churches of

Christ (later changed to the National Christian Missionary Convention). But even as they gathered, like their White counterparts, many Blacks in Restoration churches opposed instrumental music and many other “innovations” (Holloway & York, 2003).

Among restoration churches, Black congregations had been formed in the year following the Civil War, including the Gay Street and Lea Avenue Christian Churches in Nashville Tennessee. The Lea Avenue and Gay Street congregations would produce African American church leaders such as A. C. Campbell (1862–1930), G. P. Bowser (1874–1950), S. W. Womack (1850–1920), and M. Keeble (1878–1968) all of whom left those congregations because of their “innovations.” The Jackson Street Church of Christ was formed in 1906 by Womack and A. C. Campbell as a response to the new innovations. The Jackson Street Church of Christ is known as the mother church of African American Churches of Christ. Among the innovations were the use of instrumental music and the use of preachers from other denominational backgrounds. These three men had been all influenced and shaped by the conservative teachings of Lipscomb and the opposition to these innovations reflected Lipscomb’s doctrinal and cultural influence. A. C. Campbell was described as a dynamic animated preacher whose speaking style mirrored Black preachers in other denominations, yet Campbell’s loyalty to the culturally influenced hermeneutic style of White brethren made him view scripture as they did. A. C. Campbell believed the “pure gospel” was worship without musical instruments, the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, and evangelizing without missionary societies.

As a Black preacher in the early 20th century, Campbell reached out to White benefactors for monetary support of efforts to preach the “pure gospel.” “Paternalism was

the most common relationship between white and black Churches of Christ in the years before the Civil Right Movement” (Holloway & York, 2003). White benefactors would support Black preachers who made sure that their people worshipped in segregated buildings. G. P. Bowser, who was more militant in the stance against racial segregation, found it hard to get White monetary support. Keeble, however, was more accepting of the social structure of the day, which allowed Keeble to gain White trust and support for evangelistic efforts among Blacks.

Racist attitudes prevailed in the Churches of Christ among church leaders who banned African American students from attending colleges associated with the fellowship. Two schools among Blacks would become key institutions in the formation of African American Church of Christ identity: Southwestern Christian College (1950–) and The Nashville Christian Institute (NCI, 1940–1967). The closing of NCI served to sever ties between White and Black Churches of Christ for years to come. NCI was a grade school set up by Black leaders of the Churches of Christ to train young preachers. Black members of the Churches of Christ sacrificed for years to keep the school in operation. Many saw NCI as central to the identity of Black congregations. From 1942 to 1958, Keeble served as its president. The board of the school started all with all Black members and within a few years had become integrated with Whites, many of whom also served on the board of David Lipscomb College. The school board voted to close the school in 1967 when David Lipscomb College became integrated, over the protest of Black leaders. The property was sold for 225,000 and proceeds were given to Lipscomb College to provide scholarships for Black students. Many Black congregations, however, were apathetic to the appeal of David Lipscomb College. They saw it as way of

appealing the closure of their school and a way to bring about cultural conformity. Blacks did not want to be on a campus where their culture and contributions were devalued and they served as institutional tokens.

Some of the Black alumni of NCI tried to sue David Lipscomb College, hoping to use the funds for Southwestern Christian College, but were unsuccessful. This event left a deep scar in the minds of Black Churches of Christ, driving a wedge between the two fellowships. The closing of NCI was one of several events that would effectively end the paternalism of the past and seal the pattern of separation (Holloway & York, 2003). In the 1960s, a completely separate independent Black Church of Christ was formed. Though it is not referred to as such, Blacks have their own paper, *The Christian Echo*, its own National Lectureship, and its own National Youth Conference. Interactions between Blacks and Whites were more common at the beginning of the 20th century than toward the end. As of 2013, two fellowships remain: one Black and one White, with the two having little to do with each other.

Even during the Civil Rights Movement many Churches of Christ remained segregated. Black congregations had formed their newspapers, conferences, and lectureships. That separation remains largely intact in 2013. This segregation of Blacks in the Churches of Christ was rooted in biblical interpretation. Many White leaders did not believe it was their duty to seek social reform in the church. Caucasian church editor H. A. "Buster" Dobbs (1973) wrote,

The gospel of Jesus places the emphasis on the individual. The social gospel puts the emphasis on the community. The gospel of Jesus teaches soul salvation. The social gospel is a community salvation. The gospel of Jesus encourages an emphasis on heaven and not on earth. The social gospel employs all of its energy in the worldly and not heavenly interests. (p. 26)

The social gospel that seeks to alleviate the ills of society was viewed by many White leaders as unbiblical. Therefore the Churches of Christ during the Civil Rights Movement remained largely apolitical. This view of civil rights influenced many Black congregations to take the same stand as their White brethren. Militant segregationists played significant roles in White congregations but the majority of Whites desired gradual change. Certain White members did not want to upset those who had deep-seated prejudices toward Blacks.

Martin Luther King Jr. was never fully embraced by Blacks in the Churches of Christ because he was outside the fellowship belonging to a denominational church that, in their opinion, had no scriptural right to exist. King and the entire Civil Rights Movement were viewed with suspicion. Gray was a protégée of Keeble and served as a Civil Rights attorney for King and Parks during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This made many Blacks in the Churches nervous about Gray (Holloway & York, 2003). In an autobiography *Bus Ride to Justice*, when a preacher said, “Keeble, Fred Gray is smart,” Keeble replied, “He’s too smart.”

Keeble

Among Churches of Christ in the United States, an estimated 10% are African American, and many in this fellowship can trace their affiliation to Keeble and to the individuals Keeble influenced. Keeble (1878–1968) was an influential African American minister of the early 20th century. Keeble was born and reared in middle Tennessee and came under the religious influence of church restorationists such as Womack and A. Campbell, as well as the social influence of B. T. Washington. By the time of Keeble’s

death, the pastor reportedly had baptized 40,000 people and had established more than 200 congregations, some of which still flourish today (Robinson, 2008).

Keeble's evangelistic efforts across the United States could not have been possible outside the financial support of White Churches of Christ (Robinson, 2008). Keeble understood that in the Jim Crow South Black schools and Black congregations depended on the financial sustenance of White believers. Keeble digested B. T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, knew the book from lid to lid, learning how Washington raised money for his school from White people. Keeble, years later, would follow suit, raising money for NCI, a school instrumental in producing influential African American preachers across the United States. Keeble labored tirelessly around the country. In the spirit of Washington, Keeble believed that Black self-help should accompany White philanthropy. "The greatest missionary' in African American Churches of Christ was, ironically, neither a black man nor a white man but a curious merger of white philanthropist and black proclaimer" (Robinson, 2008, p. 30).

Keeble was described by some as an accomodationalist, choosing not to rock the racial boat and challenge the White establishment on racial equality and civil rights. Keeble understood that White benefactors would never succor a Black preacher who exhibited the traits of a "New Negro"; only those African American ministers who compiled with Jim Crow etiquette could expect any assistance (Robinson, 2008). Keeble understood the racial climate of the day and would often publicly thank the White establishment for their generosity. Keeble understood how to appease the racial and religious ego of the White establishment to accomplish his goal of preaching the gospel. "The generosity of white leaders and the 'humility' of the black clergy went hand and

hand, for Keeble he knew humility in the minds of whites in the segregated South meant strict compliance with Jim Crow statues and practices” (Robinson, 2008). Contrasting Keeble’s accommodating approach to the White power establishment of the Churches of Christ was African American evangelist G. P. Bowser (1874–1950). Bowser, a contemporary of Keeble, spoke out clearly against racism in the Churches of Christ and worked almost exclusively with poor Black Christians.

A turning point came for Bowser when he moved to Nashville in 1920 as principal of the Southern Practical Institute, a new school supported by Churches of Christ for African American students. The white superintendent of the school, C.E.W. Dorris, insisted that the students enter the building by the back door and the Southern culture dictated. Bowser called it racism and would have no part of it, leaving Nashville. The school closed in six weeks. (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

Bowser had influenced ministers such as R. N. Hogan (1902–1997), a West Coast pioneer among African American preachers, who consistently spoke out against racial discrimination in the Churches of Christ. As a child, Hogan lived and worked with a White philanthropist, Burton, and when asked if he thought that Burton was prejudiced, Hogan answered: “Yes I do. Because if he was not he would have not given me a room in the basement” (Bowers, 2001). When Hogan boldly called for the Churches of Christ to repent and change concerning racism, there was almost complete silence on the issue from the White leadership of the church. The Civil Rights Movement in the mainstream Churches of Christ was depicted by editors in newsletters as political, communist inspired, or violent (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

White benefactors in the early 20th century contributed substantially to the emergence of African American churches in the South, however the financial contribution of Whites did not equate to the social equality of Blacks. Most Churches of Christ remained racially segregated and remained silent on the issue. The emphasis

among mainstream Churches of Christ was doctrinal correctness on the issues but otherwise follow the established culture (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

Religious Traditions

Tradition is the act of handing over or passing down, as when one generation gives its values and practices to the next generation. Ironically, in the Churches of Christ, the inclination to live without a tradition has been one of the most prominent features of its tradition (Childers, Foster, & Reese, 2002). The traditions of the Churches of Christ are the set of attitudes, practices, forms, and doctrinal emphases historically characteristic of the religious group. One of the reasons tradition is castigated is linked to the roots of the Stone–Campbell Movement. A. Campbell and B. Stone were early 19th-century church leaders who wanted to see a church free from oppressive denominational doctrines and practices. As they surveyed the American frontier, they were unhappy with the church’s past. Its traditions had become overbearing, unscriptural, and unhealthy; thus, they sought to restore the primitive church of the first century. This church was to be a complete restoration of the church discussed in the Bible, free from all unbiblical religious traditions. Tradition carried a negative connotation, and as a result an “ahistorical” mindset was established. History and tradition were seen as tainted with a human, temporal element, whereas the church must be founded on the spiritual, the transcendent, and the eternal (Childers et al., 2002).

The problem is that unlike in many other religions, history is central to the Christian faith because God throughout the Bible emerges in historical events (Childers et al., 2002). Christianity cannot be reduced to set of patterns and practices. History helps people understand church tradition. When Churches of Christ develop this ahistorical

mindset, they become victims to repeating history all over again. Childers et al. (2002) stated,

Far from eliminating tradition this attitude forces tradition underground, where it operates freely, unidentified and unchecked. What was vital tradition becomes oppressive traditionalism. Traditions that grew out of specific circumstances are presumed to be absolute and eternal in their significance, making it difficult to distinguish practices at the core of God's will for a Christ-centered church from those that lie at the periphery. Such an attitude leads to sectarian divisions, as we exalt our patterns as fully divine, displaying an arrogant rejection of any who differ. Disrespecting our history in this way causes us to cling tightly to our traditions without recognizing them as such. We become traditionalists. And especially in times of cultural change, we are left without told to cope, retreating instead to a memory of the "good 'old days", rendering the heritage stale and wooden. (p. 57)

Theology in Black Churches of Christ

To understand theology in the Black Churches of Christ, one must understand how theology was developed among its White counterparts. Campbell's interpretation had its roots in the Enlightenment Enterprise that sought to free the Bible from sectarian strife by reading it scientifically (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Campbell's hermeneutic was Christocentric, believing that one should use the best contemporary methods of Bible translation, but always keep the focus on a heart-felt relationship to Christ. This viewpoint would prevent Campbell's hermeneutic from becoming fixed and legalistic (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Campbell's followers, toward the end of the 19th century, believed that to deal with the various issues being debated in the church, such as missionary societies, instrumental music, and Sunday Schools, they should develop a narrower hermeneutic. This hermeneutic focused more on what the Bible specifically authorizes. Biblical authorization came one of three ways: command, example, and necessary inference. If the New Testament did not command it, have an example of it, or necessarily infer it, then it was prohibited. This three-fold hermeneutic is commonly used

today in some Churches of Christ and it is how a legalistic pattern of righteousness by works was developed. Holloway and Foster (2006) pointed out,

This hermeneutic worked well in our formal debates with other churches. We were a debating people. Our minister debated Baptists over the order of baptism and salvation, Christian Churches over instrumental music...and numerous other groups over a variety of issues. As a result much of our theology in Churches of Christ was formed in controversy. Debating tended to push us to extremes in our doctrinal positions; we dare admit our opponents were correct on any point. Thus instead of emphasizing what we had in common with them for the sake of Christian unity, we focused exclusively on where we were distinct from others. This mentality—"we are not like them in these ways"—lead us to be even more isolated and exclusive. (p. 110)

This approach to scripture was inherited by African American members of the Church of Christ. White leaders in the Churches of Christ helped shape the beliefs and values of their Black counterparts. J. W. Atkisson, a White leader in the Churches of Christ, linked the believers' relationship to the missionary society and instrumental music in worship to their relationship with Christ (Robinson, 2008). A staunch opposition to missionary societies, which Womack inherited from White cohorts, was transmitted to Keeble. Keeble began to adopt the biblical hermeneutics of White preachers. Keeble carried the rejection of missionary societies and musical instruments through evangelistic endeavors across the New South (Robinson, 2008). Keeble's evangelistic efforts were financially supported by White brethren who helped shaped the pastor's practice and pedagogy. Keeble had no formal training, had attended no seminaries, and had only a grade-school education. Keeble's religious education was completely informal.

Keeble's theology, absorbed fundamentally from White leaders in Churches of Christ and reflected in sermons, eventually formed the theological platform from which southern African American Churches of Christ emerged (Robinson, 2008, p. 56). Keeble held a high view of scripture, placing the Bible and the Holy Spirit on the same plane.

Refuting Pentecostals who claimed the working of the Holy Ghost was independent of God's word, Keeble believed that the word of God was inseparable from His Spirit, stemming from the influence of White church restorationists: Campbell, Fanning, and Lipscomb. In a 1843 debate with the Presbyterian theologian Rice, Campbell affirmed: "the conversion and sanctification, the Spirit of God operates on persons only through the word [sic]" (Campbell, 1844). Keeble and other Black leaders emphasized this argument in their frequent confrontations with Pentecostalism. Pentecostal teaching argued that certain miraculous spiritual gifts (such as healing and speaking in tongues) were extended to the modern church. Keeble believed the Bible taught the cessation of such gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). "Certainly Keeble and other African American preachers in Churches of Christ absorbed Campbellian rationalism, which denounced *emotionalism* and placed the highest value on reading scripture almost as a scientific textbook" (Robinson, 2008, p. 58).

This belief shaped the current climate and culture of African American Churches of Christ, which continue to employ a patternistic approach to the scriptures. Stone-Campbell leaders attempted to frame their purposes around the idea of discarding all practices or beliefs not specially found in New Testament language: "We speak where the bible speaks, and are silent where the bible is silent" became the platform for biblical practices and pedagogy. Seeking to discard traditions they developed on their own was problematic (Robinson, 2008).

