

PROCESSING TRANSFORMATION:
RESHAPING SURVIVAL MODE DYNAMICS IN THE BLACK CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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This research will investigate the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X as an archetype to foster awareness of the origins of conflict in the Black church. A close observation of his life will offer comparable examples of created ideas and ideals lived out in ways that present themselves as oppositional to an established understanding of congregational governance and practice. While different in its theological tenets and practices, Malcolm's lived experiences and encounters will provide necessary content for leaders in the Black Baptist Church who seek to formulate strategies to enable the reshaping and transformation of family legacy group members. This work will grapple with social conditioning, relational influences, pilgrimage, ritual practices, and a reimagination of lent and sacred spaces.

The pursuit of congregational mutuality suggests that leaders in the Black Church must actively participate in the reshaping process by exhibiting positive social behaviors aligned with the tenets of our faith context. The future of congregational and community sustainability rests on the social interactions, support, and healthy partnership between influential families and the leaders in the Black Church.

DEDICATION

To Willie, Ruby, & Emma – My Witnesses in the Clouds!

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INTRODUCTION: PART I

Experience and encounter shape what groups deem particular within a given context. In most cases, the characteristics that define a group are not problematic. Instead, this developed image serves as a proverbial identification card showing how a specific group sees themselves, e.g., race, class, gender, inclusionary markers, preference, and neighborhood of residence. When a group's character trait is established, that created image becomes a marker by which a group is seen within a given social construct. What happens in a church context when a faction within the larger group develops a system of interpretation relating to polity, power, and practice and seeks to formulate practices contrary to the original intent of an established ideology?

In this project, I will reference the term *ideology*. I will understand my use of the term to describe the ideas and ideals created by family legacy group members that ground how they interpret mission, ministry, and congregational governance in the Black Baptist church. When the use of this term is read in a manner seen as oppositional within this document, my use of the phrase *created ideologies* will reference systems of polity, power, and practices developed by factions/members of families in the church oppositional to the established/traditional set of rules created by the larger body in the congregation.

Suppose there is a conventional system in place. Yet, the procedure that is most followed is a makeshift set of rules created by the faction within the larger group and sometimes supported by the leadership group in the church. How do we distinguish between rightness and what appears as congregational anarchy? While it is easy to suggest that the ideologies created by the faction are flawed in relating to the established ideology of the larger group, if there is no direct pushback from members of the larger

group, can this ideology be created by the faction identified as contradictory? If not, how does a church ground its hermeneutic when alterations to what they believe and how they live out their beliefs change based on influential members of the family legacy group (Family legacy group - members of a congregation who helped found the church, which seeks to influence how the church functions and operates using influence and power)? How does one determine the correct polity, governance, and practice in this context?

Is a traditional ideology the benchmark for correctness in congregational/social spaces? Each situation requires individual evaluation based on the context in which the traditional/established ideology functions. For example, on a societal level, white supremacy is the original intent and precise position of the traditional/established ideology framing the U.S. Constitution in America. According to this conventional system, African Americans would be considered the contrary group based on their contradiction of the original intent of the social construct of whiteness by claiming full human dignity and equality as a minority group in America. How do we make proper distinctions? Whose system do we follow?

Suppose the traditional/established ideology exists as the status quo in this example. In that case, everyone who represents "the other" is indirectly encouraged to assess themselves based on the status quo of whiteness, e.g., white particularity claimed as the norm for full humanity (racism), male particularity claimed as the norm for full humanity (androcentrism/sexism), straight/cis particularity claimed as the norm for full humanity (heteronormativity/homophobia), and able-bodied particularity claimed as the norm for full humanity (ableism). If the traditional/established system does not serve the best interest of all, then a new system is essential to the masses, and the traditional/established system needs altering.

Within Black Baptist churches, created ideologies of polity, power, and practice by family legacy groups foster tensions within the larger group in the church. For my congregational context exclusively, the right system to follow is the established/traditional system created and agreed upon by the larger body. Corporate dialogue should occur if/when the established system is no longer adequate for the congregation's members, and mutually beneficial amendments should be made. With this understanding in mind, I suggest that any system created by a faction or subgroup of the larger group without due process for amendments is contradictory and out of order. Additionally, those who make up the faction/subgroup of the larger group attempting to superimpose this created system exhibit social behaviors that oppose how congregations should function together and with the community. I will use my leadership experience in a particular Black Baptist church as an example of this problem I believe to be at work in the case of family legacy groups in the Black Baptist church that I want to address and remedy.

If what we believe contributes to our behavior, what we believe will help or hurt others. Factions within the larger group have distorted polity, power, and practice and attempted to frame system structures based on ideologies they create for members within the larger group to follow. The created ideologies of the family legacy group, interpreted as a flawed hermeneutic/ideology, produce social behaviors that are opposed to those within the larger group who subscribe to the established ideology of the church. When factions/family legacy groups develop their own set of ideologies lived out in oppositional ways seeking to acquire sustained power and dominance in the congregational space, any initiative that aims to encourage members to embrace and

follow the established/traditional polity of the church is problematic to the family legacy group.

