

# African American Christianity: From Kemet to Du Bois's Black Church

Min. Qadry Harris<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This essay critically examines the African civilizational continuity of the Black Church, challenging the dominant Eurocentric narrative that situates it as a syncretic byproduct of enslavement rather than as an extension of African spiritual agency. Using an Afrocentric methodological framework, the study reinterprets W. E. B. Du Bois's historiographical analysis in *The Negro Church* and *The Souls of Black Folk* argues that his reliance on Western epistemology limits his recognition of the Black Church's deeper African origins. This research incorporates Asante's Location Theory, Diop's Two-Cradle Theory, and Obenga's historiographical methods to reposition the Black Church within an unbroken continuum of African spirituality, extending from Kemet (Ancient Egypt) to contemporary African American religious institutions. Methodologically, this study employs a historical-comparative approach to analyze primary sources—including Du Bois's sociological texts, Cheikh Anta Diop's historiographical corrections, and James Cone's Black Liberation Theology—alongside secondary sources from Africology and African religious studies. The data collection involves textual analysis of theological writings, historical accounts, and ethnographic evidence demonstrating African retentions in Black religious traditions. The findings reveal that the Black Church is not a hybridization of African and Christian elements but a continuation of African priestly governance structures, oral traditions, and cosmological epistemologies under Christian symbolism. Furthermore, the study critiques the theological limitations of Cone, Willie J. Jennings, and J. Kameron Carter, exposing their reliance on biblical reconciliation models that inadvertently sustain an anti-African theological framework. The results of this analysis indicate that Afrocentric historical theology must move beyond the creolization thesis and instead assert the Black Church as an African institution that predates and transcends biblical Christianity. This work advocates for a paradigm shift in Black theology that decenters biblical dependency, reclaims African epistemological autonomy, and repositions the Black Church within African civilizational continuity.

**Keywords:** Black Church, W.E.B. Du Bois, African Civilizational Continuity, Location Theory, Two-Cradle Theory, Biblical Theology, Temple Africology.

---

<sup>1</sup> Minister Qadry Harris, M. Div., PhD Candidate, Africology & African American Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA  
Email: [qadry.harris@temple.edu](mailto:qadry.harris@temple.edu)

*Imhotep Graduate Student Journal* 19-33. © 2025 Harris. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives License, which permits the user to copy and distribute the work in unadapted form only, for noncommercial purposes only, provided that the original authors and source are credited.

DOI: 10.15367/r4ge6y40

<https://tuljournals.temple.edu/index.php/imhotep/index>

## Introduction

*The Encyclopedia of Black Studies* defines the “Black Church” as a term denoting African American Christian institutions that emerged in the 18th century, serving as both a spiritual and socio-political foundation for Black communal life.<sup>2</sup> However, standard academic interpretations of the Black Church often fail to interrogate its African civilizational continuity, treating it instead as a hybrid institution shaped by Christian theological influence and the socio-political conditions of Euro-American enslavement.<sup>3</sup> This essay challenges Eurocentric framing by arguing that the Black Church is not merely a reaction to oppression but a continuation of African spiritual agency, informed by centuries of African cosmological and theological traditions.

### *Centering an Afrocentric Methodology*

W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Negro Church*, represents one of the earliest academic efforts to historicize the Black Church’s African spiritual inheritance. Du Bois acknowledges the survival of African religious elements in

Black Christianity, stating that “the Negro [*sic*] Church, the first distinctively [African] American social institution, was not at first by any means a Christian Church, but a mere adaptation of those heathen [*sic*] rites which we roughly designate by the term Obi Worship or ‘Voodooism [*sic*].’”<sup>4</sup> However, while Du Bois correctly identifies African spiritual retentions, his methodological framework remains constrained by Western historiography, as he relies on *The Encyclopedia Britannica* to validate the African origins of Egyptian religion.<sup>5</sup> This Eurocentric epistemological dependence limits Du Bois’s ability to fully capture the theological continuities between African civilizations and the Black Church, forcing him to situate African religious survivals within the margins of Christianity rather than recognizing these vital forces as foundational to the Black Church’s emergence.

This essay reframes Du Bois’s findings through an Afrocentric methodological lens, building on the work of Cheikh Anta Diop, Molefi Kete Asante, and Theophile Obenga to position the Black Church as an institution deeply rooted in the civilizational, epistemological, and spiritual frameworks of African antiquity.<sup>6</sup> By

---

<sup>2</sup> Myra Julian, “Black Church,” in *The Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, eds. Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 118.

