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IT'S TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE

THE CIVIL RIGHTS GENERATION AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TRADITION

For our foreparents who died for us,
it's time to make a change.
Lord, working in the field from dawn till dusk,
it's time to make a change.

BOLD Mass Choir

MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER, Willie Faye, was born in Forest, Mississippi, in 1932. That's the same year segregationist Martin "Sure Mike" Conner was inaugurated as governor of Mississippi.[1] From Reconstruction to the 1950s, Mississippi had more lynchings than any other state in the Union. Accordingly, Willie Faye's parents kept a shotgun by the door to protect the family in case the Ku Klux Klan decided to pay them a visit and tried not to leave the house after sundown. Fearing the false allegations of looking at a White woman inappropriately, her first cousins, Billie and Buford, fled the state as teenagers. Yet, Conner, a Yale-educated lawyer, practically ignored the issue while endlessly railing against the federal government and President Roosevelt's New Deal for "meddling in the race question" and treading on states' rights.[2]

Named after her father, Willie Frazier, Willie Faye, or Faye for short, was the sixth of eight children. By natural disposition, she became the glue binding a house full of conflicting personalities together. She found herself playing the role of mediator, defusing in-house rivalries and settling disputes. The siblings would have to pick cotton to help make ends meet and they often went shoeless as they labored in the heat of the Mississippi Delta for depressed wages that weren't magically corrected by the invisible hand of the market. Early on, she vowed that her future children would never pick cotton or go shoeless.

Unlike Governor Conner, Faye would not attend an Ivy League school or any college at all. She'd leave high school at the age of sixteen to get married. According to her mother, this was the best option given the social location of a Black woman of her day and by this time, her family had uprooted and moved to Decatur, Illinois, in search of greater social justice and economic opportunities. She was one of millions of Black Americans who relocated from the South to the North in what's been called the Great Migration from 1910 through 1970.[3] According to Jonathan Frank, the editor of the National Baptist Union Review, a Black Baptist publication, the migration might've had social and religious implications. He compared it to the Hebrews being delivered from Egypt: "The migration of colored people to the North is a great religious movement. God's hand in it is almost visible."[4]

Interestingly, neither Faye nor any of her siblings liked talking about life in Mississippi. They wouldn't volunteer much information, and when one of her eldest nieces tried to document a family history, she was surprised how few memories they were willing to share about life before moving north. She had to pry, and her questions were sometimes met with vagueness or explicit rejection. It's as if looking back was almost forbidden. "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop" (Genesis 19:17).

Before leaving school, Faye sang in the Colored Girls' Choir at Stephen Decatur High School. She also sang in the choir of her Black Pentecostal church and developed a passion for the formation and Christian education of children. Faye loved gospel music. Every Saturday morning when she cleaned the house, there was one voice her three children were sure to hear: Mahalia Jackson. Known as the Queen of Gospel Music, Jackson was her favorite artist—a muse Willie Faye would cherish in mundane, celebratory, and disheartening moments for decades. Her voice would pierce through denominational walls and inspire singers like Aretha Franklin. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would say, "A voice like [Mahalia's] comes along once in a millennium."[5] It's been described as not a voice, but a force of nature.

Mahalia, "Halie" for short, was born in New Orleans in 1911. She grew up in the Black Pearl section of the city in a three-room house with thirteen family members, including aunts and cousins. Her mother, Charity, died when she was five years old, leaving her with her Aunt Duke, a stern disciplinarian.[6]

Three of Mahalia's nicknames from childhood provide insight into her early social experience: "Hook" referred to her severely bowed legs and crossed feet, "Black" referred to her dark complexion, and "Warpee" was the name of a Native American character who walked around barefoot, as Mahalia often did because she couldn't afford shoes. While the nicknames were often repeated affectionately, they exposed real pain points in her life. Born with deformities, dark skin in a colorist society, and in poverty, Mahalia was about as far from privilege as one could get.[7] Her ascribed status didn't provide her with any advantages, but her faith, diligence, and her voice would distinguish her in due time.