Keeble also censured clergymen who elevated emotionalism above the reading of scripture. Keeble's understanding of scripture molded Keeble's ecclesiology (Robinson, 2008). Like most of Keeble's mentors, Black and White, Keeble linked the New

Testament church with the Churches of Christ in the United States. Although exalting the Church of Christ, Keeble denounced denominational organizations as lacking scriptural endorsements. Keeble believed Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and other groups who deviated from the biblical written word were not Christians; only members of the Church of Christ comprised the one true church. Although Keeble believed the doctrine of exclusive salvation for members of the Church of Christ, not all agreed with this interpretation of scripture. Some in the fellowship felt uncomfortable with this denunciation of their religious neighbors, yet Keeble insisted that this was the biblical way (Robinson, 2008).

Keeble's and other Black leaders in Churches of Christ, teaching of exclusive salvation, led to the religious and cultural isolation of this religious group. African American members of the Churches of Christ became separated from Black religious communities and culture, rendering them unable to fully connect with larger issues of social justice.

Robinson (2008) recalled Keeble's sermon: "Five steps to the Church and Seven Steps to Heaven," in which listeners were grouped in spiritual darkness:

And so it is with masses of the people at large today, the preacher gets up and preaches. He takes his text in the Bible and he leaves it pretty and into the cemetery he goes. He preaches your mother's, fathers' and all your dead kinfolks' funeral and Oh! The shouting that takes place over that old cemetery gospel. That's not in the Bible. And you have your mouth wide open sitting in the churches like these birds, only you are blind spiritually and, like the birds, you don't know what you are eating. You are in a serious predicament. Had you been reading, you would have been in a Bible church. Had you been reading, they would have never gotten you to the mourners' bench. Had you been reading, you would have never prayed for pardon. Had you been reading you would never have got up and told that tale that Jesus told you "Go in peace and sin no more." You made that stuff up on account of not reading. (p. 58)

One of the motivations for Keeble's evangelistic work was driven by his other-worldly perspective (Robinson, 2008).

African American churches in the early twentieth century tended to have compensatory or otherworldly concerns and at the same time, political preoccupations. The former focused on heaven, the world unseen beyond this visible world; the latter addressed political issues and social injustice faced by blacks on a daily basis. (Robinson, 2008)

Keeble's focus was on the world to come, which led him to downplay current issues of racial injustice and civil rights. One of Keeble's favorite hymns was Hold to God's Unchanging Hand (1904),, composed by Eiland. This hymn was born in the Jim Crow era. It signified an era of legalized racial and social oppression of African Americans in the U.S. South:

Time is filled with swift transition,
Naught of earth unmoved shall stand,
Build your hopes on things eternal,
Hold to God's Unchanging Hand!
Covet not this world's vain riches,
That so rapidly decay,
Seek to gain the heav'nly treasures,
They shall never pass away!
When your journey is completed,
If to God you have been true,
Fair and bright the home in glory,
Your enraptured soul shall view.

The hymn exemplified the feelings of Keeble and shaped the value system of the plain and simple, nonmaterialistic, African American Churches of Christ (Robinson, 2008). Keeble's mentor (and parent-in-law) Womack had taught Keeble to depreciate material, social, and political matters and to focus on "things eternal and heav'nly treasures," emphasizing the essentiality of other-world priorities (Robinson, 2008, p. 20). Keeble's humble worldview would shape his mentees to outwardly conform to the same

nonmaterialistic position, further distinguishing them from their denominational counterparts.

Summary

A sociological perspective about Black Churches of Christ set the appropriate context for discussion about its evolution in the United States. Challenges to the pedagogy and practices of African American Churches of Christ in the 21st century has brought about historical shifts in century-old ways of “doing church.” The emergence of a new generation of scholars, pastors, and preachers have challenged the ahistorical approach of their predecessors. New scholarship seeks to understand more clearly a church history not written on the pages of inspiration. This is important because understanding how one arrived helps in understanding who one is and where one is going. This study provided members of the African American Church of Christ with a historical and sociological context for current pedagogy and practices. This study fills gaps that current teaching in the African American Churches of Christ does not provide. This analysis explains why certain practices are performed and the impact on church life as a whole.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of Purpose

This study (a) sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions experienced by members of a predominately African American Church of Christ and how they have been influenced by their current worship traditions, (b) to provide a counterstory for congregants to explain their worship experiences in Black churches of Christ through qualitative interviews, and (c) explore religious theology in the Churches of Christ and its impact on specific worship practices and interactions in the Black church community.

Research Design and Methodology

This research used qualitative, open-ended interviews of members of a local African American Church of Christ. Creswell (2005) stated,

Qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. (p. 39)

Specifically, I sought to describe the experiences and perceptions of members of a local congregation. This research was used to explain why they chose to become members, how they felt about the style of worship, and allowed them to use their own voice through interviews to explain what happens during a worship experience.

I conducted a case study using a qualitative approach. A case study is a study in which the researcher explores a program, an event, an activity, or a process of one or more individuals in depth. A case study is a holistic inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2008). An explanatory case

study is used to explore causation to find underlying principles. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data-collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). This research was an explanatory case study, highlighting a few events to show what a particular situation was like. The objective of an explanatory case study is to make esoteric topics known to readers by providing common language.

There is a disagreement about the role of theory in a case study. Stake (1995) said theory can be absent from case studies. Yin (1994) believed that a theoretical framework could be used to *guide* a case study in an exploratory way. Creswell (1994) described that theory is developed in the case study and is used toward the end of the study, comparing it with other theories. In this study, however, theory was used at the beginning to give structure to the research questions. The theoretical framework discussed assisted in filtering and organizing the data received.

Opponents of case studies believe they cannot offer grounds for establishing reliability or generalizability of findings due to the study of a small number of examples. Others opine that case studies expose the researcher to bias, due to intense exposure during the investigation, and dismiss it as only an exploratory tool (Creswell, 1994).

This case study allowed me to explore the pedagogy of the Churches of Christ in a natural setting and advocate for a transformation of religious practices in the African American Churches of Christ. An extensive review and analysis of religious books, articles, periodicals, and worship observations was also implemented for this study. Religious journals can enable a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants. As written evidence, it saves the researcher the time and expense of

transcribing (Creswell, 2003). Analyzing audiovisual material was an unobtrusive method of collecting data and provided an opportunity for participants to share their reality (Creswell, 2003). I believe that the methodology of a case study along with a historical analysis was the best approach to exploring this cultural phenomenon.

Population and Sample

This study concerning religious influence occurred at the Delta Bay Church of Christ. The Delta Bay Church of Christ is a newly formed congregation located in northern California. The congregation is predominately African American and currently consists of 160 members. The Delta Bay Church of Christ was selected because it is a relatively young congregation filled with members who desire cultural and communal relevance. Their desire to effectively engage its community often contradicts the traditions of its denominational ties.

The Delta Bay Church of Christ was started in the fall of 2007 as an off shoot of a local more traditional African American congregation. A group of 20 members decided to form a new congregation that better met the needs of the community. The Delta Bay Church of Christ was started as a form of sociocultural resistance to the established power structure. The congregation was started and did not receive denominational monetary support. Local leaders of the Churches of Christ often discouraged the work. As the Delta Bay Church of Christ began to flourish, it began to implement nontraditional approaches to ministry. The Delta Bay congregation became focused on its home-based cell groups as it emphasized meaningful relationships. These nontraditional approaches proved successful and the congregation began to attract those who did not attend church. Local congregationalists who did not like the nontraditional methods of ministry would

often threaten disfellowship. The Churches of Christ however are nondenominational; as a result there is no governing board of directors that determine church fellowship. All local congregations among Churches of Christ are autonomous. Therefore all decisions pertaining to church discipline are made separately by the leadership of each local congregation. The leadership of the Delta Bay Church of Christ currently consists of a Pastor/Minister, three deacons, and a vision team leader. The Delta Bay church currently has several functioning operations that include ministries for youth, married couples, community outreach and assistance, health, and music.

For the first 4.5 years, Delta Bay Church of Christ worshipped in various locations: community centers, school cafeterias, and residential locations. At the beginning of 2012, Delta Bay Church of Christ found a church building in Pittsburg, CA. In November 2013, the Delta Bay Congregation found another church building. Its Sunday morning worship celebration begins at 10AM, Wednesday Night Bible Class begins at 7pm, and home-based cell groups are held on Sundays at 3pm. This study examined its current congregational pedagogy and practice to reveal traditions that may help or hinder growth of this assembly.

Instrumentation

I interviewed six members of the congregation ranging from ages 30 to 77. This large age range allowed me to capture the insight of members from various generations. I asked questions concerning the extent traditional religious theology impacts worship styles. The following research questions guided the study: (a) What perceptions do congregants have the about the Sunday sermon? (b) What perceptions do congregants have about exclusive a cappella singing in the worship setting? (c) What perceptions do

members have about weekly communion? I searched for common themes of religious traditions and theology unique to the Churches of Christ.

The interviews were informal, conversational interviews. I guided the questions and focused the study. Experiences were described in terms that were familiar to those being interviewed. The cultural interview focused on the norms, values, understandings, and the informal rules of behavior belonging to the group or society (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

After interviewing six congregants, I reached saturation, in that no new information was forthcoming. Participants were sought through a selective process that prioritized diversity based on age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and experience in the Churches of Christ. Participants had to meet the following criteria:

- Present status as a current and active member of the Churches of Christ.
- Has attended worship services on a consistent basis (at least 75% of available services)
- Willingness to participate in one-on-one recorded interviews
- Willingness to complete a background profile to establish demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, and years of service.

Further, participants had to be familiar with the practices of the Churches of Christ. Actual participants were selected based on their availability to be interviewed. I was interested in participants who were available to fully participate in the research and who had knowledge of traditions associated with the Churches of Christ.

Written approval was sought from each participant for liability and confidentiality purposes. Prior to commencement of the research, permission was obtained from the

academic review board with jurisdiction over the University of San Francisco's International and Multicultural program for Doctoral Studies on working with human subjects. Additionally, participants were provided with a debriefing about the results of the study. This was arranged as a focus group with a number of participants and individually. I depended on recorded interviews, transcripts, and participant profiles for accuracy in describing participant experiences. Although specific questions were asked during interviews to establish context, the methods of the interview were similar to those used by Babbie (2004, p. 300): "A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (p. 300).

Broad questions were asked to assist in developing an overall profile on each participant; to seek a deeper understanding of how participating in a Church of Christ worship affected the participant. A written demographic profile was also completed for each participant to obtain data related to age, years of membership, ethnicity, and gender for subsequent analysis. All interviews were recorded. I sought clarification from each participant during the interview by restating key areas for a complete understanding, as well as analyzing interview transcripts from the recordings. The interviews started with participants describing a typical Sunday morning worship experience. The interviews happened after a Sunday morning experience to capture immediate impressions.

Human-Subjects Protection

Prior to collecting fieldwork data, I submitted the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board (IRBPHS) application for approval to conduct research on

human subjects. I followed the IRBPHS guidelines for conducting research, including anonymity of participants who sought confidentiality.

Background of the Researcher

I am a graduate of Pepperdine University where I received a bachelor's degree in telecommunications. I also have a master's degree in sociology from the California State University at Bakersfield. Continuing my commitment to traditionally underserved populations in education, I have been an urban educator since 2000. I have taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in Bakersfield, San Francisco, and Sacramento. I have worked as a school-based family advocate at West Oakland Middle School and a counselor with the Antioch Unified School District. Currently I serve as a minister in a predominately African American Church of Christ, where I have ministered for the last 10 years. I was born and raised in this religious movement. My background as a member of the Churches of Christ helped me discern religious patterns of behavior that maybe indiscernible to others. I am aware of my extensive background in the Churches of Christ, which I believe served to my advantage in this study.

Data Collection

Creswell (2005) defined data collection as a “means identifying and selecting individuals for a study, obtaining their permission to be studied, and gathering information by administering instruments through asking people questions or observing their behaviors” (p. 589). Further Creswell (2005) elaborated that data collection in qualitative research consists of “collecting data using forms with general, emerging questions to permit the participant to generate responses; (2) gathering word (text) or image (picture) data; and (3) collecting information from a small number of individuals

or sites” (p. 47). Data collection for case studies can be tedious because one is gathering information from a number of sources. Systematic organization is crucial for the researcher to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

I have analyzed various books written by scholars in the Churches of Christ that address the development of Church of Christ theology and the pedagogy and practice of Black congregations from a sociological standpoint. I also analyzed various news journals associated with the Churches of Christ such as *The Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Chronicle*. I collected sermon transcripts, tracts, debates, and journals from congregational databases, websites, and archives of White and Black congregations. In this congregation, I looked for evidence of traditional Church of Christ pedagogy and African American Church of Christ culture.

This study required voluntary, open-ended qualitative interviews with current members of the Delta Bay Church of Christ. These participants were solicited through direct networking with church leaders or from personal knowledge of members who attend worship services on a regular basis. Upon initial contact with a participant, I prescreened each person to verify they met the prerequisites required to volunteer in the study. I compiled a complete list was compiled of all interested parties. Selected participants were briefed about how their confidentiality was to be protected and the required treatment of human subjects in a research setting.

I recorded and transcribed all interviews. The two topical themes—traditional Church of Christ pedagogy and African American Church of Christ Culture—were coded when interpreting text. Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes are attached to

“chunks” of varying size: words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Secondary themes were examined in the text with the objective of analysis induction. Repetition across texts were noted with emphasis on repeated ideas, beliefs, concerns, and issues. Data analysis was based on data reduction and interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Tesch, 1990). Themes were developed and analyzed that allowed the organization of topical areas. Themes were compared, contrasted, and connected to explore the researched phenomenon. I took a holistic approach to interpretation, attempting to keep data in context.

I kept observational notes, divided between descriptive and reflective notes. The descriptive notes described portraits of participants, a reconstruction of the dialogue, a description of the physical setting, and accounts of particular events or activities (Creswell, 2008). Reflective notes provided my personal thoughts, such as “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 121). The advantages to field observations were usefulness in exploring a topic that maybe uncomfortable for participants to discuss in an interview setting (Creswell, 2008). A disadvantage to field observation is that it reduces meanings to what is observable and at times fails to capture the true nature of social behavior.

An extensive review and analysis of religious books, articles, debates, online videos, and sermon observations was the method used for this study. Religious journals can enable a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants. As written evidence, they save the researcher the time and expense of transcribing (Creswell, 2008).

Analyzing audiovisual material is also an unobtrusive method of collecting data and provides an opportunity for participants to share in their reality (Creswell, 2008).

