

Faith of Our Fathers: Reflections on the Black Church

Black History month often reminds me of the brutal past we have endured as a people. The common thread we all share is that of a people forcibly removed from a continent and their respective nations. They were brought here across the Atlantic to serve as human chattel. One of the biggest criticisms of the Slave Trade was the forcible conversion of people and the names they were given to reflect those of their Christian masters. The knowledge of this heinous chapter in our nation's history, coupled with the codified racism that followed, have led some to vehemently oppose the Christian faith and label it a "White man's religion." That stated – I beg to differ with the description "White man's religion."

The Slave Trade had many conspirators of diverse religious backgrounds, from the indigenous, ancestral worship of warring tribes that captured their enemies and sold them to the merchants or kept them for themselves, to the Arab Muslims who historically enslaved non believers and rivals

alike. Religion has always been used to justify atrocity and one man's oppression of another. We must always keep in mind that many good Christian White people fought and gave their lives as abolitionists to destroy the institu-

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tion.

I believe some of our fathers found a new faith in the journey across the Atlantic. It was not something their fathers would recognize or something they were force fed by plantation owners. They created a culture grounded in a hope for the future and a freedom they would never experience in this life. They were not earthly minded. They looked past the hypocrisy of their captors and believed in the God of the Bible based upon their own internal witness. In spite of all tangible evidence, the Black church

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believed that God was with them and that he in fact died for them. The preachers insisted that those who called upon their God would be saved, but not by human hands, and not necessarily in this life.

Think of the profound contrast

between modern day saints and the rampant materialism that is taught from the pulpits of many Black preachers today. In the past, Courageous believers planted seeds of hope through their simple instruction the wonderful music left behind that spoke of the riches of Christ. Stripped of all earthly hope, they found an architect who promised to build them a city beyond the Jordan, and they sang (man did they sing!) about

it often. They grabbed hold of a compassionate Christ that loved them and looked neither like their master or themselves. He was a spirit, a fire, a light, eternal and unchanging. Their music identified with the bondage of the Hebrews and they surmised that one day their deliverance would come, and if not for them – then the generations that would proceed from them.

I have often wondered about this faith handed down for centuries. The faith of our fathers is something to reacquaint ourselves with. They were illiterate, yet spiritual beyond description. Victims; yet, overcomers in every sense of the word! They possessed nothing but were rich beyond compare. Their faith created a perseverance few

human beings would ever know. I believe their prayers were answered regarding many of the opportunities Blacks have been given today, but I believe many remain unanswered still because many have remained in mental

were tortured, raped and sold off. I imagine the sweltering heat of the sun during the summer and blistering cold of winter and alas I hear a prayer from the battered psyche of a people. "Delivah us Lawd, and if not us, our lil ones."

That was the spirit of our fathers. The church is not about color, but it is about people called out from diverse backgrounds throughout the history of the human race. Our spiritual journey emerged out of extraordinary circumstances because God reached out to a people, oppressed and dispersed throughout this nation. Whereas some ridicule the history of the Black church by citing excessive expression, emotionalism, shallow theology/doctrine and the like, I salute it and thank God for it. I understand that it is an inseparable part of our unique history.

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bondage.

The Black church has a rich heritage. Historically, it gave us was a sense of community and belonging to one another. It was a place we could go to and seek a God who would make Himself accessible when we called upon Him. I think it was the closest place to home they knew. They carried the Sunday experience into the everyday toil of a life in bondage.

In my mind's eye I can see them now and I hear the passionate cries of yearning that ascended into heaven that came be known as gospel music. I see their torment of soul as their family members

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