Mahalia left school before finishing fourth grade to work and tend to family.[8] However, her experience overcoming her disadvantages in a harsh urban environment developed a "mother wit"

that'd eventually make her a wise counselor and formidable businesswoman.[9] Throughout a very rough childhood, Mahalia always had the church. Her maternal grandfather, Paul Clark, was a Baptist preacher, and from a young age, she was known as a prayer warrior who almost never missed a church service. She sang her first hymn at four and was capturing the audience at Mount Moriah Baptist Church by fourteen.[10]

She would move to Chicago with her Aunt Hannah a year later on the Illinois Central Railroad. Chicago had been described to her as a majestic place of prosperity and culture—the promised land—by family members who'd moved or visited earlier.[11] When she first arrived, she was stunned when a White cab driver picked her up at her aunt's request. She wasn't used to being served by White people; she was only familiar with serving them. She planned to reenter school and train to be a nurse, but her work was limited to that of a domestic—cleaning houses.[12]

Mahalia was a dutiful congregant. Her friend, Brother John Sellers, said she would do almost anything for her pastor.[13] Willie Faye had a similar conviction, but perhaps with an additional motive. She was married to the man who pastored her church for most of her adult life, Rev. Thomas Lee Cooper from Brownsville, Tennessee. She'd stand faithfully beside this civil rights–era preacher for almost forty years until her death. He pastored in the Church of the Living God, the Pillar of Ground and of the Truth, also known as PGT Nation, a Black Pentecostal denomination.

Willie Faye and Mahalia shared a common American experience viewed through the lens of faith. Both Black women were born deep in the Jim Crow South and reared in the traditional Black Church. The stench of slavery still lingered in the air of their environment and was visible in the scars of the family members who shaped their worldview. Both were nurtured by elders who were formerly enslaved themselves.[14] They were cautioned by the wisdom of the

enslaved and emboldened by the courage of those who'd survived America's original sin.

These women lived in an era that some have called America's Second Slavery.[15] Even after Emancipation, Black labor was still being stolen through the sharecropping system, and racial injustice was upheld in courts of partiality. Additionally, white supremacist defenders of the Lost Cause believed it their calling to literally terrorize the Black community to maintain political and economic dominance.[16] During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, almost two or three Blacks were lynched every week in America.[17] As Willie Faye and Mahalia were coming into womanhood, the "progressive" eugenics movement was giving "false scientific legitimacy" to forced sterilization. As a result, tens of thousands of Black women were victimized by non-consensual sterilization, including civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer, who called it a "Mississippi Appendectomy."[18] They both journeyed to escape Jim Crow's jurisdiction, but would still endure racism with a different accent and Midwestern flavor.[19]

Willie Faye and Mahalia's story is the story of the Black Church's civil rights generation, a generation whose Christian faith and social action prowess provided us with perhaps the greatest illustration of moral imagination in America's history. For the purposes of this book, Willie Fay and Mahalia's generation are those who served as the base of the civil rights movement—the progeny of the enslaved and the fruit of the Black Church.

They were Black Americans for whom the Christian church served as the center of spiritual, social, and political life. This generation intersects substantially with the Silent Generation (1928–1945). However, those in the older segment of this cohort, like Rosa Parks and Mahalia Jackson, were born in the 1910s. This generation was born from roughly 1910 to 1940 with members like John Lewis being on the younger end. The Black Church is broadly defined as Christian

denominations and congregations in America that are primarily led and attended by African Americans. While the Black Church was never a theological monolith, this book will refer to what Dr. Esau McCaulley describes as the mainstream of the Black ecclesial tradition, which was "unapologetically Black and orthodox."[20]

Socially and politically, their American experience was beset by the evils of Jim Crow—social exclusion, systemic denigration, lynching, and so on. They also suffered through the scarcity of the Great Depression, maneuvered through the Great Migration, and weathered the uncertainties of World War II. Willie Fay and Mahalia's generation was far from a product of peace and privilege. At the beginning of their lives, they were unequal under the law and even after a number of judicial and legislative victories, they still found themselves unequal in fact.

In a speech promoting the Civil Rights Act of 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson described some of the traits and the impact of Willie Faye and Mahalia's generation:

> The real hero of this struggle is the American negro. His actions and protests, his courage to risk safety and even risk his life have awakened the conscience of this nation. He has called upon us to make good the promise of America. And who among us can say that we would've made the same progress were it not for his persistent bravery and his faith in American Democracy.[21]

The following are some primary characteristics, among others, that distinguished them and their tradition of social action from the rest of the American cultural and political landscape.