Written transcripts of interview responses (counterstories) formed the foundation often used in CRT qualitative research to examine institutional racial culture through the following research questions:

Research Question #1: To what extent has traditional religious pedagogy in the Churches of Christ impacted worship styles at the Delta Bay Church of Christ?

1. How long have you been a member of the Church of Christ?
2. Did you first experience this faith tradition as a child or as an adult?
3. What attracted you to the services of the Churches of Christ?
4. Are you familiar with Stone–Campbell (American Restoration) Movement?
5. Who was Alexander Campbell? And what contribution did he make to the formation of the Churches of Christ today as we know them?
6. Do you believe that the Church of Christ is the one true church? If so why?
7. Do you fear excommunication or the loss of your salvation if you do not agree with the main teachings of the Churches of Christ? If so why? If not why?
8. Do you believe that Churches of Christ are truly dedicated to the cause of social justice in the community?
9. Do you feel that the Churches of Christ do everything according to how it is done in the scriptures? Why or why not?
10. Is there anything you were taught in Churches of Christ as a sinful practice that you do not believe is clearly spelled out in scripture? Give a specific example.

Research Question #2: What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have about aspects of traditional Sunday worship?

A. What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have on various topics?

1. Would you feel comfortable inviting a friend to worship? Do you believe the friend would return? If so why? If not why?
2. Do feel comfortable displaying aspects of emotion during worship service?
3. How do you feel about women leading prayer?
4. Do you feel that gifts of women are utilized properly in the worship service?
5. What are perceptions about the way money is collected in the Churches of Christ?
6. In your opinion is there an over or under emphasis on money collected during worship?
7. What are your perceptions about the weekly communion services
8. Do you feel connected to other members during the communion service?
9. Do you prefer sitting or standing during a communion service?

B. What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have about the content of and context of the Sunday sermon?

1. What makes sermons preached in the Churches of Christ distinct from other sermons in African American churches?

2. In the Churches of Christ what is the 'Plan of Salvation' and do you believe it is still necessary to give after every sermon? Why or why not?
 3. Do you feel that weekly sermons focus a lot on doctrinal teachings of the Churches of Christ?
- C. What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have about acappella singing in the worship setting?
1. What was your first reaction to acapella singing?
 2. What do you enjoy most about the acapella singing?
 3. What do you least enjoy about the acapella singing?
 4. During the worship services do your prefer the older hymns or the newer praise and worship songs and why?
 5. Do you prefer one song director or a 'praise team' and why?
 6. How do you feel about women leading songs?
 7. Do you feel that instrumental music during the worship is sinful?

Data Analysis

Creswell (2005) said, "In qualitative research, because the data consists of words or pictures, a different approach exists for data analysis" (p. 49). Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research data involves text analysis, development of descriptions and themes, and an interpretation that "consists of stating the larger meaning of the findings (Creswell, 2005, p. 48). Through qualitative interviews, this research identified broad themes in storytelling and looked for trends in what participants talked about most. The themes developed were driven by the type of description each participant painted of a traditional Sunday-morning worship service. An interpretation of these themes was

developed by using a BLT framework in addressing the pedagogy and practices of the African American Churches of Christ, which included how members could understand the origins of church traditions and how they could employ certain aspects for spiritual growth and awareness.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The study investigated the exploration and the development of religious education in Black Churches of Christ and how that legacy shapes current practices and traditions. The study explored the perceptions of the worship of an African American Church of Christ. The interview discussions ranged from reasons for becoming a member of the Churches of Christ to why they placed membership at Delta Bay. The interviews also focused on participants' knowledge of traditional doctrines of the Churches of Christ, their perceptions of the practices and pedagogy of the Churches of Christ, and their observations of the Delta Bay Church of Christ in contrast to more traditional congregations.

The findings are arranged in the following manner: A profile of each participant is provided, including demographic, educational, and religious-background information. Next, the findings of the interviews are discussed pertaining to each participant. Finally, responses to interview questions are organized in thematic fashion, using corroborating quotations from participants. Chapter 4 closes with a summary.

Participant Profile

This study focused on participants who are active members of the Delta Bay Church of Christ who are actively involved in ministry and have attended the congregation for more than a year. All but one participant identified themselves as African American; there was one Caucasian. They live in the San Francisco Bay Area and come from various socioeconomic backgrounds. A profile of each participant is

provided. Participants are presented in alphabetical order, based on first names. To protect the confidentiality of each participant, only first names and the first initial of the last name are used.

Chris P.

Chris is a 31-year-old recent graduate of the University of Phoenix. He has a bachelor of science in psychology. Chris is from Miami Florida but went to high school in Pittsburg, CA. Chris became a member of Delta Bay 4 years ago. He heard about the church through a friend and enjoyed the relational aspect. Chris was adopted as a child and really enjoys the family atmosphere. Chris was not raised in the Churches of Christ and came to this faith tradition as an adult. However, Chris was still an active church attendee, attending other denominations. At Delta Bay Church of Christ, Chris is a diligent Bible teacher and student preacher. He was recently married while attending Delta Bay and he and his wife are active members.

Crystal P.

Crystal P. is 30 years old and is majoring in education at the University of Phoenix. She is currently on sabbatical from school. She is from Antioch, CA and is the product of an interracial union (her mother is White and her father is Black). She was raised by her mother and was instrumental in bringing her to the Delta Bay Church of Christ in 2012. Crystal was raised in a different denomination. During that time both Crystal and her mother became preachers at their local church. Crystal's first husband was a member of the Church of Christ, which led her to Delta Bay Church of Christ. She has been at Delta Bay since its inception in 2007. She has been divorced since then and has recently remarried a childhood friend with whom she become reacquainted at Delta

Bay Church of Christ. Crystal teaches women's classes and described herself as a strong Bible student. She is a mother of two children.

Karl B.

Karl is a 53-year-old married man with three sons. He is a former minister in the Churches of Christ with almost 20 years preaching experience. He served as the senior minister of Churches of Christ in Los Angeles and Charlotte, North Carolina. He is a graduate of Arizona State and is currently working as a financial advisor. Karl became a member of the Churches of Christ as an undergraduate in Arizona. He moved to the Bay area several years ago from North Carolina for job reasons. Since leaving North Carolina he has left the ministry. Karl, his wife, and his two grown sons now attend the Delta Bay Church of Christ. Karl came to Delta Bay Church of Christ over a year ago because he liked the direction of the congregation and the religious freedom it expressed. He currently serves as a mentor, a spiritual advisor to the minister of Delta Bay Church of Christ, and also occasionally preaches to relieve the pastor.

Monte G.

Monte G. is 58 year-old White woman from Oregon. Monte is a college graduate with a teaching and administrative credential. She currently works as the principal of a local multiracial elementary school of more than 700 students. Monte was born and raised in the Church of Christ faith tradition. The church attended growing up was racially separated from the predominately African American Churches of Christ. Monte came to the Delta Bay Church of Christ 4 years ago when she moved to Antioch, CA for her job. Monte is a Bible teacher and describes herself as rooted in the Word of God. She

also sings on the Delta Bay Church of Christ praise team. Monte is single and is the mother of one adult child.

Myron B.

Myron is 33 years old. He came to Delta Bay Church of Christ 4 years ago as the minister of music. His mother and stepfather raised Myron in the south Bay. Both of Myron's parents are strong members of the Church of Christ. Myron was raised in the Church of Christ from birth. Myron has always had a strong background in music. His mother was a singer and his biological father was a local musician. Myron has been singing in a capella music groups most of his life. He is the director of the Delta Bay praise team and has been instrumental in its unique musical development. Since he has been at Delta Bay Church of Christ, he has gotten married and is father of a small daughter and three older stepchildren. Myron also currently serves as a deacon at Delta Bay Church of Christ.

Jean S.

Jean S. is 78 years old. She was born and raised in the U.S. South. She was also born and raised in the Churches of Christ and remembers clearly the racism that existed in the religious movement. She grew up in the Jim Crow South and experienced marked discrimination from White Churches of Christ. Jean was a decorated and accomplished singer who earned a music scholarship to Southwestern Christian College in the early 1950s. Southwestern Christian College is a historical Black college associated with the Churches of Christ in Terrell, TX. Jean graduated and went on to become a community activist in the Bay area. She has been divorced for many years and is now retired, living with her children and grandchildren. Jean was a founding of Delta Bay Church of Christ

and is its oldest member. Affectionately known as “Gran Gran,” Jean serves as a mentor to many of the young people who attend. She is still an active member and loves Delta Bay Church of Christ for its ability to express itself culturally.

Each participant was open and thoughtful during the interview and provided in-depth data related to the research questions. The following sections summarize the major findings for each research question, organized by themes that emerged from the data.

Findings: Research Question 1

The first research question in the study was, To what extent has traditional religious pedagogy in the Churches of Christ impacted worship styles at the Delta Bay Church of Christ? This question sought to understand the religious background of each participant and how that background influenced their perceptions of worship and impacted the worship styles of the Delta Bay Church of Christ. The major themes that were coded were traditional Church of Christ pedagogy and African American church culture. The subthemes that emerged from the collected data were Truth, Doctrine, Instrumental Music, and Salvation. These subthemes will be discussed as to their influence on the Delta Bay congregation as well as in a historical context.

Truth

When reflecting on what first attracted them to the Churches of Christ, the first theme that emerged was an emphasis on biblical truth. Participants believed their initial experience in the Churches of Christ provided them with an opportunity to study the Bible in ways that had not before been available to them. Everything had to be done according to the scriptures and seeking the truth appeared to be of the utmost importance. Three of the six participants came to the Churches of Christ as adults. Karl, who came to

the Churches of Christ as a college undergraduate, commented, “What first attracted me to the Churches of Christ was that you were able to ask the preacher Bible questions.”

Chris, who was introduced to the Churches of Christ through Delta Bay Church of Christ, expressed a similar sentiment:

I came from churches where preachers did not have emphasis on the Word, they would have give a bible passage in the beginning of their sermons and never go back to explain it. What I loved about the Delta Bay Church of Christ was there was an emphasis on explaining the truth of the bible.

Seeking the truth of God’s word was perceived as a hallmark of most Churches of Christ. The Churches of Christ were born from the American Restoration Movement, which sought to restore the 1st-century pattern of Christianity (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Crystal, who was introduced to the Churches of Christ by her first husband, noted, “The Churches of Christ offered an insight to scripture that I had not been offered in previous denominations.” She noted that she learned more about the Bible in the first month of attending a Church of Christ than she ever had in her previous churches. Crystal further commented,

There where [religious practices] that we did that, I never understood why we did. When I was baptized into the Churches of Christ, I gained a greater understanding of why we do things. Everything that we practiced had to be justified in scripture or it had no place in our religious lives.

The three participants—Myron, Jean, and Monte—who grew up in the Churches of Christ all emphasized the importance of the truth. The truth was something they were all taught to value growing up. Biblical accuracy and doing Bible things the Bible way was emphasized in their congregational upbringing. Jean, who was brought up in the Churches of Christ in the 1930s and 1940s noted, “We were taught to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.” Jean, who is a second-generation member of the Church of Christ, grew up in a racially segregated

congregation. She noted that among the African American churches of Christ, staying with the truth is at the core of their fellowship.

Of particular note, Monte who was raised in a predominately White Church of Christ, echoed the same sentiment as Jean. Monte, who is a third-generation member of the Churches of Christ, remembered a congregation where staying with the truth of God's word was vital to the church's identity. Monte noted, "I would say the thing that attracted me the most about Church of Christ is their study habits. They really get into the word of God." Even across racial and geographical lines in the Churches of Christ, preserving the truth of God's WORD was of prime importance.

Myron, who at 33, is two generations younger than Jean and a generation younger than Monte, also voiced the same response about the truth. "We were taught to stay in the word, but we were taught that we were right at the expense of every other religious denomination to be wrong." Myron noted that in his pursuit to preserve the truth, he had been taught that he no longer sought it. Crystal also noted, "I noticed that when I was introduced to the Churches of Christ, I believed I knew everything I needed to know about the Bible to go to heaven, so I stopped studying." This led to Crystal becoming "Pharisaical." She felt she had to establish her "rightness" at the cost of everyone else being wrong.

Doctrine

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the emphasis on doctrine. Doctrine is defined as the teaching of the Bible. In the context of the Church of Christ, doctrine is defined as the teachings that are deemed essential for one's salvation. Because many in the Churches of Christ believed they correctly restored 1st-century Christianity,

many believe their practices are equated to precise biblical doctrine. The doctrines of the Churches of Christ were seen as essential biblical elements to salvation. The common doctrines taught by those who came into the Churches of Christ were Instrumental Music, Salvation, Weekly Communion, and Women's Roles. Jean was raised to believe that the right beliefs on these subjects were essential to salvation. Chris was the only member who came to the Churches of Christ through the Delta Bay congregation and was not taught that way. The others echoed Jean's sentiment.

Instrumental Music

The participants were taught there were wrong beliefs that could keep one from Heaven. The first was the Church of Christ doctrine on instrumental music. When asked do you believe that instrumental music is a sin, Monte responded,

No. I used to. I believe that—there's verses in the Bible that teach you that whatever your heart is confident with God, that that's the practice you can have and that you should be okay with that. But I also believe that, you know, there are lessons about being submissive to others that you need to also pay attention to. So it's something that would have to be a group decision, I think. But, you know, it's not something I would divide a church over. I would just simply say whatever you believe the practice should be but I don't believe that it's wrong to have instrumental music anymore, not anymore. That's what I believe right now. Who knows what I'll believe next week.

The traditional doctrine against instrumental music among Churches of Christ is based on two biblical New Testament passages: Ephesians 5:19: "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord***" King James version). The other passage is Colossians 3:16: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.***" Myron quoted these two passages, emphasizing "singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord," taught to justify a capella music and prohibit instruments in the

worship. The Churches of Christ adhered to the legislative view of scripture, which states that silence is equated to prohibition (Childers et al., 2006).

Myron stated that he was taught that instruments during worship were a sin but now is beginning to believe otherwise. “God is beginning to show me different in the scriptures as I look the whole context of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, certain things never added up to me.” Crystal, who came from an instrumental church, believed that it was a sin, but since coming to Delta Bay Church of Christ believes otherwise. “I was taught at another Church of Christ that instruments were sinful because they were not commanded by the New Testament Church.” Chris, who came to the Church of Christ through Delta Bay, was never taught that instruments were a sin. He does, however, appreciate what he feels are some of the advantages of a capella music:

In my old church it felt like the choir sung for you and the (instrumental) music would sometimes drown out the voices, at DBCoC everyone is encouraged to participate in the singing and as a result you feel more connected to the worship experience.