In assessing what I have described as the congregational problem, I will seek to investigate the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X during the periods of pre-hajj and pilgrimage as an example comparable to the problems in the congregation surrounding issues relating to systems of understanding, practice, and social behaviors lived out in oppositional ways. This comparison between Malcolm X's experience and the family legacy dynamic in the Black Baptist Church will have three parts: a description of the problem, the movement toward transformation, and the goal of transformation. I will begin by comparing Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam, and the family legacy group in ways that demonstrate the development of hermeneutics and practices antithetical to established/traditional ideals. Using his pre-hajj period will provide an analogy of how in the Black Baptist congregation, hermeneutics, interpreted as flawed and comparable to an established/traditional interpretation of system structures and practices, contribute to behaviors lived out in oppositional ways. While these contrasting hermeneutics empower the social identity of the family legacy group, they are antithetical to the established/traditional polity and prevent the congregation from the kind of mutual, participatory, democratic processes and practices created by the larger body.

Secondly, we will investigate the impact of religious teachings and how consistent participation, learning, and implementation, along with support mechanisms outside the local church, contribute to reshaping individuals within the family legacy group. We seek to offer comparisons between the members of the family legacy group who underwent transition and Malcolm X during this transitional period in his life

based on the teachings of traditional/Sunni Islam and its contributions to his reshaping.

Lastly, we will investigate the impacts of transformation in the lives of reformed family legacy group members and the social dynamics that play out within the congregation based on their change. We seek to compare transformed family legacy group members and Malcolm X during the pilgrimage period of Malcolm X's life. Additionally, we aim to show how a flawed hermeneutic and an aligned oppositional ethic can undergo a transformation that produces congregational mutuality between family legacy group members and the leadership in the Black Baptist Church.

SECTION ONE: THE FORMATION OF CREATED IDEOLOGIES/FLAWED HERMENEUTICS

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science Susanna

Schellenberg writes, "Perception grounds demonstrative reference, yields singular thoughts, and fixes the reference of singular terms. Moreover, perception provides us with knowledge on particulars in our environment and justifies singular thoughts about particulars."¹ Thus, systems of polity, power, and practice that we see within a given environment, in connection to those who exist as voices of influence concerning those systems at work within a given environment, shape and develop our mindsets around the concept of polity and power and undergird our ethical responses within the social spheres we navigate. What we perceive as rightness based on what we are exposed to anchors our hermeneutics, even if it is not directly associated with an established/traditional interpretation and practice.

To address the problem mentioned in the previous sentences, this section of the paper will reference Susanna Schellenberg's concept of perception and associate it with the family legacy group's use of influence and perception as tools to develop and spread their created ideology of polity, power, and practice in ways that go against the established structure system in the church. As a working example, we will look at the lived experiences of Malcolm X during his pre-hajj period and observe the similarities of influence and interpretation in ways that produced hermeneutics and practices that do not represent the same hermeneutics and practices associated with traditional Islam (Sunni).

¹ Susanna Schellenberg, "Perceptual Particularity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93, no. 1 (2016): 25-54, doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12278.

Moreover, this section will briefly highlight the foundational philosophies of Noble Drew Ali, which grounded the teachings of Elijah Muhammad for members of the Nation of Islam. Additionally, we will observe Malcolm X's formative learning of Black nationalism and his experiences with racism as life actions that contributed to his association with the Nation of Islam and his acceptance of a hermeneutic and practice that misrepresented traditional Islamic views and practices.

To ground what I suggest as the formation of the family legacy group's created ideology, I will look at the historical examples of the local Black Baptist church I led. While the information will not serve as an official case study submission, I aim to look at the historical examples of the church concerning the gap periods of leadership in the church to develop a working hypothesis for forming the family legacy group's created ideology.

Historically, the local Black Baptist church I once led has had over fifteen congregational leaders in its ninety-seven years. Within the gap periods of leadership, the congregation was left to lead as they saw fit. Scripture offers context to the perceived congregational dilemma during these gap periods. The author of the book of Judges writes, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes."² Two hypotheses are created based on this assessment. First, I suggest that, with no clear direction, family legacy group members develop their ideology that became their working hermeneutic during this gap period. I make this assessment based on the opposition of the family legacy group relating to their lack of observance and practice of the established/traditional polity created by the larger group in the church.

² Judges 17:6 (NRSV).

Secondly, I seek to suggest that their influence began to increase when there was no elected leader of the church. With a level of power, any elected leader would be problematic to their ability to maintain what had become the status quo. This hypothesis grounds what I suggest as the formation of the flawed/created ideology of the family legacy group in the Black Baptist Church.