1. They connected the spiritual with sociopolitical advocacy.[22]
2. They upheld social justice and moral order—which means they didn't fit into the conservative-versus-progressive culture war binary.

3. They acknowledged the potential for wickedness in themselves, not just in others.
4. They were led by moral imagination and refused to treat their opponents with contempt, which allowed them to engage with grace and tenacity.

Some of these elements are found in other traditions, but the combination of these principles in practice is what makes the Black Church social action tradition truly unique. As African Methodist Episcopal Zion reverend, W. H. Davenport once said, "A pound of practices is worth a ton of theological dogmas and Christian theories."[23]

They talked about morality and heaven, but unlike the White evangelical church, they didn't limit God's will in the public square to personal piety.[24] They recognized social justice as a required part of the kingdom plan. Unlike secularists, they clearly didn't interpret the separation between church and state to be a severing of one's faith from their sociopolitical engagement. Faith guided and anchored their social action.

Unlike the social gospel of today's progressive Christians, they believed the "whole counsel of God" was more than the justice imperative alone (Acts 20:27 RSV). It also involved the Bible's tenets about sin and how sin exists in all of humanity, not excluding their community or themselves. Lastly, unlike much of Black secular activism, while it understood that "power concedes nothing without a demand," they believed their social actions had to be aspirational, holy, and redemptive, and that no group of people, not even their oppressors, was irredeemable.[25] Willie Faye and Mahalia's generation were not the originators of the Black Church's social action tradition, but they were perhaps its crown. They grasped the legacy and the lessons they learned from their elders and took "bigger steps and bigger risks."[26]

This is clear in the initiative to create the Progressive National Baptist Convention. In 1961, Pastors like Dr. L. Vencheal Booth,

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. William Augustus Jones Jr., and Dr. Gardner C. Taylor broke away from the National Baptist Convention and its elder leadership because they wanted to go further on the issue of civil rights.[27] The new denomination, led by younger pastors, maintained the orthodoxy of the NBC but wanted to further emphasize the social justice mandate as a centerpiece of their witness. The "progressive" in the name referred to its forward-looking stance on social justice, not progressive theology. They'd significantly change the race conversation, legislation, and jurisprudence dealing with race in America.[28] Historian Mary Sawyer further explains, "In the years from 1954 to 1968 . . . black churches and their pastors and members helped stage a drama that challenged the nation and captivated the world."[29]

THE ORIGINS AND SPIRIT OF THE TRADITION

While Mahalia grew up in a Baptist church, when she moved to Chicago it became clear that she'd been heavily influenced by the sound of the Black Pentecostal church a few doors from her home in New Orleans. Many of the Baptist churches in Chicago didn't appreciate the impassioned shouting and improvisation in her style.[30] Gospel singer Sallie Martin said that early on "most of the big churches still didn't receive her work . . . Some were very, very much against her—and other singers looked down their noses at her."[31] Denominationalism and classism were at play here. Many Baptists considered their music refined, unlike the frenzied shouting of lower-class Pentecostals in what was called the sanctified church.[32] But Mahalia would eventually compel some resistant Baptist audiences to "get happy" and applaud a more Pentecostal approach to worship.[33]

Mahalia would later join the choir of New Salem Baptist Church in Chicago. The music she'd create with legendary music director Thomas Dorsey would revolutionize the art form and galvanize

Black saints nationwide. Today, the Black Baptist church I attend welcomes shouting and impassioned praise, in large part based on Mahalia Jackson's legacy. She was the intoning voice of a generation of women who nurtured and powered churches, communities, and a social movement—women like Willie Faye who fed and supported the leaders before and after they preached and protested. But her voice didn't just impact the women of her time, it became the pitch for the civil rights generation in general.

If the civil rights movement had theme music and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s visionary words were the bars that laced the track, then Mahalia's riveting contralto blessed the chorus, melodically expressing the ethic and motif of this world-changing social composition. She sang her signature versions of the songs "How I Got Over" and "I Been Buked and I Been Scorned" at the March on Washington in 1963 before Dr. Martin Luther King gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. During the speech, in the Black Church's time-honored call and response tradition, she would shout, "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin. Tell 'em about the dream."[34] That theme wasn't in his notes, and he hadn't originally intended on mentioning it that day. But Mahalia had heard Dr. King speak about "the dream" in other addresses and had experienced its power. As fate would have it, her encouragement might have catalyzed the most memorable lines of one of the greatest speeches in American history.