Karl, who was a once a minister in the Churches of Christ, used to teach that musical instruments during worship were sinful. Now, after further study, he no longer believes that. It was important to note that Jean, despite her nontraditional Church of Christ views on other subjects, believed that instrumental music was still a sin in worship. When asked if she still believed instrumental music was a sin she responded,

I do 'cause that's the way I've been taught. And I have read in the scriptures, you know, where in the temple they used instrumental music but it wasn't so much that they used it in a worship, okay? And I always think about the Levites, And then I think I've read where there were women in those groups, all right? So instruments just takes away from—you get so caught up into the instrument and it's so loud, it can get so loud, until you don't really hear voices. ... And without that instrument their voice got to come through loud and clear.

Of particular interest was her belief that instrumental music is a sin based on the teachings she had received years ago. It was not based a clear present exegetical understanding of the scriptures. The teaching had never been challenged; rather it was staunchly defended as “the faith.”

The discussion of whether to use instrumental music is not unique to the Churches of Christ. Zwingli and Calvin opposed the practice during the Reformation. In the United States, congregational churches did not use instruments until after the Revolutionary War (Holloway & Foster, 2006). The first instance of the practice of instrumental music in the Restoration (Stone–Campbell) Churches was in 1859 Midway, KY. The singing was said to be so bad that it frightened the rodents. The minister, Pinkerton (1812–1875), brought in a melodeon to aid the singing. Pinkerton was baptized by Campbell (1830), served in the Union army, and established an independent congregation for slaves in Midway, KY (1852). Pinkerton was regarded as the first liberal of the Stone Campbell Movement (Foster, 2005). Ironically the individual who introduced instrumental music to Restoration churches was an abolitionist from Kentucky who had served as a surgeon in the Union Army. Fellow southerners criticized the pastor for Union loyalties, yet Pinkerton remained steadfast to previous beliefs.

After the Civil War, many churches began to bring in instrumental music. Opposition to instruments in Restoration churches were primarily regional. Many churches in the U.S. South were opposed to instruments because after the Civil War many of the former confederate states lay in ruin while Northern churches had the economic means to purchase instruments. Others argued that instruments did not promote “spiritual worship” because too much emphasis was put on the beauty of the music *at the*

expense of glorifying God (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Instrumental music was accepted by some Restoration churches and opposed by others. Those who opposed instruments did so primarily on the basis of New Testament silence. Because the New Testament mentions singing and not the use of instruments, some viewed the practice as forbidden. The initial opposition by Restoration Churches was not based on a scriptural violation but on social mores.

Church leader B. Franklin first opposed instruments when they were introduced, demonstrating a bias against social elites. “Franklin opposed instruments because to him it seem to reflect the values of the rising middle class” (Hughes, 1996). Pinkerton, a contemporary of Franklin, was incensed with Franklin’s opposition of instruments because to it seemed to reflect the ignorance of the lower class. In an 1860 article that responded to Franklin’s opposition to instruments, Pinkerton wrote, “I am ready and willing to discuss the subject of instrumental music in churches with any man who can discriminate between railing in bad grammar and Christian argumentation” (Pinkerton, 1860, p. 410).

Restoration Churches that were not opposed to instruments believed they aided singing, just as hymnals, song leaders, and church buildings (none of which are not mentioned in New Testament scripture) help as well. Instrumental music became the most divisive issue in the Restoration Movement between the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church). This was perhaps because instruments were visible as one entered a worship service. It was one of the major issues that led to the split between the Disciples (Christian Church) and the Churches of Christ in 1906.

The Bible, however, never mentions a capella singing but it has much to say about musical instruments (Psalms 150). The Bible never says that instruments in the worship are unspiritual, nor is the practice condemned. The passages used to condemn it by some in the Churches of Christ (Ephesians 5:19 & Colossians 3:16) do not have a context in the public assembly. Myron stated,

After years of study I no longer believe instrumental music in worship to be a sin, I do however prefer acapella music because I enjoy the melodies. I now realize that you can enjoy a capella music without putting people who choose to worship with instruments in hell.

Salvation

Salvation was a topic that also came up during the interviews. When I asked if they believe that the Church of Christ is the one true church, everyone except Chris was taught that members of the Church of Christ were the only ones going to heaven and that salvation exclusively belonged to those in that fellowship. Crystal noted that it gave her a sense of superiority over other believers. The idea of an exclusive salvation made her feel special, privileged, but also pious. She stated, “Exclusive salvation was explained to me in a simplistic way and I was taught I was going to heaven not based on who I am but what I do.” Myron was also raised to believe only those in the Churches of Christ have salvation but now, due to recent study, questions what he has been taught.

Salvation is not in a place, but in a person and that person is Christ, when God revealed that in scripture to me I was both nervous and excited. I was nervous because [exclusive salvation] was all that I had known. I was taught to believe people who did not believe like me were going to hell, it might have been wrong but it was the foundation by which my [religious life] stood. If I was wrong on believing we were the only ones going to heaven, what else was I wrong about? I would have to go back and reexamine everything that I was taught. I was also excited because of the prospect of other people [outside of the Church of Christ] going to heaven. I am excited to think that I will see my grandmother one day in heaven because she died as a member of another denomination. (Myron)

Salvation, as taught to participants, could be both gained and lost. Salvation is gained when you obey the doctrine of Christ and lost when one deviates from the doctrine that is deemed to be essential (i.e., a capella music, weekly communion, etc.). The theme of a salvation line emerged from the interviews. A salvation line is a line that is created by rules and regulations that one considers to be essential to being saved. Once one crosses a point on the salvation line, their state of redemption is in jeopardy. All participants except Chris were taught at one point that there was a salvation line. The fear of crossing that line held members back from studying biblical doctrine that was seen as crossing that line. Salvation was seen as a ticket to heaven, not as a life process of becoming more Christ-like. Salvation was seen as a state, not a process of personal growth and transformation. Cone's (1997) soteriology (or study of salvation) reappraised the relationship between salvation and earthly pursuits of freedom and wholeness:

The historical character of liberation as an essential ingredient in salvation is also found in the New Testament. Jesus' message centered on the proclamation of liberation for the poor, and his exorcisms clearly illustrated that he viewed his ministry as engagement in battle with the powers of evil that hold people in captivity. The healing of the sick, feeding of the hungry, and giving sight to the blind meant that Jesus did not regard salvation as an abstract idea or a feeling of the heart. Salvation is the granting of physical wholeness in the concreteness of pain and suffering. (p. 135)

The theme that did not emerge was sanctification, the process of being set apart to do God's will. The Churches of Christ taught more about what to believe than how to live.

Findings: Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have about aspects of traditional Sunday worship? The major theme coded was for aspects of African American Church Cultural Expression. The subthemes that emerged were Weekly Communion, Cultural Expressions of Worship, Hand

Clapping, and Congregational Singing Praise Teams. These subthemes are discussed in regard to their influence on the Delta Bay Congregation as well as in a historical context.

Weekly Communion

Communion was a theme that emerged from participants. They described their worship experience differently in the Church of Christ because of the emphasis on weekly communion. Myron noted, “Weekly communion was taught as a practice that we have as a part of the five acts of worship.” In the Churches of Christ, the five acts of worship are described as singing, praying, preaching, giving, and communion. Weekly Communion is taught as part of the biblical pattern for scriptural accuracy. Without weekly communion, the Sunday-morning service is considered deficient.

Chris, who came from another denomination that observed communion on a monthly basis, noted, “I don’t think it’s wrong to take communion monthly but I like the fact that Delta Bay takes it on a weekly basis because we are able to commune with God and others more frequently.” The Delta Bay congregation took communion differently from most Churches of Christ. For three years Delta Bay Church of Christ would take the communion meal in intimate small groups instead of taking it corporately as a congregation. The reason was to try and capture the intimacy of Jesus and His disciples in the upper room and as he communed with them (Matthew 26:26-29). According to the New Testament, when Jesus shared the meal with His disciples, he was able to make eye contact with everyone at the table and share the meaning of the meal. There was an atmosphere of closeness and community in that room and that intimacy may be lost when congregations take the sacrament in rows. Taking communion in rows makes the meal seem more about the individual and not about the whole. Communion was not ordained

by Jesus to be taken individually, but with others. Members who took communion in rows seemed to be like islands, isolated from others, together while alone. Communion became routine and ritualistic, losing its intended meaning.

The small groups practiced by Delta Bay put the community back into communion. This allowed members to connect more because of the perception that the way to get closer to God is to allow members to get closer to one another. Members were able to share what communion meant to them among family and friends to whom they have grown close. Small groups for communion were made available for the old as well as the young. These groups allowed the Delta Bay Church of Christ to experience communion in a new way.

The Delta Bay congregation, in November, 2013, obtained a larger facility and no longer could hold communion in small groups. The congregation recently went back to taking communion corporately. Crystal noted the change: “I enjoy our current communion services but I miss the intimacy our small groups. I loved they way we would get into a circle and actively participate. I felt closer to those I took communion with.”

Monte noted the difference at Delta Bay from other Churches of Christ:

In the weekly communion service in Delta Bay, I love them because they’re about community. They’re about togetherness and connection and remembering what Jesus did for us but in a more family intimate way as opposed to just, “Here, pass a plate and let’s get this part of the service over with,” as I’ve seen in—or felt like in many congregations.

Karl did not mind the change back to corporate communion but added that the brief video shown before communion gets his mind in the right place. Jean noted that communion at the Delta Bay Church of Christ is welcoming but places the emphasis on it being weekly: “Well, I grew up believing that on the first day of the week we’re to have communion in order to commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.”. For

Jean, her early teaching instructed her that communion must happen every Sunday for worship to be complete.

The traditional justification of weekly communion in the Churches of Christ is found in Acts 20:7, which states: “Upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preach on til the morrow and continued his speech until midnight.” The passage in Acts chapter 20 that is used to mandate weekly communion is based on an inference. This traditional hermeneutical approach to scripture was adopted by White brethren who instituted the command–example–necessary inference approach to scripture. Acts 20:7 states that the early church met on a Sunday to commune, but it does not establish a weekly precedent. The fact that the early church took communion every week is not based on a *necessary* inference but a *sufficient* inference. The apostle Paul later wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:25, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, *as often as you drink it*, in remembrance of Me.” The scripture did not indicate how often one should commune, but the proper frame of mind to have when taking communion.

Cultural Expression in Worship

When discussing how worship should look, Brownlow (1945) commented,

It was also taught in that early day that man must worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24). Their worship, my friends, was very *simple and plain and sincere*. Their worship was not on the low level of *showmanship*; they did not appeal to the fans that patronize the vaudeville. Their worship rang with simplicity, sincerity, and humility. They were not trying to please themselves. They were trying to please the God they were worshipping.

Brownlow’s discussion of the simplicity of worship must be examined through a cultural lens. Brownlow was a product of a Great Depression southern Anglo-Saxon culture.

Brownlow’s values and view of how worship should look reflect the norms and traditions

of that upbringing. Many Churches of Christ, Black and White, feel an obligation to confirm to the pastor's culture and traditions as a scriptural mandate for all generations that followed. Some African American congregations in the 21st century still use Brownlow's book for congregational recruitment and retention. The impact of Brownlow's work on many African American congregations is noteworthy. Many Black Churches of Christ still feel the need in worship to conform to a cultural value system that leaves their community witness both powerless and ineffective. Congregants in these churches feel the pressure of a cultural imperialism that limited Blacks for generations. Many Black Churches of Christ do not feel it is biblical to express themselves culturally.

Hand Clapping

For instance, hand clapping is an issue about which some Black congregations still struggle. For a long time it was seen as a violation of the scriptural mandate for worship because it was thought clapping was another form of instrumental music. Clapping is also done in both secular and denominational settings, which made it a forbidden practice during the worship. Clapping is seen as done for entertainment purposes and showmanship, and these practices ought not to take place in the worship service. Jean, who has been a member of the Churches of Christ for over 60 years, stated she was taught not to express herself emotionally in worship.

Well, I get emotional because every Sunday I look around. I get very emotional now at Delta Bay because I'm so happy that God's presence is there, the spirit of God is with us, and I see it and I feel that, okay? *And I was taught not to*—that everything about the church built on faith and that's true too, but there are some feelings and I express myself tearfully a lot because I feel happy that I'm in the church, that I got up in the morning and got myself together and I'm sitting here praising God. Sometimes you may see my hands up. That's what I'm happy about and I will shed tears about that.

After coming to the Delta Bay Church of Christ, Jean felt liberated to express herself culturally. She was taught early in her upbringing that hand clapping was a sin. She no longer believes that, but her liberation is not without a cost. Many of her peers who have grown up in the Churches of Christ over the years do not agree with this stance. She candidly stated,

And when I share that information and clapping of hands and patting my feet, you know, you don't pat your feet in the Church of Christ. And when I do that, I had a sister, my oldest sister, in fact, told me she was going to withdraw from me because I sound like a Baptist. And when I try and bring up—I have learned to enjoy gospel music and denominational churches like the Baptist Church and others would sing them. And I enjoy that. I see how that music had a lot to bring about freedom and help Black people to pull their culture together and I appreciate that. But when I talk to my family, it's like we've gone Baptist. I mean, we're not supposed to listen to that kind of music. And that's how I grew up, you know, listening to the little school sounds, that the kids used to tease us about when we were going to school, when we were all in school. But I have learned to appreciate African American music and not feel that it's the wrong thing to really do, to sing.

Jean admitted she felt pressure from other Blacks in Churches of Christ to leave the Delta Bay congregation because of its violation of Church of Christ Norms. She was told that the Delta Bay Church of Christ was not really a Church of Christ because its atmosphere of emotionalism mirrored more the culture of a Baptist church. Jean, however, knew that the message was the same but the Delta Bay Church of Christ employed a worship methodology that would better engage the community. The Delta Bay Church of Christ is a congregation with a handful of seniors. Seniors at other congregations are typically rooted and some refuse to visit the Delta Bay congregation because of its new innovations. As a result, Jean is typically not around those who generationally grew up sharing her religious values. As the oldest member of the Delta Bay Church of Christ Jean sees herself as the link between the old and the new guard.

Constantly surrounded by young people, she is excited about where the church is going, while reminding younger members about where the church has been.

A new generation of African American believers are beginning to reject the Anglo-Saxon cultural norms of the 1940s in huge numbers. Crystal mentioned that when first coming to the Churches of Christ as an adult that she was afraid to display aspects of emotion. “The displays of emotion were considered ‘denominational’ and that is was I was taught to be delivered from.”