<sup>3</sup> See James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume One: 1966–1979*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 89–91.

<sup>4</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903*, ed. Phil Zuckerman (AltaMira Press, 2003), 5. Du Bois, much like numerous 19th-century Western scholars engaging with African anthropology, operated without a comprehensive metatheory or guiding paradigm to structure his systematic

examination of African populations. Consequently, this distinguished scholar frequently employed derogatory language when referencing the origins of African ethnic communities and their associated spiritual traditions. Significantly, this essay uses the terms like “Black,” “ethnicity,” and “ethnic group” instead of “Negro” or “tribe” to denote the native African lineages that trace back to the dawn of humanity, which chattel slavery violently interrupted and compelled Africans to extend within America.

<sup>5</sup> Du Bois *Negro Church*, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> See Molefi Kete Asante, “Temple Circle,” in *The Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, eds. Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 445–446.

employing Asante's Location Theory and Diop's Two-Cradle Theory, this analysis critiques Eurocentric interpretations that depict African spirituality as a fragmented cultural remnant rather than an intact and evolving knowledge system rooted in Kemetic history.<sup>7</sup>

*Beyond the "Africanization of Christianity" Thesis*

African American theologian Anthony B. Pinn, in *Introduction to Black Church History*, describes the historical development of Black Christianity as a process of "Africanization," in which enslaved Africans synthesized African spiritual elements with European Christian frameworks.<sup>8</sup> Pinn states, "[many] Africans did not reject the Christian faith; [instead], they combined it with traditional African practices and developed religions that greatly resembled belief systems such as Vodou (Haiti), Santeria (Cuba), Obeah (Jamaica), or Shango (Trinidad)."<sup>9</sup> While helpful in acknowledging African spiritual survivals in the Americas, this syncretism thesis fails to account for the foundational role of African cosmologies in shaping Christian theological concepts in antiquity.<sup>10</sup> Pinn's framing implicitly assumes that Africans encountered Christianity as an external framework, using it to fit their needs by structuring the

remnants of indigenous African faith, reinforcing Western theological primacy.

This essay argues instead that Christianity itself, particularly its trinitarian structure, distorts the African cosmological worldview long before the advent of biblical theology. Cheikh Anta Diop's research in *Civilization or Barbarism* substantiates this claim by demonstrating that Kemetic theology had already articulated a trinitarian framework centuries before influencing biblical Israelites and the historical rise of Christianity. As Diop explains, "Egyptian cosmogony states: 'I was one; I became three'; this notion of trinity permeates [all] Egyptian religious thought and is found again in multiple divine triads such as Osiris-Isis-Horus, or Ra, in the morning, at noon, at night."<sup>11</sup> As an institution, this essay argues that the Black Church's theological framework is fundamentally African. Therefore, Black Theology emerges from Diop's southern cradle rather than a product of Euro-American Christianity.

**Historical Foundations of the Black Church—From Sociology to Africology**

W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* remains one of the most comprehensive early studies of Black religious life in the United States. His work, grounded in a sociological framework, identifies the Black Church as the first major African American

---

<sup>7</sup> See Ama Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm," in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, ed. Ama Mazama (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 30. For the purposes of this essay, "Kemet" and "Kemetic" refer to Ancient Egypt situated in Diopian historiography and Afrocentric metatheory to treat the Blackness of the Pharaonic dynasties as an operational scientific principle.

<sup>8</sup> Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 10-12.

<sup>9</sup> Pinn and Pinn, *Black Church History*, 10-12.

<sup>10</sup> See Amon Saba Saakana, ed., *African Origins of the Major World Religions* (1988; repr., London: Karnak House, 2021). [NOTE: copyedits reflect reprint by original publisher. Confirm this is the case.]