How often did Willie Faye and hundreds of thousands of other Black Christians in her generation find respite in Mahalia Jackson's voice? How often did they remove their soiled aprons and weathered fedoras after enduring another day of subordination and segregation and pull one of Mahalia's records from its sleeve? I imagine, almost out of necessity, they put the vinyl on the turntable, carefully placed the phonograph needle down, and through her spirituals were persuaded or even compelled to push forward another

day. Or perhaps some tuned into her weekly CBS radio program, sank into the couch, or prepared soul food supper and let her powerful articulation of the sanctified gospel heal their souls.

Their pain was too real and direct for this to have simply been a routine or formulaic exercise. No, this was soul-penetrating praise and worship in the spirit of the prophet Jeremiah and King David. It was embattled petitioners saying, "LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief" (Psalm 143:1).

Through the music, we see how the spiritual and the sociopolitical were seamlessly tied together in the Black Church social action tradition. The spirituals they sang in church were the same spirituals they sang during marches and protests. In church, they'd sing about faithfully pursuing God:

> Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'roun'
> Turn me 'roun'
> Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'roun'
> I'm gonna wait until my change comes.

For a social action march, they might adapt the song by singing,

> Ain't gonna let no Jim Crow turn me around
> Turn me around, turn me around
> Ain't gonna let no injunction turn me around
> I'm gonna keep on a-walkin', keep on a-talkin'
> Marchin' up to freedom land.

In the same vein, the song "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize," one of the most recognizable civil rights spirituals, was an adaptation of "Keep Your Hand on the Plow," a gospel song based on Luke 9:62. Negro spirituals were ever present in the civil rights movement. It was a way for Black Christians to take the church with them as they journeyed outside the four walls of the sanctuary.

By singing spirituals in the field of life, Willie Fay and Mahalia's generation was continuing a legacy of placing God at the center of their interactions in the world. In his book *How Sweet the Sound*, Horace Clarence Boyer explains the dual role negro spirituals played in the life of slaves:

> Negro spirituals not only spoke of the slaves' relationship to God but also gave special attention to their position on earth and the difficult fate that had befallen them. The songs combined a recognition of the power of God and thanks for life, health, and strength, but more important they expressed the slaves' feelings about oppression, discrimination and the struggle to survive.[35]

For instance, the song "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" sounds like a defiant response to a cynical or hopeless statement. It speaks to God's omnipotence and reliability in dire circumstances:

> Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?
> Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
> And why not a every man?
> He deliver'd Daniel from the lion's den,
> And Jonah from the belly of the whale,
> And the Hebrew children from the fi'ry furnace,
> And why not every man?

If the Lord delivered Daniel, Jonah, and the Hebrew children, then surely he was able and willing to deliver his disinherited children in America. Black Christians advocated based on that premise.

When survival and civility seemed to conflict, spirituals served as disciplines—a way of forming one's perspective and reiterating standards. From slavery to the civil rights movement, they were an immediate reminder of God's promises and commands. The songs allowed them to be present in the moment without being overcome by the moment.

Today, we see partisans beat the drums of war as they enter enemy-laden territory, but Willie Faye and Mahalia's generation sang about peace and redemptive victories as they walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Gospel hymns and old-fashioned spirituals were much needed reminders of the church's foundational principles. These songs were often tirelessly repetitive, but not vainly so. They drove home the point. When your churches are bombed and your friends lynched, repeating the line "I'm gonna treat everybody right until I die" is more than just a cute lyrical phase; it's a directive to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) when it's least convenient. Intently professing, "I'm going to sing til the Spirit moves in my heart, I'm going to sing til Jesus comes" isn't reciting bubblegum pop; it's surrender to the Creator and trust in his renewing power.

Faithful biblical expositions like these helped an oppressed people identify the image of God even in the most hostile manifestations of human brokenness. The only way to see human dignity in someone who hates you is to see what's invisible outside of faith. You have to want to see it and be willing to imagine it despite all other indications. You have to love and fear God too much not to see it.