Evans, president of Southwestern Christian College (the only historically Black college in the United States associated with the Churches of Christ) cautioned members of this fellowship about excessive emotionalism (2002):

There are things we do in worship with members of our physical body that are not intrinsically wrong such as “patting the foot to the time of the tune,” but are made wrong when such emotional expressions become a superficial rite orchestrated by time-repetitiveness that has been prescribed (and preplanned) by the worship leaders. (p. 6)

Evans (2002), who since has been described as one of the most influential leaders of African American Churches of Christ, believed that clapping in the worship service is not wrong in itself when it emanates from an individual’s joy, but when orchestrated, with everyone will clap on cue, it become ritualistic and superficial (Evans, 2002). The same logic Evans used for excessive orchestrated emotionalism that becomes ritualistic can also be used for others aspects of the worship service that has become directed and routine such as communion, singing, and prayer. When one is taught in the Churches of Christ that worship is a five-step equation that simply must be conformed to in order to engage God, then the prescribed acts become ritualistic and superficial. One performs these weekly rituals to stay saved, not because one is saved.

One's performance of these worship acts are not only based on what one does, but on how one does them. If one performs these acts in a way that violates the cultural norms that have been established as biblical, then these acts are considered in vain by some in this fellowship. Evans (2002) admitted, "When one tries to tell another how to express his joy, he is as guilty as the one who orchestrates the clapping 'on cue' of others who have made the clapping a prescribed ritual." Worship should not be culturally regulated but too often it has been under the guise as scripture.

This practice of cultural regulation began as White brethren shaped their Black counterparts. Clear evidence exists of cultural regulation as Black Churches of Christ regulate each other using Eurocentric standards to measure faithfulness. African American congregations who worship "too Black" or demonstrate too much emotion are castigated in this fellowship as apostates.

Congregational Singing

For many years in the 20th century, Churches of Christ sang congregational a capella music with one male song director in front of the congregation. The song leader was responsible for selecting the appropriate songs and leading the congregation in that portion of the worship. The songs were typically selected from hymnals that contained music written by various composers. One of the most commonly hymnals used among Churches of Christ was *Sacred Selections*. Myron mentioned, "The Sacred Selections hymnal was commonly known as the red book, it was second in important to only the Bible." In the *Sacred Selections* hymnal were classics such as "At the Cross," "Love Lifted Me," and "When the Morning Comes." Many hymns contained in this book were

written in the 19th and early 20th century. The hymnal was composed by Crum in 1956 and is still used by Black Churches of Christ almost 60 years after it was composed.

Crum (1928–2011) was a Caucasian minister in the Churches of Christ who comprised these songs for the spiritual edification of saints but did not mean to use them as the spiritual standard of faithfulness for generations to come. Men and women of various faith traditions wrote these songs, and many of the songs use language that speaks to the culture of the times. For example, the song “When the Morning Comes” (1905) was written by Tindley (1851–1933), an African American Methodist minister born to a slave father and a free mother. Tindley spent childhood years among slave children. This song, written in the early 20th century, was shaped by the Jim Crow era Tindley experienced.

Trials dark on ev’ry hand,
and we cannot understand
All the ways that God would lead us
to that blessed Promised Land;
But He’ll guide us with His eye,
and we’ll follow till we die;
We will understand it better by and by.

As Tindley wrote, lyrics that spoke to the world in which he lived. The song offers an otherworldly perspective of hope and expectation. However, newer members of the Churches of Christ want to hear music that speaks to their generation. When asked by the participants which songs they preferred, older hymn or the newer praise and worship, four of six mentioned they preferred the newer songs because they felt the songs spoke to them. The two older participants, Jean and Monte, like songs of both genres. Myron, who is the Minister of Music said, “I don’t mind singing the older songs, as long as they are ‘remixed’ for a new generation.” One of the favorite songs of the Delta Bay Church of Christ is “I Give Myself Away,” written in 2007 by gospel artist McDowell, whose music

speaks to a new generation of believers. Myron arranged an a capella version of the song that often moves congregants to tears. Although McDowell is the lead pastor of Deeper Fellowship Church in Orlando, McDowell's music has transcended denominational lines and inspired many at the Delta Bay Church of Christ.

Praise Teams

A praise team among Churches of Christ consists of men (and sometimes women) who stand before the congregation to lead the congregation in song. The praise teams were not designed to serenade the congregation but to lead each section in its parts. For 3 years, the Delta Bay Church of Christ has adopted praise teams into its worship to enhance singing. The Delta Bay Church of Christ praise team consists of men and women (Black and White), singers in their teens, 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. These individuals lead the congregation in weekly praise. Praise and worship at the Delta Bay congregation has been described by participants as moving and inspirational. Although, the congregation has chosen for singing to remain a capella, the decision has not had a negative effect on members. Crystal mentioned, "I have no problem with praise teams; the only thing that offends me is bad singing."

After the praise team was implemented, reaction from the congregation was mostly positive, however the reaction from other local African American Churches of Christ were mixed. Other Black congregants opined that because praise teams are not specifically prescribed in scripture, the practice is sinful. Other congregants believed that praise teams were acceptable as long as they did not include women. This was seen by some participants as an example of intracongregational regulation, when members of one congregation attempt to regulate pedagogy and practices of another congregation. This

practice occurs frequently among some African American congregations, as each congregation believes they have arrived at a point of scriptural accuracy.

Intracongregational regulation exists on a national level. In 2002, Evans (2002) wrote about praise teams:

Worship expressions are abused when any church decides that a small group within that church can render one or more of these expressions of worship for the whole congregation. The “choir” has presented the music over years in denominational congregation FOR the rest of the congregation. And now some of our brethren want to “be like other nations” and adopt this arrangement in the worship of the Churches of Christ. But this arrangement (rite) is not authorized in New Testament worship. (Colossians 3:16-17, p. 7)

Evans (2002) justified this critique of praise teams by mentioning that in the Old Testament the Levites played the musical instruments *for* the Jewish congregation and (Numbers 10:8, 2 Chronicles 29:25-29). Evans argued that in the New Testament, everyone is a priest (1 Peter 2:9), so every believer must sing praises to God individually. Praise teams, however, do not sing for the congregation, but sing with the congregation. The New Testament scriptures give the command to sing (James 5:13), but are silent concerning the method of singing. That method must be determined by the context in which the singing is performed. As praise teams are not mentioned in scripture, neither are song leaders, which are used by the majority of African American Churches of Christ. If Churches of Christ use the same argument, that the silence of the scriptures prohibits, then many of the most beloved practices and possessions in that fellowship would be outlawed. These practices include Sunday school, multiple communion cups, hymnals, and even church buildings, all of which are not mentioned in scripture.

Jean, during her college years, had one of the most sought-after voices in the Churches of Christ. She travelled around the United States as a featured singer for Southwestern Christian College. Singing in choirs was permitted in the Churches of

Christ as long as it was not in the “worship service.” She would sing in an a capella choir in various Churches of Christ, Black and White, in the Jim Crow South. She often remembers receiving racial slurs from White-church audiences who would say things such as, “Those darkies can really sing.” Despite being the victim of bigotry, she continued singing.

Although Jean grew up in churches being led by one song leader, she loves the praise teams at Delta Bay. She believes that the praise allow every section—soprano, alto, tenor or bass—to hear their parts more effectively, which results in better praise. Jean sees the praise teams of Delta Bay as a means of cultural liberation from Eurocentric forms of domination in Black churches.

Karl also appreciated the praise teams at the Delta Bay Church of Christ. He believed that they allow singers to express their gifts in a way that is edifying to the congregation. As a young person, Karl attended denominational churches before coming to the Churches of Christ as a college student in 1979. He described his first reaction to traditional a capella singing.

It was different, to walk and see the entire congregation singing with opened hymnals. It was like walking into an episode of the Waltons [describing a predominately African American congregation]. It was like viewing an episode of Little House on the Prairie”

He grew to appreciate it and was taught that that method was the way it was done in the Bible. Now when Karl sees one song leader in a traditional setting, he describes it as witnessing a “solo artist,” whereas he believes the praise team encourages more participation from the audience. “To see a woman up front leading a section of the song encourages the congregations and expands our view of women’s role.” Other African American Churches of Christ around the country have praise teams. Though they are not

the norm, the popularity of the concept is growing nationwide as congregations are being liberated from traditional forms of worship.

Excommunication

The fear of religious excommunication is not a new concept. In John 9:22, Jewish leaders had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the messiah would be excommunicated. This meant that they would be put out of the synagogue, which was the center of the Jewish community, cutting off many social relationships. The Bay Area African American fellowship of Churches of Christ can be described as a close knit homogenous group with relationships going back as far as 70 years. Because fellowship with other denominations are prohibited, the exclusive gatherings include generations of families going back to the 1940s. Social ties in the group are strong. These social ties, however, are formed by the religious adherence to a patternistic doctrine of uniformity. Believers who appear to deviate from the traditional teachings of the Churches of Christ would be viewed and sometimes treated as outcasts. As a result, those who no longer agree with the traditional teachings believe that it is easier to leave the fellowship altogether than to remain and face constant ridicule. Many conservative members of this fellowship desire “liberal thinking” members to leave the fellowship to avoid addressing the challenges of reengaging biblical text.

Fear of excommunication is strong among African American Churches of Christ. For a preacher it may mean the loss of many preaching engagements on a local and national level. For the average congregant it means the loss of social relationships that may go back decades. For those who were raised in this fellowship as second- or third-generation members, to practice anything outside the traditional doctrines of the

Churches of Christ can mean excommunication from relatives. Parents of members who have left the fellowship altogether can be ridiculed less than those who have children who remained and are considered liberal.

The Delta Bay Church of Christ is comprised of a significant number of second- and third-generation members. Many are now grown, having left the fellowship after becoming adults. These members left the Churches of Christ for various reasons. Many no longer believed in the exclusive salvation of the Churches of Christ. Others believed the worship experience did not connect with them and therefore had a hard time bringing in family and friends. Others enjoyed the church-restoration concept but did not see the reality played out in the various congregations. Thus, some left Churches of Christ and did not joining any other fellowship. Delta Bay Church of Christ, for these members, offered something familiar, yet new.

Becoming a member of what others considered a liberal church did not come without repercussions. These members constantly feel the pressure from other family members and friends in the fellowship to leave Delta Bay or be forced into traditional conformity. Blood relatives have even cut some off socially. Myron, who is a second-generation member of the Churches of Christ, discussed the fear of excommunication:

No I do not fear excommunication, I feel to be excommunicated because of differences is nonsense. Just because I have different view on an issue or a topic that does not mean that you have the right to disfellowship. We all have the right to our opinion on topics. Just because there is a difference in opinion doesn't mean we can't have unity.

Monte G. who is a third-generation member of the Church of Christ discussed excommunication:

No. I don't fear it. The only thing I fear is God, who can take care of my soul whichever way he pleases. And I don't really fear him in the sense that I'm afraid of him. I fear him and I respect him a great deal but I don't fear any man. . . . I

don't allow people's point of view or their understanding of the bible to influence my understanding of the bible because I firmly believe that we're taught to work out our own salvation. Therefore, it's my responsibility to have a right relationship with God. It's not your responsibility, for instance, to make sure my relationship with God is right. You might encourage me, influence me, you know, motivate me but I'm the only one that can change me. And so nothing—It doesn't bother me one bit if somebody tells me they don't want to talk to me anymore. That's on them. I'm going to keep doing what I do.

The threats of excommunication constantly surround the Delta Bay congregation.

Pressures to withdraw fellowship, however, only come from local African American congregations. Because White Churches of Christ tend to have a separate fellowship, excommunication is unnecessary and unwarranted. Other Black congregations threaten withdrawal based on nonconformity to Eurocentric styles of worship. The gospel is then perverted and used as an instrument of White supremacy and domination. Although predominately White Churches of Christ may not actually withdraw fellowship from their Black counterparts, the legacy of their cultural imperialism still thrives among African American congregations. The threats of excommunication however do not scare the members, but strengthen the resolve of the Delta Bay membership. Crystal P. explained,

I do not fear excommunication nor the loss of my salvation because only God can give that to me and not man. And if I have to lose a few friends along the way, I will just lose a few friends along the way.

Summary

The participants in this study believed that these questions helped them reflect on their personal faith journey. Through these interviews, each commented after the session about how “traditional doctrinal teaching” influenced the way they saw scripture. The participants felt that coming to the Delta Bay Church of Christ made them reinvestigate the dogma they had been taught. This process was challenging, yet rewarding, because it allowed them to take ownership of their beliefs. Some participants during the interviews

found themselves answering questions the way they felt they had to traditionally. Through none of the participants feared the ridicule and the withdrawal of fellowship from mainstream Churches of Christ, some paused to think about giving certain answers before they gave them. Their facial expressions suggested a journey from cultural captivity to spiritual liberation. The participants loved the interview process and expressed the desire to contribute in any way to future studies.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Throughout the interviews, participants enjoyed the dialogue process. It allowed them to reflect on their religious history and experiences as members of the Church of Christ. There was evidence of traditional Church of Christ pedagogy from a few of the oldest participants, who expressed reservations about the role of women in worship and open denominational fellowship. Chris, who was introduced to the Churches of Christ through the Delta Bay congregation, showed few signs of traditional Church of Christ pedagogy. He was quite open to women's roles, praise teams, and open fellowship with other denominations. These responses demonstrated that traditional Church of Christ practices are influenced by pedagogy. Outside of the traditional Church of Christ setting, those teachings do not simply *emerge* from scripture. Traditional doctrines in the Churches of Christ are pressed into members through various means of indoctrination.

Introduction

The research questions attempted to offer insight into the pedagogy and practice of African American Churches of Christ by asking following questions:

1. To what extent has traditional religious pedagogy in the Churches of Christ impacted worship styles at the Delta Bay Church of Christ?
2. What perceptions do members of an African American Church of Christ have about aspects of traditional Sunday worship?

By looking through the lens of BLT and CRT, insights into the Eurocentric influences of Black Churches of Christ are highlighted. Recommendations for further

study and for higher education professionals are offered below, along with some suggestions on worship styles that could speak to African American Churches of Christ as a whole.

Discussion: Research Question 1

Truth

The Churches of Christ have always stood on the Restoration principle: “We speak where the bible speaks, and we are silent where the bible is silent,” coined by Campbell (Robinson, 2008). That restoration principle was proposed verbally but not in practice. The Churches of Christ have been historically silent where the Bible speaks on social justice and issues of civil rights. At the same time it has spoken on the ban of instrumental music and congregational uniformity; issues on which the Bible is silent. Participants in this study placed rightly divining the word of God as a top Christian priority. Every participant was taught to value the truth of God’s word. However, the new generation of people are not necessarily seeking biblical truth. Many in Generations X and Y are seeking community. They are seeking a place of acceptance, a place to belong, and relief from the problems of this world. I propose that the Churches of Christ become that place. Biblical truth continues to matter, but we must be aware that there is a new generation of seekers who do not prioritize biblical truth. Today, one must create a thirst for truth: Christians today must be the salt that creates the thirst.