<sup>11</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, ed. Harold J. Salemson and Marjolijn De Jager, trans. Yaa-Lengi Meema Ngemi (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), 312.

social institution, emphasizing its role in providing spiritual guidance, communal organization, and resistance against systemic oppression.<sup>12</sup> However, despite recognizing the Black Church's African origins, Du Bois's methodology remains limited by Western historiographical assumptions, treating African spirituality as a fragmented survival rather than an unbroken civilizational system. Du Bois states, "At first sight, it would seem that slavery completely destroyed every vestige of spontaneous social movement among [Black folk]...This is not strictly true; the vast power of the priests in the African state has already been noted: his realm alone—the province of religion and medicine—remained largely unaffected."<sup>13</sup>

While Du Bois correctly identifies the resilience of African spiritual leadership during enslavement, his argument assumes that African religious traditions underwent an irreversible rupture upon contact with Euro-American slavery, requiring reinterpretation within a Christian framework. This methodological limitation mirrors the Eurocentric anthropological biases of his time, where African cultures were often examined through the lens of their transformations under colonial rule rather than as self-sustaining civilizational structures.

*Beyond the Plantation: African Spirituality as a Civilizational Continuum*

A critical intervention in Du Bois's analysis comes to light when examining Cheikh Anta Diop's civilizational approach, which challenges the assumption that African spiritual structures were destroyed under slavery. In *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, Diop argues that African social and spiritual institutions—such as pharaonic priesthoods, ancestor veneration, and matriarchal theological structures—remained intact, albeit in reconfigured forms, within the African diaspora.<sup>14</sup> Diop states, "Our knowledge of African ethnography enables us to distinguish between a hypothesis and a confirmed historical fact. To be sure, a cultural foundation common to all African Blacks...seems to justify the idea...But above all, there are totemic [ethnic] names borne by all Africans...according to the extent of their dispersion."<sup>15</sup> This perspective directly challenges Du Bois's framing of the Black Church as an adaptation to oppression rather than a continuation of African civilization under new conditions. Instead of viewing Black preachers as Christianized figures, they should be understood as a dispersion of the African priests, diviners, and social mediators, whose role has persisted in African societies for millennia.

Molefi Kete Asante builds on Diop's historiographical corrections by introducing Location Theory, which asserts that African phenomena must be interpreted within their cultural paradigm rather than as byproducts of European influence.<sup>16</sup> Asante and Temple

<sup>12</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Middletown, DE: Millennium Publications, 2014), 92.

<sup>13</sup> Du Bois, *Negro Church*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, ed. Mercer Cook, trans. Mercer Cook (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974), 134-135.

<sup>15</sup> Diop, *African Origin of Civilization*, 182.

<sup>16</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, "The Afrocentric Metatheory and Disciplinary Implications," in *The African American Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 507.

Africology invite African Christians to challenge the assumption that the Black Church derives its significance from its Christian identity.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Asante contends that cosmic significance survives as an African social and spiritual structure predating Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Asante underscores this point by emphasizing the sacred knowledge embedded in African spiritual expressions preserved in Black religious traditions despite colonial disruptions. He states: “The ancient mysteries contained in the books of the great priests of the holy lodges held the key to African transcendence nearly five thousand years before the Arab jihads swept out of Arabia and conquered North Africa.”<sup>19</sup> This assertion directly challenges the notion that African spiritual epistemologies were fundamentally altered by Christianity, instead positioning African cosmologies as the original vessels of theological and philosophical transcendence. The continuity of African spiritual systems is evident in how oral traditions sustained religious, medicinal, and agricultural knowledge systems across generations. Asante elaborates: “These oral traditions have demonstrated the integration of African medicine, theology, and agriculture.”<sup>20</sup>

By situating African spirituality as a civilizational system rather than a fragmented cultural relic, Asante’s Location Theory challenges the creolization thesis of theologians like Noel Erskine, who argue that the Black Church is a hybrid creation blending African and European religious elements.<sup>21</sup> Instead, applying Asante’s

framework to the Black Church empowers theologians to assert that:

1. The Black Church did not adapt to Christianity but maintained African spiritual systems under Christian symbolism.
2. The Black Church’s theological and ethical structures are more accurately understood as extensions of African cosmologies, such as the Yoruba Ifá, Shona Mbira, and Asante Okyeame systems.
3. Christianity was integrated into African spirituality, not the other way around, just as Islam became an imposed framework across parts of North and West Africa while failing to erase African epistemologies.

#### *The Role of the Black Preacher–African Priesthood in Disguise*

Du Bois’s description of the Black preacher aligns closely with African priesthood traditions but stops short of fully acknowledging this connection. He writes: “The Negro priest, therefore, early became an important figure on the plantation and found his function as the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, and as one who expressed rudely but picturesquely the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people.”<sup>22</sup> This characterization mirrors traditional African spiritual leadership, where priests and priestesses serve as religious and

<sup>17</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *African Pyramids of Knowledge: Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Africology* (Brooklyn, NY: Universal Write Publications LLC, 2015), 162.