Civil rights legend Fannie Lou Hamer was a model of this ethic. Hamer had been beaten until she nearly passed out under the orders of a White highway patrolman. The beating was punishment for the ghastly offense of registering Black people to vote. Years later she was asked how she felt about the offending officer. Even after being fined herself for the incident while the officer got away unpunished, Hamer was gracious. She gave a logic-defying and loving response, saying, "We have to love them and they are sick . . . America was sick and it needed a doctor and we was the hope for America."[36] This was the difference between wanting vengeance and wanting redemption even for your oppressor.

She wasn't giving the officer or American injustice a pass. She fought for justice relentlessly and sought the prosecution of the officer for his crimes. But she didn't let his behavior or the unjust system blind her to what Jesus said about even the most wicked among us: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Again, this enduring spirit and moral clarity was inherited from what the late African American religions scholar Albert Raboteau called "slave religion," where we first see the church's central role in the Black American experience. Many enslaved people were forbidden from attending church and even from praying. Yet they risked corporal punishment to attend the original Black Church, which E. Franklin Frazier called the "Invisible Institution."[37] Despite living a life of physical bondage, in the invisible institution slaves found an area where they could exercise a degree of institutional freedom. According to C. Eric Lincoln, they created a religion of their own by performing "their own rituals, songs, and other cultural forms of religious worship."[38]

They were also able develop their own leaders. Raboteau explained:

> From the abundant testimony of fugitive and freed slaves it is clear that the slave community had an extensive religious life of its own, hidden from the eyes of the master. In the secrecy of the quarters or the seclusion of the brush arbors ("hush harbors") the slaves made Christianity of their own . . . Into that all-night singing and praying the slaves poured the sufferings and needs of their days.[39]

Enslaved people didn't simply copy the faith tradition of slaveholders, "they created their own worldviews, and social and cultural institutions."[40] They interpreted the faith through a different lens. Through the Bible's exodus narrative, they identified

with the suffering and the eventual liberation of the Hebrew people.[41] The God they knew and trusted was the same God that strengthened Moses and ordered him to tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go" (Exodus 8:1).

Spirituals played a key role in connecting Christianity to the experience of the enslaved community.[42] Their praise and worship were a matter of survival. C. Eric Lincoln points out, "Even a Marxist historian such as Eugene Genovese concluded . . . that slave religion played a major role in the survival of slaves."[43] Slavery is the essence of inhumanity. Such captivity, by its very nature, robs one of agency and by design arrests the development of a healthy self-image. Slaveholders often made every effort to stunt the mental and spiritual growth of the enslaved. If religion was offered to slaves, in many cases, it was a truncated gospel—void of the liberation narrative and themes that inspire hope. It was often used as an "instrument of social control."[44]

Yet, God will not be silenced by the trifles of men. The Holy Spirit still filled the hearts of those who oppression tried to keep from experiencing the fullness of God. In his slave narrative, W. L. Bost reflects on how those wicked schemes failed to keep God's word from reaching his African American slave community.

> Us [slaves] never have a chance to go to Sunday school and church. The white folks feared for [slaves] to get any religion and education, but I reckon somethin' inside just told us about God and that there was a better place hereafter.[45]

Neither the perpetuation of illiteracy nor the perversion of the biblical message was enough to mute the salvific reality of the gospel. God delivered a faithful theology to those with no formal education, while some well-educated theologians continued to endorse slavery. Just as God sent common, uneducated disciples to speak into an elitist Greco-Roman culture, God entrusted some of the

lowest in America's antebellum society with a prophetic vision of his kingdom (Acts 10).

The invisible institution would become a life source and refuge where many preachers professed a theology of orthodoxy (right doctrine) and orthopraxy (right conduct). They espoused a hermeneutic of love and truth that distinguished itself from the perverted version of the faith held by slaveholders and Jim Crow endorsers. Preachers constantly reminded the shackled congregation that they were defined by God, not by institutions of oppression, and that their chains were temporal, but their freedom was inevitable. As Vince Bantu explains, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ was the cornerstone of all faith and hope for African slaves."[46]