When Chris P. mentioned what drew him to the Delta Bay Church of Christ, he stated, “The relationships ... the way the people interacted with each other, there was definitely a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and a family atmosphere.” This made Chris P. leave a well-established church of another denominational affiliation

where he conducted their Sunday morning gatherings, and take membership at Delta Bay . Young seekers are no longer drawn to a church because of its doctrinal accuracy or order worship. These external worship practices can be performed from a self-righteous heart and can form a wall of separation between believers. What drew Chris P. and others like him to the Delta Bay congregation was not the scriptural name on the building or the weekly communion, but the love he was shown. Monte G. noted,

The Delta Bay Church of Christ is founded on the premise that relationships are the most important thing: relationship with God, relationship with each other and relationship to the word, and the negative relationship to stay away from, which is stay out of the world. So relationships with God and each other is what the foundation I believe of that church is. And so everybody's friendly, everybody is, you know, seeking what God wants first and not—there's no ulterior motives, everybody's happy, they love worshipping there. It's a great place to be.

Karl B. noted that what attracted him to the services of the Churches of Christ as a college student was that one could ask the preacher a question about the content of a sermon. Many times you could ask that preacher right after the sermon. However, as a preacher in the Churches of Christ, Karl began to question some of the traditional teachings of the fellowship. Other African American ministers in his local area began to question the doctrine they had been taught as well. "Having been a minister for years there were conversations that [my ministerial peers and I would have] outside the pulpit that we would not necessarily take to the pulpit." I believe these conversations were the genesis of personal evolutions that would result in a generational critique of traditional doctrine. "The truth" as it was taught in the Churches of Christ had to be questioned. But because of the hostility one could receive by even questioning biblical truth, this would often be done by forming a community of seekers. This community of seekers provides a safe haven for free thought and inquiry without fear of excommunication. The Delta Bay Church of Christ was formed to be a community of seekers. The participants believed

that Delta Bay provided a safe heaven for free thought and exploration of the biblical text.

Doctrine

As I talked to participants, I noticed that doctrinal positions are not what drew them to the Delta Bay Church of Christ. Our positions on hand clapping, instrumental music, and praise teams did not bring them into our fellowship. The common themes that emerged when asked what drew them to Delta Bay were community, freedom, love, and relationships. The subject that was most noteworthy concerning the themes that emerged was freedom.

Freedom is defined by the context of the person who has it or is seeking it. Freedom for the participants who came to the Churches of Christ in a traditional setting is defined as liberation from traditional dogma: the freedom to clap, demonstrate emotion in the worship service, and explore nontraditional methods of worship. However for Chris P., who was introduced to the Churches of Christ through Delta Bay, freedom is defined differently. Chris P. defined freedom as freedom from sin and freedom from past strongholds. Handclapping and showing emotion in worship is nothing new for Chris P., who came from another religious denomination where it was common. What Chris did have in common with the other participants was the emphasis on biblical teachings. The combination of sound doctrine (healthy teaching) and the ability to express oneself emotionally was an apt combination for Chris, allowing him to enjoy the essence of the word along with other aspects of the worship.

In traditional African American congregations, the doctrine of the Church of Christ became more important than Christ himself. Karl explained,

There was more of an emphasis on the bride than there was the groom. The bulk of the messages are on the 'one church', but the church does not save but are comprised of those who are saved. But as you are trying separate yourself from other denominations [this tends to be the emphasis.] Jesus says and if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me. And in some [traditional] Churches of Christ when the emphasis is more on the church than Jesus, the members become [spiritually] starved, because they don't have the nutrients that help sustain them.

What Delta Bay Church of Christ emphasizes as essential in our doctrine is beginning to evolve. The Churches of Christ as a whole are still in restoration mode. It is a movement that cannot stop. The crystallization of doctrinal methods have crippled the fellowship and made it culturally irrelevant. To echo the preaching pioneer Keeble, "The Bible is Right," however our interpretation and application of it could be wrong. When mentioning *doctrine* among the participants, it was connected with the teachings that were considered essential to salvation: weekly communion, noninstrumental music, and exclusive salvation. But if doctrine is merely teaching, other commandments have not been emphasized historically in the Churches of Christ as essential to salvation: the New Testament command for husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25) and the command to forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). In other words, a man can mistreat his wife and be covered by grace but dare not play an instrument in a worship context or be in danger of hell-fire. The Churches of Christ must cease majoring in minors and minoring in majors.

For African American Churches of Christ to address their current decline in membership, the churches must look at their doctrine. As the minister of the Delta Bay congregation, I had to take a deep look at our doctrinal practices. Before I could separate the essential from the nonessentials elements, I had to find how doctrines were

developed. I found that the majority of traditional doctrines were based on the method of inductive reasoning.

Inductive reasoning constructs its conclusions on individual instances. For example when discussing the prohibition against instrumental music, one would read Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, and I Corinthians 14:15, 26. None of these passages mention instrumental music, but instruct the 1st-century church to sing. Through inductive reasoning, one may gather the facts, from those facts an axiom is created, then a law is induced. This practice is common even among Black preachers in the Church of Christ who habitually quote a number of scriptures to prove a point about a doctrinal topic. Inductive reasoning was derived from the English Philosopher Bacon (1561–1626). Bacon was the father of the scientific method and that approach was used when exploring scripture. It was Bacon's influence that inspired Campbell's declaration and address in 1809, in which Campbell developed the basis for a traditional hermeneutical approach to scripture: command, example, and necessary inference (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Though the method has lasted well over 200 years, it does not consider culture. The Christians of the 1st century had a culture. The biblical cities of Ephesus, Corinth, and Colossae all had different and unique cultures. Culture must be considered when interpreting sacred text. The worship style at one congregation does not mirror the worship style of others. The Churches of Christ have tried to divorce culture from scripture and the result has taken the witness out of the worship. Also the method of induction is human made, and is therefore imperfect. An imperfect method cannot be employed to master a perfect text.

The Baconian way of thinking profoundly influenced T. and A. Campbell, both did not have a high appreciation for emotionalism (Hughes, 1996). The Restoration movement was borne from the Cane Ridge Revival (1801) led by Stone. That revival produced much emotionalism and was instrumental in developing the Pentecostal Movement in the United States (Hughes, 1996). A. Campbell was more inclined to the world of logic and intellectualism than emotion. As African American Churches of Christ struggle between the two today, congregationists understand that one does not have to compete with the other; that the two can compliment each other.

The Delta Bay Church of Christ provides the perfect context for that compliment. Delta Bay was able to be logical and emotional at the same time. The participants believed that the worship is energetic, emotional, and yet intellectually engaging. All participants in this study made a spiritual and cultural connection with the congregation. Christianity must connect with culture. Jesus could not only have exclusive ties to Eurocentric forms of worship. The Bible transcends culture but is able to connect with each one. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:20,

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

The Delta Bay congregation intentionally engaged in a form of worship that would engage its target community. Though the congregation is predominately African American, Monte G. was able to make a connection with the culture of the church. The assumption so many people have is that only Black people like the “Black church.” The Black-church experience resonates with anyone who has been oppressed and can relate to human struggle.

The participants of this study, who came from a traditional Churches of Christ background, perceived that their past religious experiences made them appreciate the freedom they have at Delta Bay. “No one can appreciate freedom unless you have been in bondage” Myron commented. “And once you have tasted freedom, it is hard to go back to the plantation of tradition.” Crystal commented,

I feel liberated at Delta Bay, before coming [to Delta Bay], everything in the Church of Christ was about what you can not do. ... Now we are excited exploring the scriptures to see what we can do. It is an exciting time!

Research Question 2

Jean, Monte, and Myron were all born and raised in the Churches of Christ. Their parents were active members in the Church of Christ. The traditional Church of Christ doctrine they learned as children was embedded in their minds early and often. Jean remembers being taught the Plan of Salvation, an evangelistic pattern developed by the Churches of Christ in the 1930s. Myron, who was also raised in the Churches of Christ, in the 1980s was taught the same plan as a child. Monte, who was raised in a predominately White congregation, was taught the same plan during her youth. This common thread of pedagogy was woven throughout three different generations and geographical regions; traditional teachings have transcended time and culture. This is an example of the patternistic teachings that have indoctrinated more than four generations of Churches of Christ members. These doctrines now are taking its toll. As the Churches of Christ look to adapt to life in the 21st century, one must look at the ways of thinking that have led to the church’s demise.

Based on the findings, participants viewed aspects of a traditional worship as aids and hindrances. Jean S. believed there are certain aspects of tradition that are good because they help congregations stay rooted. I agree that there is nothing inherently

wrong with tradition. Tradition gives congregations a heritage and a connection to the past, which provides a platform for the future.

Ironically, the inclination to live without tradition has been one of the most prominent features of our tradition [in the Churches of Christ]. This is because certain religious leaders of the early nineteenth-century movement out of which Churches of Christ emerged were unhappy with their past. (Childers et al., 2002, p. 45)

Tradition, although helpful, cannot be elevated to the role of scripture, lest one become like the biblical Pharisees in the days Jesus who sought external conformity to the law with no inner substance. The Churches of Christ must embrace their religious heritage and realize that cousins are Baptists, Presbyterians, and Puritans. Either we will be conscious participants in history or we will unconscious victims (Allen & Hughes, 1988). Childers, Foster, and Reese (2002) noted,

When Churches of Christ develop this ahistorical mindset, they become victims to repeating history all over again. “Far from eliminating tradition this attitude forces tradition underground, where it operates freely, unidentified and unchecked. What was vital tradition becomes oppressive traditionalism. Traditions that grew out of specific circumstances are presumed to be absolute and eternal in their significance, making it difficult to distinguish practices at the core of God’s will for a Christ-centered church from those that lie at the periphery. Such an attitude leads to sectarian divisions, as we exalt our patterns as fully divine, displaying an arrogant rejection of any who differ. Disrespecting our history in this way causes us to cling tightly to our traditions without recognizing them as such. We become traditionalists. And especially in times of cultural change, we are left without told to cope, retreating instead to a memory of the “good ‘old days,” rendering the heritage stale and wooden. (p. 57)

Many African American leaders in the Churches of Christ have been able to discern outward forms of racism but not theological forms. Though there were Black leaders who spoke out publicly against racism in the church, many patterns of their theology still mirrored separated White counterparts. Blackness could be expressed outside the doors of worship, but were vacated once service began. Conformity to

Eurocentric expressions of worship was regarded as biblical. Calls for racial equality in the Churches of Christ did not equate to calls for intellectual and cultural liberation.

The White establishment in the Churches of Christ did not see racism in the church or society as a whole as essential to salvation, so the issue was never truly addressed. When Church of Christ newsletters mentioned the Civil Rights Movement, they generally condemned it as political, communist inspired, or violent (Holloway, Foster, 2006).

So many African American Churches of Christ who were theologically influenced by their White counterparts saw salvation as otherworldly and merely spiritual. Cone, however, viewed salvation as not merely spiritual, but physical in nature. Cone insisted on a view of salvation that emphasized human liberation from oppressive structures (as cited in Anyabwile, 2007). With the rise of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s, many Black militant voices denounced Christianity as the “White man’s religion” and an insidious ideological justification to black passivity (Cone, 1997).

Corporate expressions of liberation are possible when individuals are liberated. In the biblical narrative of the Exodus, Moses expressed to his oppressor, Pharaoh, that the Israelites could not engage God in worship while still living in Egypt (Exodus 8:25-27). *Where* one engages God is tied to *how* one engages God. Authentic expressions of liberation cannot be offered in places of bondage.

Many themes that emerged from the interviews were based on Brownlow’s (1945) book: *Why I am a Member of the Church of Christ*. Brownlow (1914–2002) was a Caucasian preacher and author in the Churches of Christ. Brownlow was a graduate of then Abilene Christian College (a small Bible college in Abilene, TX affiliated with the

Churches of Christ). Brownlow wrote most of the book in 1941 and 1942, a time when the religious landscape was different in the United States. The largest consumers of this book would have been from what has been described as the Silent Generation, born between 1927 and 1945. These are the children of the World War II generation. The Silent Generation, also known as the Traditionalists, are known for being cautious, self-sacrificing, and disciplined and valuing absolutes. Traditionalists are also known for having respect for authority. It was in this context that Brownlow's book addressed the biblical essentials of the Churches of Christ, which made it thrive. People were seeking absolutes and were cautious about practice that appeared to be unbiblical.

The Churches of Christ thrived during this time because they offered a simplistic religious pattern for the average Bible user to master. The system that the Churches of Christ developed was user friendly. In a short period of time, a congregant could understand everything they needed to know to be saved. This American landscape led to the Churches of Christ being one of the fastest growing religious fellowships in the 1950s and 1960s. Brownlow's (1945) book spoke to the religious climate at the time. Selling more than 1 million copies, the book influenced a new generation of seekers to look at the Churches of Christ. The book is used today to recruit and retain members of the Churches of Christ. The popularity of Brownlow's book has crossed over racial and cultural barriers. The book was noted by Jean (a 77-year-old African American woman raised in the U.S. South) and by Monte (a 58-year-old Caucasian American raised in Oregon). Both women noted the book's influence in their local congregations. The teachings of the book address what the Church is and is not. What is lacking in Brownlow's book is any mention of love. Jesus mentioned in John 13:35, "They will

know you are my disciples by the love that you have for one another.” Love is the Mark of discipleship. The Apostle Paul echoed that statement of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

(New International version):

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Brownlow’s (1945) book became to so many members of the Church of Christ as good as scripture, but the book claims to be devoid of culture. As noted by participants, their cultural upbringing shaped the way they engage God in worship. Any form of emotionalism, which is an important part of the Black church experience, is labeled heretical. Members of Black Churches of Christ are ostensibly forced to perpetuate a White middle-class Anglo-Saxon culture in worship to please God. Worship is deemed right with God because of how it is done, not because of why it is done.

Many of these practices have left many Black Churches of Christ stuck in a cultural time warp. “Stepping into a traditional Church of Christ in 2013 is like going *back to the future*,” Myron noted. “The songs are the same, the procedures are the same, the preaching has not evolved, and as a result it has become hard for me to worship because you feel like you are simply going through the motions.” Failure to recognize tradition has made many congregations a slave to it.

Black Liberation Theology

The theological framework of BLT allows one to see the Delta Bay congregation as a case study of liberation from Eurocentric practice and pedagogies. When asked about their understanding of the American Restoration Movement and the influences of A.