<sup>18</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 198.

<sup>19</sup> Asante, *Afrocentric Idea*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> Asante, *Afrocentric Idea*, 198.

<sup>21</sup> Noel Leo Erskine, *Plantation Church: How African American Religion Was Born in Caribbean Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Du Bois, *Negro Church*, 5.

political figures, maintaining harmony between the community and the spiritual world.<sup>23</sup> However, Du Bois's failure to explicitly trace this connection reinforces the Eurocentric separation of theology and governance. This distinction did not exist in classical African civilizations such as Kemet, Kush, or the Kingdom of Kongo.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, Theophile Obenga describes African priesthoods as the original foundation of intellectual, moral, and social governance, stating that their functions were inseparable from the broader civilizational advancements of African societies.<sup>25</sup> Obenga explained that the Nile Valley clergy were spiritual leaders and had expertise in astronomy, linguistics, and governance. He underscores that "Nile Valley clergy were highly trained in religious ideology as well as in the study of celestial bodies and the act of symbolic writing."<sup>26</sup> This framing is crucial because it allows us to reinterpret the Black preacher's authority not as a Christian pastoral innovation but as an African priesthood continuity. Rather than being derived from European homiletics, the sermon itself, Asante contends, is an extension of African oral traditions, call-and-response dynamics, and cosmological storytelling techniques.<sup>27</sup>

### *Beyond Du Bois: Reconstructing the Black Church as an African Institution*

Du Bois provides a foundational yet incomplete framework for understanding the historical evolution of African American Christianity. His reliance on Western sociological methodology and Eurocentric historiography prevents him from fully

capturing the civilizational continuity of African spirituality within the Black Church. However, when reframed through the Afrocentric metatheory advanced by Temple Africology, the Black Church emerges not as a reactionary institution shaped by Christianity but as one of the longest-surviving African spiritual institutions in the Western Hemisphere.

Moving beyond Du Bois's sociological limitations, this study presents an alternative framework that fully reclaims the Black Church as a site of African spiritual agency, resistance, and self-determination. This understanding is crucial for dismantling the misconception that the Black Church is an adaptation of whiteness. It represents a cultural and theological framework that predates biblical Christianity itself. A full Afrocentric reconstruction of Du Bois's thesis would:

1. Abandon the creolization model, which assumes that African spirituality was merely absorbed into biblical Christianity rather than Christianity being absorbed into African spiritual epistemologies.
2. Repositioning the Black Church within the framework of African civilizational continuity as a modern adaptation of priestly governance structures in traditional African societies.
3. Situate the Black preacher within African cosmological frameworks, understanding their role as an extension of African priesthood

---

<sup>23</sup> See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 287-310.

<sup>24</sup> Diop, *African Origin of Civilization*, 142-153.

<sup>25</sup> Theophile Obenga, *African Philosophy* (St. John's: Brawley Press, 2015), 46.

<sup>26</sup> Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 37-38.

<sup>27</sup> Asante, *Afrocentric Idea*, 79.

traditions rather than a product of Christian theology.

### **The Trap of African American Christian Theology**

James Cone, regarded as the father of Black Liberation Theology, fundamentally shaped African American Christian discourse by framing the biblical Jesus as the Black Messiah—a theological model that sought to reconcile the suffering of African Americans with the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Cone argues that “in the Exodus event, God is revealed through his acts on behalf of a weak and defenseless people...to destroy the enslaving power of the mighty Pharaoh.”<sup>28</sup> This liberation theology reclaims the biblical God—Yahweh, revealed in Jesus Christ, as the God of the oppressed. Christ’s

incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, Cone argues, demonstrate God’s eternal solidarity with the poor and downtrodden, affirming Black Power as “Christ’s central message to America in the contemporary context.”<sup>29</sup> This leads to Daudi Ajani Azibo’s concept of theological misorientation<sup>30</sup> that treats biblical Israelite history as an interpretive lens for African struggles, even though the biblical Israelites were a Northern Cradle people whose cultural worldview was distinct from African civilizations like Kemet and Canaan.<sup>31</sup> This theological dependency on Jesus as a mediator for African American Christianity is further complicated by the works of Willie J. Jennings and J. Kameron Carter, who extend Cone’s analysis but fail to challenge the fundamental anti-African orientation of biblical theology itself.<sup>32</sup> Their

---

<sup>28</sup> James H. Cone, “Black Revelation and Social Existence” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume One: 1966-1979*, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 160.