COMPARISONS: IDEOLOGIES OF FLGM TO FLAWED HERMENEUTICS OF THE NOI

Now, I will compare the formation of the family legacy group's created ideology to the formation of what I posit as the flawed hermeneutics of the Nation of Islam. Two factors contribute to the foundational hermeneutics of the Black Muslim Movement, also known as the Nation of Islam: the philosophy of Noble Drew Eli and the socio-economic/socio-political impacts of Americanized racism. According to Edward E. Curtis IV in *Islam in Black America*,

Drew Ali had virtually no direct connection to the traditions of Old-World Islam, he was a seminal figure in the history of African American Islam. Drew Ali defined Black identity – or in his words, Moorish identity in terms of biological descent, national origin, and creed. Going even further, he claims divine origins and salvation for the Moors while casting doubts on the beginning and end of whites. Drew Ali's famous heir, Elijah Muhammad, would later take this idea and place it at the center of his understanding of Islam. In fact, Elijah Muhammad would adopt Drew Ali's entire particularistic formula for understanding Islam and turn it into the most well-known tradition in the history of African American Islam.³

Thus, the teachings of Drew Eli, taught and lived out through an ethic of hate for the white race, were a pillar of the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Colorism is not a

³ Edward E. Curtis, IV, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 85.

component of a traditional Islamic hermeneutic; brotherhood is. The dynamics of influence and the adoption of Drew Ali's teachings grounded this understanding of hate for whites into the minds of most, if not all, of Elijah Muhammad's followers. Even if there was room to reframe this philosophy into one that created unification between whites and Black people, American racism, sociopolitical prejudice, and the social construct of whiteness in America nullified any hopes of contributing to a new way of living together. Elijah's teachings did not align with the Quran, its hermeneutic, or the practices associated with traditional Islam. While Elijah's teachings were antithetical to traditional Islamic (Sunni) views and traditions, similarities of the impact of influence are witnessed in the Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad association with each other and Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X's association with each other. In assessing Elijah Muhammad's influence on Malcolm during his adulthood, I suggest that the Nation of Islam's lived-out perceptions, better known as their socioreligious ethics, were intriguing to Malcolm. Thus, traditional Quranic interpretation and practice, not taught by Elijah Muhammad or practiced fully by the members of the NOI, did not serve as the call for an association with the NOI; social conduct did. According to Malcolm X, in his autobiography,

I never had seen any Christian-believing Negroes conduct themselves like the Muslims, the individuals, and the families alike. The men were quietly, tastefully dressed. The women wore ankle-length gowns, no makeup, and scarves covered their heads. The neat children were mannerly not only to adults but to other children as well. I had never dreamed of anything like that atmosphere among Black people who had learned to be proud they were Black, who had learned to love other Black people instead of being jealous and suspicious.⁴

⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine, 1964), 198-199.

One can propose that a lived-out hermeneutic, perceived as flawed compared to a traditionalized Islamic hermeneutic (Sunni), did not appear faulty, at least to the present and prospective members of the Nation of Islam, given their experience of the denigration of Black life by white racism. What mattered in this socio-religious space during the 1960s was how Black bodies developed a collective support mechanism. This mechanism reshaped how they saw and thought about themselves in contrast to the hierarchical interpretation of Black identity created by the social construct of whiteness in America. This grounds my thoughts on how the NOI was viewed by those outside of the Nation, not as a religion in the universal sense only, but as a Black nationalist group, existing under the banner of a religious group, seeking to liberate and empower Black people from the chains of oppression in America.

SHAPING IDENTITY

Black Nationalism was a central building block of Malcolm's understanding of Black life and identity before his association with the NOI. Malcolm X, formally known as Malcolm Little, was the fourth son of two Garveyites⁵, Earl and Louise Little. As followers of the philosophy and ideals taught by Marcus Garvey, Earl, and Louise instilled Marcus Garvey's philosophies into the lives of their children and the Black people within their communities. According to Les and Tamara Payne in, *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X*,

As for the parents of young Malcolm, pride in Africa aside, they clung to the essence of Garvey's message even after his deportation, rejecting the racial

⁵ Judith Stein. The term Garveyite refers to followers of the philosophy and ideals of Marcus Garvey. Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica in 1887. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. UNIA stressed racial pride and self-improvement. Garvey believed that white society would never accept Black Americans as equals. Therefore, he called for the separate self-development of African Americans within the United States. Garvey Argued, "All Black people in the world should return to their homeland in Africa, which should be free of white colonial rule." www.crf-usa.org.

submissiveness so widespread among Negroes. With self-assurance and a sense of equanimity, Earl and Louise Little steadfastly worked to instill in their children a key Garvey credo: "Liberate the minds of men, and ultimately you will liberate the bodies of men."⁶

Thus, Malcolm's fundamentals of self-assurance, identity, and separation from whiteness lived long before his association with the Nation of Islam (NOI). What can be understood about his upbringing is the connectedness of what his parents taught him and what he would eventually live out as a representative of the NOI. This correlation between the two was not a newfound revelation but a reintroduction to a formerly taught ideal that laid the foundation for his understanding of value and significance as a Black man in America. Malcolm would use black nationalism/Pan-Africanism as the vehicle to drive his social justice agenda. Black nationalism would inevitably exist as the cover and bookend of Malcolm's life. Before he was introduced to Allah, he was introduced to Garveyism. Thus, what he developed within him as an adolescent would emerge in his adulthood and ground his socio-political agenda. DeCaro, Jr. writes,