Campbell, all six had some basic knowledge about the subject. They were able to recognize the intent of A. Campbell. Campbell was committed to restoring the primitive church in a modern world, seeking to be Christians-only and not the only-Christians (Holloway & Foster, 2006). Participants knew that Campbell erred and that the Churches of Christ were in their current state because of it. Participants echoed the sentiment of denominational liberation. Liberation must first start at the individual level. God must free the oppressed mind to think for itself. Participants felt free to investigate the scriptures for themselves, without fear of scorn. Once individuals are free, they seek to live in a free community.

Participants stated they loved the Delta Bay congregation for its freedom.

Freedom cannot be realized outside of a context of oppression. Cone (1990) wrote that the only way to know Jesus Christ is through the context of liberation, where God meets humanity in a concrete human situation.

To know God is to know God's work of liberation in behalf of the oppressed. God's revelation means liberation, an emancipation from death-dealing political, economic, and social structures of society. This is the essence of biblical liberation. There is no revelation of God without a condition of oppression, which develops into a situation of liberation. Revelation is only for the oppressed of the land. (pp. 45–46)

BLT enables conversations about liberation to be understood in light of doctrinal oppression. Participants pointed to divine revelation of the scriptures but to understand liberation, one must first realize one's level of oppression. Participants understood that the traditional doctrinal patterns of the Church of Christ that they had been taught growing up limited their spiritual freedom in Christ. It is not until one is free that one realizes how delimitating their oppression was. There were no signs of bitterness toward their earlier teachers in the Churches of Christ; they realized they believed what was

handed down to them. Also, they believed that bitterness toward others perpetually enslaves oneself.

Critical Race Theory

CRT recognizes that racism is an ingrained part of U.S. culture. The interview process revealed that historically, among African American Churches of Christ, institutional forms of racism still exist. They play out every Sunday through pedagogy and practices that largely remain undetected. CRT examines the normative acceptance of “Whiteness.” Many Black Churches of Christ, under the guise of practicing sound biblical doctrine, seem to have accepted Whiteness as the biblical standard through forms of music and the lack of emotionalism. Some Black congregations have deemed emotionalism as denominational and therefore sinful. Rather than embracing methods of worship that engage culture, they are rejected if they mirror the Black denominational landscape.

CRT also examines institutional forms of racism, continually marginalizing people of color. These institutions were easily found in colleges that are affiliated with the Churches of Christ. The majority of these schools were started by White members who during the Jim Crow era, excluded Blacks. This had a profound affect on scholarship among African American ministers in the Churches of Christ. Some ministers did not have formal educations and others who pursued theological degrees were not allowed to attend Church of Christ affiliated colleges because of the color of their skin. Author Blankenship (2006) wrote,

With the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated schools were illegal [1954], the *Christian Chronicle* released an editorial addressing segregation in colleges within the Church of Christ fellowship. In this editorial, they explain that “many of the denominational

schools have admitted the Negro long before the Supreme Court handed down its decision.” (p. 16)

R. N. Hogan, a Black leader in the Churches of Christ, condemned the brotherhood colleges for not admitting Blacks. “The fact that Negroes are not allowed in these churches and schools is proof that God is not there; for where God is, no man is barred because of the color of his skin” (Hogan, 1959, p. 54). Hogan went on to say,

One of the most embarrassing things that Negro Christians have to face today is the fact that people of our race are admitted to Denominational [sic] schools as well as State [sic] schools, but cannot enter a Christian school operated by members of the church of Christ. (p. 54)

African American Church Historian Anyabwile (2007) pointed out,

Most theologically conservative seminaries adopted the racist segregationist policies and attitudes of the time. Because liberal seminaries and universities were more likely to admit and train African Americans, the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement was more compatible with theological liberalism than with its conservative counterpart, African American exposure to and the adoption liberal intellectual viewpoints was nearly guaranteed. (p. 205)

If this is true, what happened to the African American intellectualism and theology in the Churches of Christ during the Civil Right Movement? During the Civil Rights Movement many colleges affiliated with the Churches of Christ were still theologically conservative. Though many African Americans who pursued Bible degrees could have been admitted to colleges not associated with the Churches of Christ, those colleges were viewed with skepticism because of their denominational affiliations. As a result, Blacks in the Churches of Christ during that time faced a huge dilemma: many could not gain entrance into their own colleges (inside the Churches of Christ) and were ridiculed for going to other colleges (outside the Churches of Christ). Some African American leaders in the Churches of Christ never received a formal education. As a

result, these leaders relied heavily on their biblical interpretations to come from publications like the *Gospel Advocate*.

The *Gospel Advocate* was founded by two White church restorationists, Fanning and Lipscomb, in 1855. It was influential in shaping the Churches of Christ's understanding of biblical truth. Keeble was heavily influenced by the *Gospel Advocate*, acknowledging that it had become to him, like other Black leaders, a second Bible (Robinson, 2008). Keeble was an avid reader of the news journal. In 1923, when discussing how the *Gospel Advocate* positively affected the congregations Keeble founded, the pastor noted, "When I can get people to begin with this kind of literature, I feel that they are safe, because brethren who get up these helps are men who spent years studying God's word." Keeble continued, "A good many of the white brethren, are paying for this paper to be sent into colored homes. This is missionary work" (Keeble, 1927). Keeble's influence among the Black Churches of Christ and their reliance on the *Gospel Advocate*, was also a reliance of the theology of its editors. The *Gospel Advocate* could sit in Black congregations when many White brethren refused to allow Blacks. The journal helped shaped the theology and culture of Black congregations everywhere. The cultural imperialistic powers of the *Gospel Advocate* are still seen the pedagogy and practices of Black congregations. CRT is able to point out covert forms of this cultural control that are imbedded in doctrines disguised as orthodox Bible.

The New Hermeneutic

For years the Churches of Christ have subscribed to the traditional hermeneutic rooted in rationalism and inductive reasoning. This hermeneutic allowed for its users to see the Bible as a book of laws that guide every aspect of the Christian life through

command, example, or necessary inference. Olbricht (1995) wrote, “Hermeneutics are shaped by culture and theology and once formulated, in turn, shape the culture and theology of a specific body of believers” (Olbricht, 1995, para 2). The theology of the Churches of Christ is rooted in its ecclesiology and soteriology, which is its teaching concerning the church and salvation. The uniqueness of the one primitive church and the salvation that is obtained in it has been a hallmark of Churches of Christ throughout the 20th century. Olbricht (1995) wrote concerning Churches of Christ,

The present century, then, is characterized by these three successive steps, which the lovers of our Lord Jesus have been enabled to make, in their return to the original institution. First, the bible was adopted as sole authority in our assemblies, to the exclusion of all other books. Next the Apostolic order was proposed. Finally the True Gospel was restored. (para 4)

The hermeneutic patterns of command, examples, and inferences were clearly set out by Dering as early as 1572. They were useful in restoring ecclesiastical patterns, but not Christian lifestyles. The old three-fold science of interpreting text is flawed, relying more heavily on inference than on direct commands and examples. What *is not said* many times speaks louder than *what is said*. We allow inferences made concerning the absence of musical instruments from New Testament scripture to speak louder than direct biblical commands from Jesus to love. Inferences made from scripture were long considered suspect by church founders. Church founder Campbell conceded, “Inferences may be useful, but rejected their ecclesiastical role on the ground that they divide believers” (as cited in Olbricht, 1995, para 49). The “new hermeneutic” in the Churches of Christ is labeled by the conservative wing of the fellowship as anything that deviates from the old hermeneutic. Any new science of interpretation in the Churches of Christ, is what Olbricht (1995) called

Basically a paradigm shift in our driving force. It has little to do with accepting a or theological position from which to relate to the culture of our time. Our leaders who wish to depart from our traditional hermeneutics have done so on the ground that the Christian faith is larger than the limited parameters of the church and the means of salvation. But they have been faithful to the propensities of the fathers in that they, too, have no interest in embracing a philosophical or theological foundation from which to make the gospel appealing. (para 45)

I argue that in the 21st century, leaders of the Churches of Christ must remain true to the principles of the restoration movement while showing the relevance of the gospel to the world around them. This must be done however without compromising the composition or mission of the gospel message. The cross must be at the forefront, but as was in the 1st-century church, the cross must intersect with culture. Many scholars among Churches of Christ are hesitant to wholeheartedly embrace a new hermeneutic, for fear that it may become the new master. As a result no new hermeneutic has formally been established.

Recommendations

For African American Churches of Christ to reverse the recent trends of decline, they must be willing to perform some self-reflection. There are lessons learned from those who left. Yeakley (2012), a Caucasian researcher and statistician in the Churches of Christ, wrote a book entitled *Why They Left: Listening to Those Who Have Left Churches of Christ*. Yeakley interviewed more than 300 former members of the Churches of Christ and inquired about why they left. What emerged from the finding were significant. Former members had issues with among others: (a) the doctrine of exclusive salvation for members of the Churches of Christ, (b) instrumental music being taught as a sin, (c) a lack of discipleship and belonging, and (d) the restricted roles of women. These issues are not only prevalent in White congregations but in African American ones as well. Leaders nationwide must not be afraid to come together and discuss these issues in an atmosphere

that is free from castigation and labeling. Free thought must be encouraged as Black congregations must cultivate scholarship, not condemn it. Black congregations must, through investigation of the text, determine what issues are essential to salvation. Congregations must feel free to disagree on nonsalvation issues. Free communication and study will open the doors of the fellowship and allow members to engage culture in worship, in ways that have not been previously allowed.

Praise teams or communion groups may not be effective in every congregation; they are by themselves not expedient solutions for growth. Every congregation must first understand its local context before it embraces ministry innovations. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 4:19, "Follow me and I will make you Fishers of Men." If African American congregations are to "catch the fish" in their local areas, they first must determine who are they trying to catch. They must understand the habits of the fish: where they like to swim, what music they listen to, and what they value most. Knowing the kind of fish one wants to catch will determine the bait one will use (Warren, 1995). The mistake so many church leaders fail to realize is that there is more than one kind of fish in the sea. If all fish were the same then a monocultural patternistic repetitive approach to worship would be effective.

Local congregations must also ask themselves, In what ways have we failed to connect with our communities and in what ways have we failed to create community? Young people are longing to belong, searching for community on social-networking sites. The Churches of Christ, largely have not offered community, but commandments. People will embrace the commandments once they feel part of a community. The Delta Bay Church of Christ offers cell groups for its members to create that community. Cell groups

are groups of 10 to 12 people based outside of the local church building that meet on a weekly basis. The gathering offers a way for members to connect relationally in ways that would be impossible in a traditional setting. Cell groups, for some congregations, may be a way in which community can be created and celebrated.

My recommendations for African American Churches of Christ are as follows:

1. Offer history courses for members that include a rich discussion of American Church Restoration history and its impact on how study and fellowship interact with God in worship.
2. Create opportunities for church leaders to have an honest discussion about church issues that threaten unity. Note: This should not be done using a debate, “hot seat,” or panel-discussion method. The discussions should take place in closed rooms with open hearts, minds, and Bibles.
3. Reexamine the traditional hermeneutical practice of the Churches of Christ (commandment, example, and necessary inference). Discuss how this approach to scripture limits one’s view of scripture and what other approach might be evaluated.
4. Create opportunities that promote the involvement of women (within the boundaries of scripture), using their spiritual gifts and talents. This could include public readings of scripture, women leading musical solos, public administration of communion, and ushering.
5. Promote community for members to belong. Cell groups are an effective opportunity for members to connect on a relational level, witnessing another sharing life stories as they relate to the word of God. It is also an effective

evangelistic tool to draw in new people outside of the traditional church setting.

6. Connect with local African American denominations to discover what the two groups have in common. This alliance can be made while each church keeps the distinctiveness of their fellowship; working together to aid social ills. This alliance would allow Black Churches of Christ to have a broader range of fellowship and a greater witness for Jesus in the local community.
7. Conduct a monthly evaluation of worship services to see if they are effective in engaging the congregation and reaching the local community.

Conclusion

The African American Churches of Christ are at a cultural crossroads. This fellowship must decide whether it will continue to perpetuate Eurocentric practices as biblical doctrine or seek innovative methods that will allow them to be relevant in a 21st-century context. The Churches of Christ, over the last 10 years, are in a numerical decline (Yeakley, 2012). African American congregations are experiencing this decline in membership locally. Individual congregations must decide between innovation and irrelevancy. Definitions of sound doctrine can no longer be evaluated by adherence to patterns of denominational conformity. African American Churches of Christ must seek to understand the cultural landscape and find biblical ways to connect. In the 1960s Black Churches of Christ became economically independent from their White brethren; now they must become culturally liberated. The Black church can no longer operate as a creation of the White power structure. Eurocentral methods can no longer regulate worship, disguising them as scripture. The influence of White brethren remains, years

after the two fellowships went their separate ways. The church's pedagogical masters are still White, but its overseers are Black. The African American church has become its own worst enemy to spiritual growth and relevancy. Cultural imperialistic powers have remained hidden in our institutionalized way of thinking; they must first be recognized, then removed. Institutionalized ways of thinking are so entrenched in *what was* that they have lost touch with *what is*, and what *can be*.

Congregations must be willing to embrace the freedom that one has in Christ to minister to a lost generation. Congregations must understand that they are a part of a restoration movement that is ongoing. This fellowship must continuously seek scriptural correctness and understand that during one's lifetime, they will not "*arrive*." When Churches of Christ adopt a doctrine that has become relentless, they have become like the denominational churches from which they seek to separate.

As African American members of the Churches of Christ continue to study, they may gain deeper insight to biblical passages that were historically misunderstood or misapplied. Then congregations must decide what to do with this new understanding. Will congregations ignore these understandings at the expense of an entire generation, trying to preserve remnants of a dying fellowship? Has institutional loyalty become more important than the mission of the gospel? Are African American congregations willing to leave their cultural comfort zones to engage the community around them? Are African American Churches of Christ willing to stand against intraracial cultural regulations and ridicule to reach a new generation?

As the message of the gospel remains the same, the methods churches use to impart them must change with the times. In the Gospels, Jesus healed the blind on three

different occasions but each time used a different method (John 9:6, Mark 10:52, Mark 8:23-25). One's focus must not be on the various methods, but on the result. The biblical focus was not intended to be on how it was done, but why it was done. Too many African American Churches of Christ have crystalized methods and lost sight of the mission, the miracle expressed in the Bible, and its meaning. As congregations like Delta Bay continue to emerge nationwide, there will be a movement of congregations that continue to seek scriptural accuracy, but not at the expense of cultural identity. Witnessing freedom in Christ may be expressed in a way that breaks traditional norms and empowers the Churches of Christ for years to come.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions of key words or terms will come from a variety of sources in this study.

Alexander Campbell. (1788-1866) Minister, reformer and leader in the American Restoration Movement. Founded in 1809 with his father Thomas Campbell, a movement to unite Christians on the basis of the restoration of primitive Christianity.