<sup>29</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 86.

<sup>30</sup> Kobi K. K. Kabon, *The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework* (Tallahassee, FL: Nubian Nation, 1993), 150.

<sup>31</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Karnak House, 1989) (CUBA), 84. Diop’s anthropological framework establishes that the biblical Israelites were culturally distinct from African civilizations such as Kemet and Canaan. Diop posits that they emerged from the Northern Cradle, which fostered patrilineal succession, hierarchical governance, and an exclusionary theological worldview that diverged from the communal, matrilineal, and cosmologically holistic traditions of African civilizations. Diop argues that the Canaanites, who are often presented as adversaries to biblical Israel, were ethnically and culturally African, tracing their origins to the Paleolithic Natufian and Capsian industries, which radiated from North Africa into what is now Israel and Palestine. The “Zone of Confluence”, where the cultural attributes of the Northern and Southern

Cradles intermingled, is the area in which the matrilineal Canaanites became assimilated into the patrilineal Hebrew-Israelite identity, ultimately resulting in the theological and social rupture between African and Israelite worldviews.

<sup>32</sup> See J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 365-366 and Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) 259. Jennings and Carter’s theological frameworks extend Cone’s vision of Black theological identity but ultimately reinforce a locational fallacy by assuming that African-descended people must be reconciled to the biblical God through the Semitic cultural lens of Jesus and biblical Israel. Their theologies present Jesus’ Jewish flesh as the universal mediator for racial redemption, yet they fail to interrogate the historical anti-African orientation embedded in biblical theology. According to Asante’s Location Theory, this theological dependency reflects a misorientation within Africana religious thought, where scholars attempt to restore Black identity through a reconciliation model rooted in Semitic frameworks rather than African cosmology. This misalignment, as observed in both Jennings and Carter, results in a dislocation that subordinates African spiritual sovereignty to biblical narratives that have historically demonized African civilizations

theologies seek to reconcile African Americans back to the biblical God of Israel post-slavery. Still, this framework is deeply flawed because it centers on the cultural Jewishness of Jesus rather than engaging critically with the anti-Egyptian and anti-Canaanite orientation of biblical Christianity. Thus, their theologies reinforce African spiritual fragmentation rather than restoring African civilizational unity.

*The Problem of Biblical Judaism and the Northern Cradle*

Cheikh Anta Diop's Two-Cradle Theory provides the historical and anthropological corrective to this theological problem by demonstrating that the cultural worldview of the biblical Israelites was shaped by the Northern Cradle, which was fundamentally distinct from African civilizational models.<sup>33</sup> As Diop asserts: "Western Asia is the true zone of confluence or meeting place of the two cradles...[it leads to real] intermixing of influences and peoples coming from both regions."<sup>34</sup> This intermixing produced the biblical Hebrews/Israelites, who were not culturally or ethnically African but a Semitic offshoot that diverged from African spiritual and ethical traditions due to generations of sustained contact with early European patriarchs.<sup>35</sup> This is critical because biblical theology—from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament—repeatedly positions Egypt (Kemet) and Canaan, matriarchal African civilizations, as ideological enemies.

- Exodus 7:14-11:10: Yahweh's Ten Plagues against Egypt are framed as a divine punishment against the Classical African Pantheon of

Divinities, portraying Kemetic priests as "magicians" and idolaters.

- 1 Samuel 28:3-20: Saul, the first Israelite king, engages in an African spiritual practice—ancestor communication through divination—only to have it condemned by Yahweh.
- Matthew 15:21-28: The Canaanite woman must beg Jesus for divine intervention from a derogatory position endorsed by patriarchal cultural norms, reinforcing the subjugation of African peoples in biblical theology.

If biblical theology is built upon a cultural and theological rejection of Africa, then Cone, Jennings, and Carter's insistence on centering African American Christian theology around Jesus (a Jewish figure) fundamentally limits African agency. Instead of reclaiming African spiritual sovereignty, they redirect theological discourse into a comprehensive paradigm that demands reconciliation with an anti-African biblical God. This creates a contradiction within Black Church theology:

1. On one hand, the Black Church claims to be the primary institution for preserving African spiritual resistance.
2. On the other hand, it remains theologically dependent upon a biblical narrative that vilifies African civilizations.