In his earliest memories of home, Malcolm recalled parents whose first love was to disperse information and provide social education to blacks in the name of liberation. This remains key to understanding the development of Malcolm as a social and political leader in his own right. As we will see, even after Malcolm broke with the racist presuppositions of Elijah Muhammad, he was still fundamentally grounded in a Garveyite worldview.⁷

At the core of this connection between his adolescent and adult life rests his experiences and encounters with whiteness. Whether "being taunted by racial abuse throughout his childhood, haunted by his father's tragic end, or ambivalent about how it

⁶ Les Payne and Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 54. Kindle.

⁷ Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People, The Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 40, Kindle.

occurred,"⁸ Malcolm had a history of experiences and encounters with Whites that represented the racial tensions common in mid-century America. Whether Jim Crow or the KKK, whether in Omaha, Lansing, East Lansing, Detroit, Boston, or even Harlem, USA, racial tensions were a permanent fixture in Malcolm's life from birth until he was no more. These tensions were a constant for Blacks and continue to be even today.

Contributing writers to the Public Broadcasting System offer a timeline of events centered around the life of Malcolm and the issues around race connected to his life and death. While the timeline spans Malcolm X's life, I will highlight three areas of racialization⁹ offered in their timeline: racialization by way of housing, vocational aspirations, and judicial bias.

1928 - The Littles move again, this time to Lansing, Michigan. Settling in a white neighborhood, they are sued for eviction on the basis that a restrictive covenant prevents their home from being sold to any non-Caucasians. November 7: The Little house is burned to the ground. No fire wagon was dispatched to the scene. Looking back, Malcolm believes that a local white supremacist group was behind it.

1939 - The state places the Little children with various foster families, and Malcolm, who has been kicked out of school in the seventh grade, is sent to a juvenile home in the nearly all-white community of Mason, Michigan. He does well at school there, earning straight A's and being elected president of his eighth-grade class, but his teacher discourages him from pursuing his goal of becoming a lawyer.

1946 - January: Malcolm tries to retrieve a stolen \$1000 watch from a pawnshop and is arrested and charged with grand larceny, breaking and entering, and firearms possession. He is convicted and, along with Jarvis, receives an eight-to-10-year sentence. The white women have their sentences suspended, but Malcolm's

⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁹ Racialization is defined as the act of giving a racial character to someone or something: the process of categorizing, marginalizing, or regarding according to race – Merriam – Webster. (n.d.). Racialization definition & meaning. Retrieved March 16, 2022, from <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/racialization>. The term racialization is used in this paper to identify bias imposed on black bodies based on race.

girlfriend serves seven months in prison.¹⁰

While these occurrences in Malcolm's life date back fifty to one hundred years, Black people in America still encounter tensions centered around racialization in housing discrimination and restrictions, limited job opportunities, judicial bias, racial profiling, biased policing, stymied socio-political engagement, and challenges to educational equity. While racism impacts the Black community in general, the concept of racism in this paper does not apply to the internal conflicts of flawed hermeneutics and oppositional ethics in the local Black Baptist church where I led. Certain similarities to the dynamics at work in Malcolm's association with the NOI can be found in Black Baptist churches. To this point, some members exercise a created system functionality, not formulated on the established polity or scripture, but on the rules and rights they set for themselves. These ideologies created by the family legacy group are perceived as flawed by individuals who subscribe to the established polity within the congregational community. I have witnessed this lived-out ethic in an oppositional way concerning the church. This lived-out ethic is not based on scripture or a proper interpretation of the established/traditional polity or practice but on maintaining the connectional identity and influence of the family legacy group.

MORAL EXAMPLES AND IMMORAL PRACTICES

David E. Fredrickson, in *Pauline Ethics: Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation*, offers a perspective by which he feels congregations can live out their human behavior in healthier ways. Fredrickson says,

¹⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, "Muslims See Contrasts with Nation of Islam: Beliefs: Core tenets of Farrakhan's group have historically differed from mainstream Islam's. Publicity of upcoming Million Man March accents distinctions," October 14, 1995, accessed March 1, 2022, <http://www.latimes.com/>.

In this approach (ethical significance), congregations are neither obstacles to the reconstruction of coherent moral opinions nor the passive recipients of already worked out answers. They are places where moral reflection, formulation, and action occur. Pauline ethics grow out of the apostle's vision of the church as persons gathered and empowered for moral deliberation by the Spirit in the name of Jesus.¹¹

Frederickson suggests that congregations should exhibit a spirit-led practice of mutuality amongst themselves. Not a space free from disagreement but an area where deliberation produces congregational success. Also, the essence of Fredrickson's quote offers an interpretation of how church seekers potentially assess the working ethic in the church. When individuals and families search for a new church, the message, music, ministries, and the church's perceived social/congregational ethic are assessed. While churches are not purchased items, church seekers seemingly shop around to see where they fit. According to Fredrickson, a harmonious/mutuality-driven space is the breeding ground for moral reflection, formulation, and action. In that case, a space free from mutuality creates unethical disregard, social destruction, and congregational discord.