Lincoln explained, "Historically, black churches have been the most important and dominant institutional phenomenon in African American communities."[47] It was more than just a place of worship, "but also a bulletin board to a people who owned no organs of communication . . . and even a kind of people's court." E. Franklin Frazier called the Black Church a "nation within a nation"—"the center of economic cooperation, education, and social and political life for the black community."[48] No institution invested more in the education of African Americans. Frazier goes on to say, "The Negro Church has affected the entire intellectual development and outlook of Negroes."[49]

Churchgoers in Willie Faye and Mahalia's generation greatly invested in the church and made major sacrifices for it. Some weeks, Mahalia would be exhausted after five straight nights of revival singing at Greater Salem, where all the proceeds would go to the programming for the children's ministry, "so those children wouldn't have to run around the streets."[50] Bishop Cooper and Willie Faye helped build PGT Nation Temple #1 brick by brick and paid off the last of the mortgage for Temple #2 out of their own pockets.

The Black Church's social action, at its best, was a negro spiritual in action. While the Black Church was far from unanimous in its support of social activism, "From the beginning, the civil rights movement was anchored in the Black Church."[51] Preachers and the people in the pews organized and financially supported the movement. Again, Willie Faye and Mahalia's generation of Christian advocates didn't disconnect the sacred from their engagement in the public square.

Some secular movements have interpreted religion and talk of faith and heaven as merely a form of escapism—a means of disengaging from reality. But for many the hymns helped them better engage reality. There were indeed those in their community who tried to dismiss the here and now by solely focusing on the hereafter. However, the civil rights movement was the opposite of escapism. It was an action-oriented initiative with a keen awareness of the principalities and spiritual wickedness in high places at play in society.

This supernatural perspective conflicts with the materialism of secular activism. Materialists believe only in what they can see or touch. They focus solely on the physical concerns of this world and often regard religion as a liability diverting our attention away from social change. They take God's sovereignty and providence out of the equation. The secular mind is uncomfortable with the idea of an all-powerful authority that it can't control and struggles to admit there are realities beyond human understanding. Perhaps materialism is its own form of escapism—a vain attempt to circumvent what one can't completely understand and control. Conversely, Willie Faye and Mahalia trusted God's self-disclosure, were empowered by his grace, and were at peace with the things that would only be known "by and by."

Social justice outside of the existence of a loving and just God doesn't make sense. The worldview at the center of the Black

Church's social action tradition rejected the idea that this miraculously designed world came from nothingness. A godless particle or uncreated big bang couldn't possibly create Mahalia's voice, Zora Neale Hurston's prose, George Washington Carver's scientific mind, or a slave's moral imagination. The "black sacred cosmos or the religious worldview of African Americans" saw the whole universe was sacred.[52]

Contrary to materialist narratives, acknowledging the spirit world and human limitation doesn't require a surrender to anti-intellectualism. Look no further than the brilliant Black organizers and tacticians who orchestrated the civil rights movement from church fellowship halls. Leaders like Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth strategically outwitted devious Birmingham commissioners and sheriffs, proving logic was neither scorned nor in short supply in Christian advocacy circles.[53] Great minds were at work, but those minds weren't obstacles to a greater faith. Faith and logic weren't in conflict. These believers employed both.

Ultimately, dismissing what can't fully be ascertained through the five senses is disempowering. It desensitizes us to what can be felt, captured, and achieved spiritually. They were at peace and even celebrated dependence on a higher power (Proverbs 13:4; Colossians 3:23; Hebrews 13:16). Their faith was refuge from the hopelessness of the skeptics. They also knew prayer and a song of worship could accomplish things a philosophical treatise could not.

In this chapter, I've obviously highlighted the best of the Black Church's history and prophetic public witness. However, that tradition, like any other, isn't without its warts and ongoing struggles. The truth is women often weren't given their due, certain groups were marginalized within the movement, and moral shortcomings compromised some of its leaders. As Dr. Gardner C. Taylor cautioned, "We need to reflect on the aberrations and, also some of the futile aspect of the Civil Rights Movement."[54] Notwithstanding its

shortcomings, I believe the Black Church's social action tradition can provide a model for how Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy can help the church and a polarized nation overcome the toxic culture wars and move toward a greater faithfulness and civic pluralism. Our historic public witness can correct many of the erroneous approaches, attitudes, and practices much of American Christianity has fallen into in the public square today. In other words, the Black Church has a word for this moment in the public square.

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