This contradiction must be addressed and resolved, which Cone, Jennings, and Carter fail to do.

<sup>33</sup> Diop, *African Origin of Civilization*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Diop, *CUBA*, 84.

<sup>35</sup> Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, 16.



*The Du Boisian Error: Why Cone, Carter, and Jennings Misread African Identity*

His reliance on Euro-American historiography shaped Du Bois's framework of spiritual reconciliation between Africa and Christianity.<sup>36</sup> Du Bois emphatically asserts that the emergence of the Black Church centers on the coerced adoption of European Christianity.<sup>37</sup> Theologically, the biblical Jesus, as the quintessential symbol of the one true God of the universe, initiates the paradigmatic transformation that encompasses brutalized African ancestry, culture, and history within himself.<sup>38</sup> This framework sets a dangerous precedent for Cone, Jennings, and Carter, who extend this same theological reconciliation model rather than rejecting it outright. Their failure lies in their inability to recognize that African spirituality is alive and well in the Black church, existing long before biblical Christianity, and does not require validation from Semitic religious constructs. The call for African American Christians to reconcile with God through the biblical figure of Jesus, given the demonization of African elements in biblical texts, can inadvertently sacralize anti-African sentiments. This means that theologians and preachers lacking a functional use of the Temple Afrocentric Paradigm who continue to center Jesus in the Black Church are unknowingly sacralizing anti-African theology rather than liberating African people.

*Toward an Afrocentric Historical Theology: Reclaiming African Spiritual Sovereignty*

---

<sup>36</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 157-158.

<sup>37</sup> Du Bois, *Negro Church*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings (LOA #34): The Suppression of the African Slave Trade / The*

To resolve this crisis, Black theology must

1. Reject biblical reconciliation models that force African spiritual identity into Jewish and Christian frameworks.
2. Recognize that Christianity, as it is biblically structured, emerged from the Northern Cradle and is not Indigenous to Africa.
3. Reframe the Black Church as an extension of African civilizational continuity, not as a response to slavery or biblical narratives.
4. Develop a theological system that decenters the biblical God and is instead rooted in African epistemology.

Maulana Karenga's Kawaida Theory argues that African culture, inseparable from spirituality, must be reclaimed on its terms, grounded in Kemetic history, not through the theological assumptions of oppressor religions.<sup>39</sup> African American Theology must recognize and rectify the underdeveloped connection to Kemet across generations. Such an effort is crucial for preserving and recreating the Classical African cultural and spiritual heritage of the Black Church. This means that the future of Black theology must be Afrocentric before biblical.

James Cone, Willie Jennings, and J. Kameron Carter fail to recognize that their theological dependence on Jesus as the Second Member of the Trinity forces African people into an inherited theological paradigm that is structurally anti-African. By failing to

*Souls of Black Folk / Dusk of Dawn / Essays*, (Library of America, 1986), 577.

<sup>39</sup> Maulana Karenga, "Kawaida Philosophy," in *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*, ed. Young Yun Kim, associate ed. Kelly L. McKay-Semmler (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).4.

interrogate the Northern Cradle origins of biblical Judaism and Christianity, their theologies perpetuate the fragmentation of African spiritual unity rather than restoring it. Thus, the Black Church must return to its original African epistemological and cosmological foundations. Only then can African people reclaim their full spiritual sovereignty, free from the theological constraints of Christianity's anti-African legacy.

### **Locating Jesus Beyond African Civilization: Repositioning Christ as a Semitic Priest Dislocated from Classical Africa**

The existing paradigm of African American Christian theology remains trapped in a Du Boisian reconciliation model, where Black Church identity is theologically dependent upon biblical narratives that structurally subordinate African civilizations to biblical Israel. This dependence is evident in James Cone's Black Liberation Theology, which frames Jesus as the Black Messiah for the oppressed while failing to interrogate the anti-African orientation of biblical theology itself. The same theological limitations persist in the work of Willie Jennings and J. Kameron Carter, who, despite their critiques of Christianity's racial constructs, ultimately reaffirm the idea that African people must be reconciled to God through Jesus and biblical Israel.