I have witnessed this lived practice of the family legacy group, which offers no consideration of biblical exemplars in their hermeneutics. I have seen oppositional behaviors that work to maintain power, influence and a disposition that stands against the established polity of the church. I wish to look at how created ideologies of family legacy groups result in behavioral practices that are not biblically based/faith-based at all but lived out in oppositional ways that become embedded in the religious and cultural traditions of the church over time. In the following example, I reference one of my experiences at the church. In this context, I represent someone who belongs to the

¹¹ David E. Fredrickson, "Pauline Ethics: Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation," Luther Seminary 1998, Faculty Publications 211, http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/211.

church but exists within the outsider group to the family legacy group.

In my specific case, I belonged to the lineage of passing pulpiteers. I was not a constant fixture; I was another pulpit pilgrim who graced the church but never transitioned from student visa to permanent resident. One of the board members informed me that the church did not know what they were doing. Little did I know that implementing scripture as a means of congregational development disrupted the faction's way of functioning in the church. While members of the family legacy group were not opposed to the bible per se, there were moments of mild frustration when topics centered around methodology (how we do things) and rationale (why we do things) were discussed. During those moments, my biblical interpretation(s) and calls to action were disregarded because they did not advocate the "do it how I want to do it or do it the way we have always done it" methodology of the family legacy group in the local Black Baptist Church. Because I was an outsider in their space, my words were embraced only by those who associated themselves with the church's established/traditional governing system, not those who were a part of the faction in the church. Concerning my previous presentation of Malcolm living out a flawed hermeneutic, members of the family legacy group were motivated to exercise their truths and methodologies based on what they deemed correct rather than on the established/traditional polity of the church or the Bible to which they claimed to ascribe.¹² Similarly, we saw how Malcolm was formed in and lived out of a Nation of Islam hermeneutic that can be considered flawed to traditional (Sunni) Islam.

I have selected this example to explain the conflicts associated with polity, power, practice, and created ideologies of the family legacy group within the Black

¹² Ibid.

Baptist church. While most Baptist churches have executive boards, constitutions, and bylaws that govern the church, the actions of the members of the family legacy group suggest that the authority of corporate decision-making does not rest with the elected leadership of the church. Thus, pockets of families create and seek to maintain the ideals they have made to govern this congregational space behind the scenes. This example sought to illustrate how flawed hermeneutics, in relation to an established/traditional polity, impacts polity, power, and practice in the Black Baptist church. How does an ideology created by a specific faction in the church that appears antithetical to an established/traditional polity created to govern the church does not seem oppositional? How can we see the family legacy group as ministry partners when the tenets they operate on are seemingly oppositional?

Maintaining created ideologies inhabited in oppositional ways fosters tensions that directly affect social/cultural/religious norms in a given space. In a story told in church, a couple grows in their relationship. As a result, one of the partners in the narrative prepares her family's ham recipe. In preparing the meal, her partner notices that she cuts off two substantial portions of the ham. When asked the reasoning behind her action, she stated, "This is how the ham cooks all the way through." Her partner told her, "This is not true. Who told you this?" She stated, "My grandmother." Once the opportunity to meet the grandmother had arrived, the partner and the grandmother engaged in conversation. After sharing what was offered as an answer with the grandmother, the grandmother stated, "My granddaughter is wrong. You do not have to cut the ham to cook it through. When she was young, I did not have a larger pot to cook the entire ham. So, I would cut off a part of the left and right side of the ham to fit as much as possible into my small pot. That is what she saw growing up, so this is how she cooked the ham when she started making it herself."

In the story of Malcolm's NOI years and the family legacy groups, we have seen the impacts of behavioral practices based on flawed interpretations of the church should function and govern itself, lived out in ways that become oppositional to the original intent of an established/traditional ideology. For the family legacy group, their hermeneutics and ethics oppose the established ideology of the Black Baptist church. For Malcolm, his hermeneutics and ethics taught by Elijah Muhammad oppose the hermeneutics and practices of traditional/Sunni Islam. The flawed hermeneutics in the story of Malcolm X and the family legacy group in the Black Baptist Church is the byproduct of social conditioning, influence, and a "filling in of the gaps" when all the pertinent information is not passed down. While not explicitly stated in the narrative, it is implied that the granddaughter never questions the "why" of her grandmother's methodology. The grandmother exists as the voice/person of influence. Thus, what the granddaughter did was follow without question.

Similarly, members of the family legacy group I previously pastored created and propagated a system of governing and practices that have never been questioned but blindly followed, whether the ministerial position was filled. The way the family legacy group's created ideology is propagated is also illustrated in this story, i.e., passed down behaviors within families from generation to generation in sometimes informal but not always explicit ways. The connection between the example in the story and the family legacy group grounds itself on behavior. Both the granddaughter in the example and the actions of non-elder members of the family legacy group exhibit behaviors based on what they saw. While the grandmother and the elders of the family legacy group know the truth, they neither sought to correct the granddaughter's behavior nor the young generations from the family legacy group.