Barton Stone. (1772-1844) was a preacher during the American Restoration Movement of the early 1800's. An ordained Presbyterian minister, was later expelled from the church and led a group of believers to unite with the followers of Alexander Campbell in 1832 forming the Stone–Campbell Movement (American Restoration Movement).

Cane Ridge Revival. was an interdenominational large camp meeting was held in Cane Ridge, Kentucky from August 6 to August 12 or 13, 1801, which drew between 10,000 to 20,000 people and considered the most important revival meeting of the American Restoration Movement.

Churches of Christ. A group of autonomous Christian congregations with roots in the *American Restoration movement*. A Christian movement that began on the American frontier during the Second Great Awakening (1790–1870) of the early 19th century. The movement sought to restore the church and “the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the church of the New Testament.

David Lipscomb. (1831-1917) was an editor, evangelist and educator in the American Restoration Movement and one of the leaders of that movement, which by

1906, had formalized a division into the Church of Christ. He was the co-founder of the Nashville Bible School, which is now known as David Lipscomb University.

Deductive Reasoning. The process of reasoning from one or more general statements (premises) to reach a logically certain conclusion.

Inductive Reasoning. Reasoning that constructs or evaluates general propositions that are derived from specific examples

Firm Foundation. A major journal of the Churches of Christ established in Austin Texas in 1884. It was one of two major publication among Churches of Christ from the (1880's to the 1980's). The Firm Foundation would at times provide more of a conservative stance for members of the churches of Christ.

Gospel Advocate. A Tennessee based religious newspaper of the restoration movement, found in 1855 and very influential in Churches of Christ throughout the 20th century. The objective of the paper is to create a forum for discussion on the subject of church cooperation and human organizations in the church among other concerns. The journal is still circulation today.

G.P. Bowser (1974-1950) Known as the father of Christian Education among Blacks in the Churches of Christ, George Phillip Bowser was an African American editor, educator and leader in the 20th century. Bowser was the founder of the 'Christian Echo' (a religious journal).

Jack Evans Sr. (b.1938) is an influential leader in African American Churches of Christ. He is the president of Southwestern Christian College (the only Black college in the U.S. for members of the Church of Christ). Evans has served as the college president since 1967.

Marshall Keeble.(1878-1968) A son of slaves and a traveling evangelist among Black Churches of Christ. A notable preacher who helped bridge the racial divide with White Churches of Christ. Keeble was also responsible for establishing more than 200 African American congregations and baptizing over 40,000 people. His leadership produced a generation of leaders who provided crucial guidance for Black Churches of Christ in the 20th century.

Nashville Christian Institute. (NCI) Established in 1940 as a night school for African Americans. Two years later it became a fully accredited elementary and secondary school, the purpose of which to train young men and women as evangelists in the Churches of Christ. Between 1945 and 1955, 235 students graduated from NCI, with 97 of them becoming preachers. The school closed in 1967 (Foster, 2005).

R.N. Hogan. (1902-1997) an influential African American evangelist, editor and leader in the Black Churches of Christ. Hogan was an editor of the ‘Christian Echo’ and a fierce opponent of racism and segregation in Christian colleges.

Samuel W. Womack (1850-1920) A notable African American minister among African American Churches of Christ. The most influential mentor and Father in-law to Marshall Keeble.

Scottish Common Sense Realism. (Or Common Sense Philosophy) The Scottish School of Common Sense was a school of philosophy that flourished in Scotland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Scottish philosophy was a broad attempt to show the Christian faith to be reasonable in a world where empirical methods of knowing reigned, in the process defending “common sense” against philosophical paradox and skepticism.

Theology. The systematic and rational study of God.

Thomas Campbell. (1763-1854) a Presbyterian minister born in Northern Ireland who became a prominent reformer during the American Restoration Movement. He believed there ought not to be any sectarian divisions in the church.

Sir Francis Bacon. (1561-1626) was an English philosopher, statesman, scientist, jurist and author. His works established and popularized inductive methodologies for scientific inquiry, often called the Baconian method, or simply the scientific method.

Soteriology: Teaching about God's Work of Salvation

1. Background and Rationale

Fellowship between Black and White congregations has for the most part been a spiritual illusion rooted in scriptural unity (Holloway & Foster, 2006). In reality, contentment and culture now separate Black congregations from their White counterparts. Issues of race among Churches of Christ are often avoided or ignored. Yet after years of separation, many African American Churches of Christ for the most part theologically mirror their Caucasian brethren. Although there are some distinct ethnic cultural practices, religious cultures in mainstream congregations both Black and White remain homogeneous.

This reality exists for various reasons. One reason is that theologies in colleges affiliated with the Churches of Christ were formed by White scholars (Holloway & Foster, 2006).

Many African American pioneer preachers had their theology shaped by White colleagues and as a result many Black congregations have inherited many Eurocentric cultural practices. Many of these practices have gone undetected and have been mistakenly 'scripturalized' and become part of orthodox Christian doctrine. While many White Churches of Christ have evolved their practice and pedagogy with the changing culture, many Black congregations remain trapped in a sacred time warp for the sake of religious piety. As congregational culture is investigated, the researcher will seek to connect current religious practices to a wider ideology rooted in the American Restoration Movement.

This qualitative research study focused on participant interviews from members of an African American Church of Christ and their perception about traditional practice and pedagogy of the religious body.

The theoretical rationale used for this research is the Black Liberation Theology (BLT). Black liberation theology has its roots in South American liberation theology that applies traditional Christian theology to issues of social justice and equality. Jesus is viewed as a radical advocate for the oppressed. BLT is an interdisciplinary body of research blending theology, sociology, history, anthropology, philosophy, etc. in addressing issues of social inequality as it relates Jesus and his divine responsibility to oppressed segments of the population. BLT provides a solid framework to examine Church of Christ pedagogy and practices as it relates to worship, music, communion, soteriology and ecclesiology.

2. Description of Sample

The population to be sampled will consist of current or former government ethnic employees who have filed a complaint of discrimination against their U.S. government employer. This is a unique population to study as government research about this population does not address individual counter-stories of employment discrimination about marginalized populations.

3. Recruitment Procedure

It is the intent of the researcher to interview 6 participants at the Delta Bay Church of Christ in Antioch, California. Participants will be sought through a selective process that seeks diversity based on age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and experience in the Churches of Christ. Participants must meet the following criteria:

- Present status as a current and active member of the Churches of Christ.
- Attend worship services on a consistent basis (at least 75% of available services)
- Willingness to participate in one-on-one recorded interviews

- Willingness to complete a background profile to establish variables such as age, ethnicity, years of service , etc.

Further, participants must be familiar with the practices of the Churches of Christ. An actual number of participants selected will depend on their availability to be interviewed. The researcher is interested in participants who are available to fully participate in the research and who have experience with traditions associated with the Churches of Christ.

4. Subject Consent Process

All participants in this study will be voluntary. Written approval will be sought from each participant for liability and confidentiality purposes using a consent form (see attached Appendix B). An overall description of the research and purpose will be discussed with each participant as well as all potential risks and social consequences (Creswell, 2005, p. 12). All names and employment locations of participants will be protected with pseudonyms.

5. Procedures

Actual interviews with participants will commence when approval is given from the IRBPHS. It is anticipated that approval will be granted in May 2013. Based on this, all interviews will take place between October – November 2013.

Participants will be selected through networking with professional colleagues or from personal sources. Potential subjects will be told about a description of the research as well as a brief synopsis of required criteria (see question #3) to become a volunteer in the study. Additionally, participants will be informed of interview timeframes (approximately 15-20 minutes), interview location, and nominal compensation upon completion (\$10 gift certificate). Upon initial contact by a participant, the researcher will

pre-screen each person to verify that they meet the criteria to volunteer. A complete list will be compiled of all interested participants. Participants selected will be briefed about confidentiality and the required ethical treatment of human subjects. A signed consent form will be obtained. Selected participants will also consent to recorded interviews. At any time in the interview or recruitment selection process, participants can withdraw from the research. Participants will be given the opportunity to participate in a debriefing. A mutually agreeable time and location will be determined with all parties.

6. Potential Risks to Subjects

Potential risks to subjects include voluntary self-disclosure about current or past issues in the Churches of Christ. All subjects signing the attached consent form will agree to the following:

1. It is possible that some of the questions about the pedagogy and practices of the Churches of Christ may make participants feel uncomfortable. All participants are free to decline to answer any questions and can withdraw participation at any time.
2. Participation in this research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept confidential. Individual identities will be used with consent from the participants.

Study information will be kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.

3. Participants will be interviewed up to 15-20 minutes initially. A subsequent 1 hour interview may occur at a later date for debriefing.

4. During the interview, any written notes or recordings that are taken will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher, the dissertation committee, or any other related party assisting with this research. Information obtained cannot be used in any court proceedings. The researcher or any other parties related to the research will not participate or share information in any legal proceedings, if applicable.

7. Minimization of Potential Risk

The researcher will not disclose participant responses to any other parties who are not involved in the research. All results of the research will be reported ethically and honestly with a protection of the participant's identity, location, and name of their present or past employer in which the alleged discrimination occurred.

8. Potential Benefits to Subjects

There will be no direct benefit from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit is a better understanding of the origins of the pedagogy and practices of African American Churches of Christ.

9. Costs to Subjects

There will be no financial costs to subjects as a result of taking part in this study.

10. Reimbursements/Compensation to Subjects

All subjects will be reimbursed a \$10.00 gift certificate for participation at the conclusion of the study. If subjects voluntarily withdraw from the study before completion or the researcher decides to terminate subject participation, a \$10 gift certificate will still be provided.

11. Confidentiality of Records

All interview results, transcripts, and recordings will be kept in a locked and secure location at the researcher's home office.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Mr. Lamont A. Francies, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a research study on the practice and pedagogy of African American Churches of Christ.

I am being asked to participate because I have either attended a predominately African American Church of Christ or I am currently a member of one.

Specifically, Mr. Francies wants to discuss the following with me to aid in the research:

- My perceptions about the worship practices of an African American Church of Christ.
- My experiences during a worship service.
- What factors influenced me to become a member.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will complete a short demographic background questionnaire giving basic information about me, including age, gender, race, educational level and religious background.
2. I will participate in recorded qualitative interviews with Lamont A. Francies and/or other researchers, during which I will be asked questions about my experiences and perceptions about my involvement in an African American Church of Christ.
3. I will complete any related forms and participate in the interview at a mutually agreeable location between the researcher and myself.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions about the Churches of Christ may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions that I do not wish to answer or I may stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded in the form of pseudonyms and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.
3. I understand that I may be interviewed up to 2-3 hours initially. A subsequent 1 hour interview may occur at a later date for debriefing.

4. During the interview, any written notes or recordings that I take will not be shared with anyone other than me, the dissertation committee, or any other related party assisting with this research. Information that I obtain cannot be used in any further EEO counseling or subsequent court proceedings. I also cannot serve as a witness for your case.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the EEO process utilizing a phenomenological design.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will be reimbursed a \$10.00 gift certificate for my participation at the conclusion of the study. If I decide to withdraw from the study before I have completed participating or the researchers decide to terminate my study participation, I will still receive full reimbursement.

Questions

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, please contact me first. I can be reached at (415) 533-6866. Or, you can also contact my advisor, Dr. Patricia Mitchell at (415) 422-2079.

If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student (if applicable), future employee at USF (if applicable), or with any parties associated with the Churches of Christ.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Signature

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date of Signature

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Personal

1. What is your age?
2. Gender?
3. What is your current annual income?
4. Where do you work?
5. What is your race or ethnicity?
6. What is your educational level?
7. How old were you when you were baptized?

Religious History

1. Growing up what was your religious affiliation?
2. What was your perception of those religious practices?
3. If you did not grow up in this faith tradition, why did you come to the Churches of Christ?
4. Have you learned more about the Bible as a member of the Churches of Christ than in other faith traditions?
5. Today why do you remain a member of the Churches of Christ?
6. How familiar are you with the Stone-Campbell Movement (American Restoration Movement)?
7. How familiar are you with the traditional Church of Christ position on instrumental music?
8. How familiar are you with the traditional Church of Christ position on women's role in the church?
9. How familiar are you with the traditional Church of Christ position on exclusive salvation.

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Characteristic	Number of members
Gender	
Female	3
Male	3
Ethnic self-designation	
African American	5
White	1
Grew Up in the CoC	
Grew Up in the CoC	
Grew Up outside the CoC	1
Education	
High School Diploma	1
Some College	2
Bachelor's Degree	2
Graduate Degree	1
Income	
Less Than \$50,000	4
\$50,000–\$100,000	1
\$100,000–\$150,000	1

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Monte G.

LAMONT: Okay, interesting. All right. Is there anything you were taught in the Churches of Christ that were taught as a sinful practice that you do not believe is clearly spelled out in scripture?

MONTE: Yeah. I don't believe any -- I think one of the things that they've done and that I've had experience with -- Now, I've been in several churches. I've been in everything from the anti to I guess you'd call it progressive, everything in between. I think one of the practices that I think is the most egregious for the churches is the practice of disfellowshipping. I think the Bible clearly teaches that if somebody is in so much err that they've returned to the world, that you go to that person and you give them every possible chance and if not, then you personally say to them, "Okay, I love you and I want you to come back but I can't fellowship with you." However, they've taken that concept that Jesus Christ taught about, if I have a problem with you I'm supposed to come to you and if you don't listen to me, I take a friend. They've taken that completely to mean that the church rules the church and I believe God rules the church. So therefore, disfellowshipping -- a church over here that's got its own congregation and its own leaders has no business telling another church what to do and how to think or how to feel. And I think it's a really, really bad commentary to the world to see people that are supposedly united in thought and unified in Christ to decide oh, we're not going to even talk to each other. I think that's a terrible practice and sinful.

LAMONT: Terrible practice, and sinful. All right. And we're going to move on to --

MONTE: And that's just one.

LAMONT: That was just one.

MONTE: I can give you many.

LAMONT: Do you have any other ones?

MONTE: We could talk about music. We could talk about --

LAMONT: What about music?

MONTE: Instrumental music. It's a big controversy right now.

LAMONT: Do you believe instrumental music is a sin?

MONTE: No. I used to. I believe that -- there's verses in the Bible that teach you that whatever your heart is confident with God, that that's the practice you can have and that you should be okay with that. But I also believe that, you know, there are lessons about being submissive to others that you need to also pay attention to. So it's something that would have to be a group decision, I think. But, you know, it's not something I would divide a church over. I would just simply say whatever you believe the practice should be but I don't believe that it's wrong to have instrumental music anymore, not anymore. That's where I believe right now. Who knows what I'll believe next week.