This framework fails because it does not critically assess the biblical figures' relationship with Classical Africa. Instead of recognizing Jesus as a Semitic priest historically displaced from African epistemology, mainstream Black theology insists on his universal salvific role, reinforcing the biblical assumption that African civilizations must be theologically subordinated to the covenantal God of Israel.

### *Jesus and the Biblical Hebrews: A Dislocated Relationship with African Epistemology*

According to the New Testament (NSRV), Jesus' early life included a period of exile in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). This event places him within the orbit of Kemetic civilization during his formative years. However, Jesus does not emerge as a figure of African epistemological restoration. Instead, his public ministry is firmly situated within the theological framework of biblical Israel, which maintains a Northern Cradle religious structure that is patriarchal, ethnocentric, and theologically exclusionary. Jesus' interactions with African peoples in the New Testament reflect a Jewish re-engagement with Africa, but this engagement remains deeply embedded within an anti-African biblical framework. Consider the following examples:

- Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). When approached by a Canaanite woman seeking healing for her daughter, Jesus initially refuses, stating, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" He then refers to her people as "dogs," a derogatory statement that reflects the anti-African sentiments embedded in Israelite theology. While he ultimately grants her request, the exchange reveals that African-descended peoples in the New Testament must seek divine favor through subordination to Jewish religious authority.
- The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. The Ethiopian official is eager to understand the Hebrew scriptures but must be taught by Philip, an Israelite disciple of Jesus. This dynamic reinforces the assumption that African epistemology is

incomplete without biblical revelation, mirroring the broader biblical portrayal of Africa as a recipient, rather than an originator, of divine knowledge.

These encounters demonstrate that Jesus and his early followers may have engaged Africans, but culturally, under the assumption that they required theological assimilation into Israel's religious framework. This dynamic continues in the Black Church today, where theological education remains grounded in the Semitic religious consciousness of biblical Israel rather than the civilizational epistemologies of Kemet, Kush, and Canaan.

#### *Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation: Repositioning Jesus as a Dislocated Semitic Priest*

Suppose Jesus and other Israelite biblical figures are not universal messianic figures but Semitic priests who were historically displaced from African civilization. In that case, a new interpretative lens is required to situate them within Afrocentric historical consciousness. This demands an approach that asks two critical questions of every biblical narrative:

1. Where is the African in the text?
2. If the Africans are present, are they freely practicing African culture?

This framework exposes the fundamental theological rupture between biblical Judaism and Classical African civilization when applied to the New Testament:

- Jesus is not as overtly hostile toward Egypt and Canaan as Yahweh is in the Hebrew Bible. Still, his interactions remain within a Semitic patriarchal framework that assumes African

civilization requires theological reformation.

- Afrocentric biblical hermeneutics must, therefore, reject any interpretation that treats Jesus as a replacement for African spirituality and instead position him as a displaced Semitic figure navigating a fractured theological landscape.

This interpretative shift enables Black theology to reconstruct the Black Church's identity not as a continuation of biblical Christianity but as an institution capable of restoring African epistemological autonomy while maintaining its current sociological structures.

#### *The Role of the Black Preacher as an African Priest in Theological Restoration*

Du Bois's description of the Negro preacher on the plantation presents an opportunity to reclaim the Black preacher as an African priest, not merely a Christian minister. Du Bois understood that the Black preacher served as a spiritual intermediary, moral guide, and cultural preserver, which mirrored the priesthood's role in Classical African civilizations. However, under Euro-American enslavement, the Black preacher's role was redefined through Christian theological frameworks, restricting their spiritual function to biblical interpretation rather than African epistemological restoration. The future of Black theology depends on reclaiming this role through Afrocentric biblical interpretation. The Black preacher must:

- Transition from the role of biblical interpreter to one of African epistemological restoration, teaching congregations to see the Bible not as a superior theological system but as a text reflecting Semitic displacement from Africa.

- Employ Temple Africology as a methodology and/or perspective for theological transformation. This will ensure that the Black Church gradually reorients its teachings toward African cosmology while maintaining sociological continuity.