The implication of "why" is never brought to light by those who subscribe to this

anti-established/traditional polity, only by those seen as outsiders to the body of individuals who are either a part of the family legacy groups or influenced by them. In some instances, pushback by members of the family legacy group was not based on whether thought processes or practices of the family legacy groups were correct/incorrect concerning the specific biblical interpretations of the official polity of the church but on the courage of newer members who did not remain silent in meetings but questioned what was perceived as a working norm. In some cases, entering a conversational space was seen as a threat by members of the family legacy group rather than a starting point for collective community building.

Dr. Traci C. West, in “*Disrupting Christian Ethics, When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*,” speaks to the importance of dialogue. She writes, "Community cooperation across cultural and religious boundaries depends upon our ability to dialogue with one another."¹³ Also, Dr. West suggests, “A dialogue partner helps to hold one accountable by asking: So, what?”¹⁴ However, in the family legacy dynamic, communication is limited in a corporate context. Consequently, the congregation is kept from inhabiting the community cooperation and dialogue Dr. West envisions for churches.

¹³Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics, When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Location 126, Kindle.

¹⁴Ibid, Location 73, Kindle Edition.

SECTION TWO: A MOVE TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION

This second section of the paper will introduce the impact of teaching as a tool that contributes to reshaping the family legacy group's created ideology into a new understanding of rule and governance that begins developing transformation within congregational/social spaces. I will refer to Malcolm X's disconnection from a flawed hermeneutic inhabited in an oppositional way. His introduction to a traditional hermeneutic and practice (Sunni) through exposure and instruction reshapes his understanding of Islam. Additionally, Dr. Louis A. DeCaro, Jr. will be our primary conversational partner in this section based on the parallels of our research and its direct connection/association to his work in his book, *On the Side of My People, The Religious Life of Malcolm*. We then posit our findings and offer comparative views of the impacts of transition for family legacy group members in the context of the local Black Baptist Church.

Teaching initiated the transitions of reshaping for a select group in the church. While most members were present on Sunday, only a select few came out to Bible study. Weekly lessons were instrumental to the individuals of the family legacy group who attended Bible study. During those weekly gatherings, questions were asked, and the bible was explained in ways that offered understanding and growth. I watched individuals from the family legacy group(s) reframe their thoughts on God, the Bible, the church, and its established governing system. I witnessed several members of the family legacy group change their views and behaviors in the life of the church regarding the family legacy dynamic. Over time, these individuals began to distance themselves from the family legacy group's created ideology. They started respecting, listening to, and collaborating with the official leaders of the church rather than being governed by the status quo of the authority of the family legacy power dynamic. While some individuals

related to the family legacy group in the congregation did not show interest based on their desire to maintain the status quo, I intentionally connected those undergoing the reshaping process with individuals and groups outside of the church who aided in progressive steps toward total transformation.

Like a select few from the family legacy group who began reshaping their understanding through weekly instruction, application, and detachment, Malcolm X's life offers a comparable glimpse of a transformation process amidst internal tensions and plots to diminish Malcolm's impact and influence in the nation. Malcolm's comments about the assassination of President Kennedy served as the proverbial knife that cut the connectional cord between X and the Nation of Islam. Relating to the assassination of President Kennedy, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad instructed all Muslims not to speak of the assassination. When confronted by a reporter in New York, Malcolm was asked a series of questions. During that interview, the assassination of President Kennedy came up in the conversation. Malcolm related the assassination of President Kennedy in what was described as a derogatory statement (Chickens coming home to roost) by implying that his assassination was a type of karma.

Further explanation is explained in the following two source examples. Louis A. DeCaro, Jr. writes, "Malcolm gave his opponents in the movement a critical opportunity to attack him after a speech he made in New York City on December 1, 1963—an event that would prove to be his last address on behalf of the Nation."¹⁵ In his autobiography, as told to Alex Haley, X states,

Any Muslim would have known that my 'chicken coming home to roost' statement had been only an excuse to put into action the plan to get me out, and step one had been already taken: the Muslims were given the impression that I had rebelled

¹⁵ DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 191, Kindle.

against Mr. Muhammad. I could now anticipate step two: I would remain "suspended," and later, I would be "isolated" indefinitely. Step three would be either to provoke some Muslim ignorant of the truth to take it upon himself to kill me as a "religious duty"—or to "isolate" me so that I would gradually disappear from the public scene.¹⁶

CHALLENGES OF REDEVELOPMENT

Relating this story of Malcolm's suspension to my experience of family legacy dynamics in the church context, I recall a moment when a member of the power dynamic went against the proverbial system. As a means of maintaining the status quo, essential information about some church issues was kept from me by members of the leadership who were under the influence of the family legacy group. When a particular crisis arose that would have created catastrophic issues for the church, this individual opted to go against the routine procedures of the power dynamic influenced by the family legacy group and provide me with the necessary information needed to rectify a particular matter before it escalated. Although my assistance in the situation benefited the church, this individual's choice to go against what could be perceived as the rules of the family legacy group produced a short-term period of ostracization. In this example, I offer this information in a manner that does not include names or detailed information that is private to the church's business affairs. Additionally, while not identical to the scenario on Malcolm X, this example seeks to offer similarities based on the association of two terms, suspension, and ostracization.

