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Editor Robert H. Reid's recent article on America's growing Pentecostalism immediately caught my attention. As a member of the "lost" or "absent" generation—those between the ages of 18 and 35 who are noticeably absent or sparse in the majority of African American mainline denominational churches—I notice that most of my peers who do attend church regularly are attending Evangelical Word churches, Full Gospel churches, local branches of mainline denominational churches with "charismatic services," or those churches with hour-long sermons that rely heavily on Biblical instruction. I see within my peers a need and desire for consistent Biblical instruction, fellowship with Christian peers, and freedom of spiritual expression. We are looking for a place that accepts and welcomes the reality of our spiritual lives, while addressing our need for spiritual guidance.

As a seminarian, I must ask myself some of the more difficult questions about this growing trend among African American Christians toward Pentecostalism. What is so attractive about this form of preaching/teaching and worship? Is there something that mainline denominational churches have missed, ignored or rejected? And how has this recent wave of Pentecostalism included both the upper and lower classes? the educated and uneducated? Are the charismatic expressions

of joy seen in "speaking in tongues," "holy dancing," and "shouting," merely cathartic emotional releases? empty movements learned from observation? or authentic expressions of praise and communication with God? Does the emphasis on spirituality and Biblical teaching negate the Black church's traditional and necessary role as an instrument for social change? Do I find myself asking, "But what are these churches doing?"

As involved laity and clergy of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, these are questions we must begin to ask ourselves as we find our congregations growing or dwindling; as we watch the African American televangelists with large audiences; as we begin to ponder the ways in which African Methodism will move into the twenty-first century.

The emphasis on freedom of spiritual expression and strong Biblical teachings are the most important things we can understand about this movement. As African Americans, we have a rich tradition in both our heritage of ecstatic worship in traditional African religions and in the formations of African American Christian ring shouts and holy dancing, that renders understandable at least, and natural at most, a desire for a variety of liturgical expression. I do not advocate that the same person ought to run around the church every Sunday. I am suggesting that we need to ensure that there are no restrictions on diverse worship styles. These restrictions are often clerical, congregational, attitudinal, classist, or fears of "being in church too long," or "disrupting the service." If we associate certain acts of worship with lower classes or psychological disturbances while we quietly try to usher the shouter or dancer out of the sanctuary, we only reinforce inaccurate perceptions of "charismatic" worship and neglect the needs and desire of many church members. We shouldn't find when the Holy Spirit disrupts our services, and we ought to be glad to be in church a little longer if it means praising the Lord. When African Methodism embraces this diversity of worship styles, we allow ourselves

to express freely while still adhering to the traditions, doctrines, and beliefs of African Methodism. It is environments such as these that lead to authentic worship and inspired spirituality. Then, we can truly mean it when we say, "I was glad when they said unto me let us go into the house of the Lord."

In a world that presents a myriad of spiritual and secular options, it can also be refreshing to encounter Biblical teachings. Even at the most liberal "divinity schools," students and professors must admit that at the end of all debates of Biblical criticism and question of authority, it is the belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior known through the revelation of the Bible that binds nearly all Christian churches and denominations together. People are, justifiably, looking for a concrete way to govern their lives. The churches that emphasize teaching from the pulpit on

Sunday, elevating the role of teaching beyond the Sunday school hour and Wednesday night Bible study, are the churches that seem to be growing. These preachers do not fear occasionally breaking from the traditions of hooping, tuning, and celebration to bring the Word clearly and simply to their congregations. These are the congregations where people sit with their Bibles open, and pens perched taking notes. After all, if the church does not meet this need of providing practical guidance along with moral instruction, another avenue will—popular psychology, spirituality meditation, etc.

Nevertheless, I am still fascinated by this move toward spirituality and away, as some might claim, from the social justice aspect of African American Christianity. I hear repeated calls for "a new King" and for the church to "do something." While I advocate social and

community activism for church as one of the natural outgrowth of ministry and an imitation of Jesus' ministry among the downtrodden and outcast, I also feel it is important to address the contemporary situation. As Rev. Vashti McKenzie reminded a group of seminarians at the recent 18th annual conference on the National Alliance of Pan-African Seminarians (NAPAS), we now have an entire generation of the "unchurched." There are people who have never been to church, do not know the songs, the traditions and may not even be afraid to classify themselves as "atheists." Having a strong faith, a personal relationship with God, and personal disciplines of Bible-reading and prayer are no longer the practice of many church-goers. We need to be taught how to read the Bible, how to pray, how to fast. We need to be allowed to ask questions about contemporary applications—how much should I separate myself from the world? How do I witness to my non-Christian co-worker? What is the Bible's teaching on sexuality—in the nineties? It is this core that will empower a community, invigorate social action and perpetuate the Christian witness and mission.

The growing trend toward Pentecostalism speaks to us as an indication of certain spiritual and liturgical needs. These needs transcend class, education, and, sometimes, racial boundaries. As Christians we must take notice of this movement, if only as a way to inform and broaden our own ministries. After all, that is the goal of lay and ordained ministry—to meet the needs of the people with theological integrity and truth.

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