This shift will allow the Black Church to function as a 21st-century receptacle of African spirituality, using the “Veneer of Christianity” as a tool for theological transformation rather than as a permanent theological dependency.<sup>40</sup>

#### *The Long-Term Vision: Theological Evolution Beyond Biblical Dependency*

While the immediate abandonment of the Bible and Jesus is not feasible, the Black Church must begin the process of Afrocentric theological reorientation to ensure that the theological limitations of biblical Christianity do not bind future generations. The long-term vision includes:

- A gradual theological transition where Jesus is no longer the center of Black religious consciousness, but rather a figure within a larger narrative of Semitic displacement from Africa.
- A restructured Black Church liturgy that integrates African cosmological principles, such as Ma’at, Ifá, and Kawaida, into worship and ethical frameworks, like transforming communion, baptism, and funeral rites into authentic African rituals.
- Creating an Africology-based theological education model ensures that Black Church leaders are

trained not in Eurocentric biblical exegesis but in African epistemology.

As Maulana Karenga argues in Kawaida Theory, cultural revolution must precede political revolution<sup>41</sup>—the same is true for theology. The Black Church cannot be politically liberated without reclaiming its theological sovereignty.

#### *Conclusion: The Black Church as a Vessel of African Civilizational Restoration*

The Black Church’s next theological evolution must commence with an Afrocentric biblical hermeneutic that recognizes Jesus and other biblical figures not as universal saviors but as Semitic priests seeking to reconnect with Classical African civilization. This shift does not outright abandon biblical theology but reinterprets it through an African-centered framework, ensuring that the Black Church gradually moves toward African spiritual autonomy. This process is an intellectual exercise and a crucial step in the long-term theological decolonization of the Black religious tradition. Only by acknowledging Jesus’ role within the broader history of Semitic displacement from Africa can the Black Church initiate the process of reclaiming its role as an institution of African civilizational restoration rather than merely a product of biblical Christianity.

To our African Christian siblings in America, across the diaspora, and on the continent: the enduring refusal to accept that African cultural identity—rooted in the Nile Valley spiritual system of Ancient Kemet—predates and is distinct from biblical Christianity is not an act of faith but an allegiance to the Northern Cradle’s theological by-product. Despite decades of scholarly consensus affirming this truth

---

<sup>40</sup> Du Bois, *Negro Church*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Karenga, “Kawaida Philosophy,” 3.

through Du Bois, Diop, and Temple  
Africology, the persistent denial of these  
facts reveals not conviction, but colonization  
disguised as Christian devotion.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Min. Qadry Harris, M. Div.  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6584-2644>

## References

- Asante, Molefi Kete. *African Pyramids of Knowledge: Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Africology*. Brooklyn, NY: Universal Write Publication, 2015.
- . *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008.
- . *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.
- . “Temple Circle.” In *The Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama, 445–446. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.
- . “The Afrocentric Metatheory and Disciplinary Implications.” In *The African American Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., edited by Nathaniel Norment Jr., 507. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007.
- Carter, J. Kameron. *Race: A Theological Account*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Revised Edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- . “Black Revelation and Social Existence.” In *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume I: 1966–1979*, edited by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 160. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. Edited by Harold J. Salemson and Marjolijn De Jager. Translated by Yaa-Lengi Meema Ngemi. Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991.
- . *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. Edited and translated by Mercer Cook. Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974.

———. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. London: Karnak House, 1989.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903*, edited by Phil Zuckerman. Lanham, MD: Rowman Altamira, 2003.

———. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Middletown, DE: Millennium Publications, 2014.

———. *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings (LOA #34): The Suppression of the African Slave Trade / The Souls of Black Folk / Dusk of Dawn / Essays*. New York: Library of America, 1986.

Erschine, Noel Leo. *Plantation Church: How African American Religion Was Born in Caribbean Slavery*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *Nuer Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Jennings, Willie J. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.

Julian, Myra. "Black Church." In *The Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, edited by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama, 118. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.

Kabone, Kobi K. K. *The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework*. Tallahassee, FL: Nubian Nation, 1993.

Karenga, Maulana. "Kawaida Philosophy." In *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication (IEIE)*, edited by Young Yun Kim and Kelly L. McKay-Semmler. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017.

Mazama, Ama. "The Afrocentric Paradigm." In *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, 30. Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2003.

Obenga, Theophile. *African Philosophy*. St. John's: Brawtley Press, 2015.

Pinn, Anne H., and Anthony B. Pinn. *Introduction to Black Church History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Saakana, Amon Saba, ed. *African Origins of the Major World Religions*. London: Karnak House, 1988; repr., 2021.

Wilmore, Gayraud S., and James H. Cone, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume I: 1966–1979*. 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.