¹⁶ Ibid., 311-312, Kindle. Additionally, the phrase "the chickens are coming home to roost" is well-known and often attributed to African American, anti-imperialist, revolutionary leader Malcolm X following the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. This refers, of course, to mean that the wrongs committed by an individual or political entity will likewise have a boomerang effect and come back to punish the wrongdoing party in a similar vein. See Albert Bender, "Chickens Coming Home to Roost: Remember What Malcolm Said," *People's World*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/chickens-coming-home-to-roost-remember-what-Malcolm-said/>.

TRANSITION

Although ousted from the NOI, Malcolm transitions from a philosophy taught by Elijah, inhabited in an oppositional way, to the initial stages of the process that began the formation of a reshaped Malcolm, living out the principles of a traditional Islamic hermeneutic. While Malcolm's pilgrimage to Mecca is often seen as the turning point of his transformation, Malcolm's lived experiences and encounters before the pilgrimage suggest that his transformation process began before he arrived in the holy city. According to DeCaro, Jr., "long before Malcolm could come to Mecca, Mecca seemed to have come to Malcolm."¹⁷ Although a considerable amount of literature details Malcolm X's experiences and encounters with white Muslims during his Hajj and their contributions to his transformation, it is essential to note that his social encounters with whiteness exclusively did not serve as his initiation into this transformative process. Malcolm's social and informational/instructional interactions with two Sunni Muslims, Ahmed Osman¹⁸ from Sudan and Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi¹⁹ from Egypt, laid the

¹⁷ DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 201, Kindle.

¹⁸ Ahmed Osman, a junior at Dartmouth, visited Temple No. 7 in Harlem on a Sunday afternoon in 1962. Frustrated by Malcolm's flawed hermeneutics of the Quran, Osman challenges Malcolm during the question-and-answer period of the gathering. DeCaro, Jr. weighs in on the encounter as well and offers a striking conclusion of the initial meeting of Osman, and Malcolm X. DeCaro, Jr. says, "Unable to forget their encounter, Osman began an earnest letter-writing campaign, endeavoring to communicate "true Islam" to Malcolm; he likewise sent him literature published by the Islamic Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. Unlike his more heated confrontation at Mosque No. 7, Osman's sincere appeals were irresistible to Malcolm X, who by nature could not ignore reasonable, intelligent presentations. Malcolm responded to Osman's letters with appreciation and interest and asked for more Islamic literature. He even began to ask Osman to provide explanations in Quranic exegesis. As their friendship solidified, Osman prodded Malcolm to make Hajj, knowing within himself that a great change was unfolding within the religious Malcolm X." See DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 200-201, Kindle.

¹⁹ Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, an "eminent Egyptian Scholar and director of the Islamic Foundation in NYC," resided in New York during Malcolm's transition. Having established an association with Shawarbi during an NOI convention in 1960, Malcolm proactively engaged in a series of private sessions, engaging in readings and questions, seeking to know the truth. DeCaro, Jr. shares comments made by Dr. Shawarbi, which shares the impact of their encounters. Shawarbi, by way of DeCaro, Jr., writes, "I have no doubt of his sincerity," Shawarbi declared in an interview. "I could not help but be impressed by his desire to learn about Islam. Sometimes he would even cry while passages of the Holy Quran were being read." DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 202-203, Kindle.

groundwork for what would eventually be understood as a transformed Malcolm. Thus, Malcolm does not posit a "white savior"²⁰ paradigm as the source of his change but highlights a new way of understanding Islam, lived out in a manner that provides love and brotherhood for all, seen as a social/multi-ethnic gumbo of sorts, and existing collectively under a traditional banner of Islamic hermeneutic and practice. Examples of Malcolm's transformation not being reliant on "white saviors" are given later in this section by Louis A. DeCaro, Jr.

Although his formal instruction in Sunni Islam, a traditional Islamic hermeneutic, began through his association with Ahmad Osman and Dr. Shawarbi, Malcolm would experience this newly taught hermeneutic lived out in a transformative manner once he reached Mecca. With conflicts surrounding his paperwork and detainment upon his arrival in the holy city, Malcolm reaches out to Dr. Shawarbi, who has connections with individuals on this side of the water. After a few phone calls from Dr. Shawarbi on Malcolm's behalf, a letter from a Saudi prince, and the presence of an unlikely ally, Malcolm was released from detainment. According to DeCaro, Jr., "Shortly after Malcolm's one call, Dr. Omar Azzam, a tall white man with a European education and an important engineering position in Saudi, appeared at Malcolm's dormitory. In minutes, Malcolm's personal papers were retrieved, and the two were chauffeured to the residence of Abd al-Rahman Azzam."²¹ Abd al-Rahman Azzam, the author of *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, was a colleague of Dr. Shawarbi. Dr. Shawarbi gifted Malcolm with Azzam's book before his hajj.

²⁰ The term *white savior* is a critical description of a white person who is depicted as liberating, rescuing, or uplifting non-white people; it is critical in the sense that it describes a pattern in which third world people are denied agency and are seen as passive recipients of white benevolence.

²¹ DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 202-203, Kindle.

Malcolm's experiences and encounters during his pilgrimage to Mecca would impact his life in ways he never expected. For the first time in his life, Islam was not a black religion that demonized whites or criticized Black followers of Christianity. Islam was a faith context for all people who desired to embrace the oneness of God. DeCaro, Jr. writes,

Malcolm sat there, absorbed by the tremendous diversity of people sharing the same shelter on the desert ascent. Of that experience, he later reflected that present in that group was every shade—every shade, every complexion, there was every type of culture, there were Chinese, Indonesians; there were people from Afghanistan, and Persia, there was one Russian and his wife, who were very white. There were [also] some Nigerians and Ghanaians who were intensely moved by the realization of the great unity of the Hajj, especially exemplified by the Hajjis' sharing of nourishment, utensils, and even the space needed for prayer and sleep. Overwhelmed by the reality of this communion, it seems Malcolm reviewed his former life as Muhammad's representative, feeling regret for his role in advancing the Nation's religion.²²

For Malcolm, the message and teachings of Elijah Muhammad had been Islam. He was once tasked with opening new temples and perpetuating this message, teaching it nationwide. Although grounded in hate, it once served as something he believed, lived for, and at one time was willing to die for. He was personally responsible as the national minister for bringing in thousands of people with this flawed message that he believed was the truth. After being taught Islam from a traditional lens, after witnessing a new hermeneutic of Islam lived out in love over hate and brotherhood for all people, he no longer embraced Elijah's message as the religion of Islam. Having now assumed what he understood as the true religion of Islam (Sunni), Malcolm viewed Elijah's teaching as having no relation to true Islam but as simply informing the religious practices of the Nation. For the new Malcolm, the two hermeneutical systems (the hermeneutics of the

²² Ibid., 207. A portion of the source comes from the author's transcript of Malcolm X on The Barry Gray Show (New York: WMCA Radio, 8–9 June 1964, an overnight program), BEST, pp. 331.

NOI and traditional Islam) were distinctly different.

Malcolm was being transformed. While he did not expect what would happen during this Hajj, it is evident through his reactions to these occurrences that something was happening to him; Mecca was liberating Malcolm. According to DeCaro, Jr., "The liberation he would experience in Mecca was not racial, but humanitarian; not parochial, but universal; not based on the strange vision of an unknown man, but on the redemptive vision of unity and brotherhood under one divine Creator."²³

EXISTING IN THE UNKNOWN

For Malcolm X and the select few from the family legacy group who underwent the initial steps of the transformation process, stepping outside their congregational/religious/social space was seen as detachment and pilgrimage. Malcolm, along with the select few from the family legacy group who started to turn from a flawed hermeneutic and a social behavior inhabited in an oppositional way, began to see the positive impacts of detaching from a system of thinking and behavior that was once oppositional in its practice. Although a process, these individuals moved beyond the spaces and mindsets where I met them. They were somewhere in the middle. This middle space to which I am referring is the Liminal Space. According to Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr,

Liminal Space is the space where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That is a good space where genuine newness can begin. Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible...This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed. If we do not encounter the liminal space in our lives,

²³ Ibid., 205, Kindle.

we start idealizing normalcy.²⁴

This transitional space, expressed in this paper as the liminal space, is frightening for some. Faith in our context does not always speak to a blind trust in God but a belief grounded in personal assurances, not divine ones. Thus, not knowing how one is to function in a liminal space could drive individuals to revert to thought patterns and social behaviors of old. We hope that community/transformation partners will assist in the process of support and accountability. George C. Lichtenberg writes, “I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is they must change if they are to get better.”²⁵ Change refers to altering a created ideal seen and practiced oppositional to an established ideology that fosters mutuality for the entire congregational body.

In comparing members of the family legacy group to Malcolm X, Malcolm X was known as an avid reader and researcher in his own right. His ability to reform was based on his desire to learn and process truth. This is not the case with most members of the family legacy group(s) I pastored in the local Black Baptist church. Thus, dismantling a flawed understanding of polity, power, and practice will take time based on their system of learning and processing. What is clear is this; transformation is developing itself in the lives of a few of the members of the family legacy group who are now following and respecting official church authority in ways that enable the congregation to act and live with greater mutuality.

²⁴ Liminal Space, “What is a liminal space?,” n.d., accessed April 1, 2022, <https://inaliminalspace.org/about-us/what-is-a-liminal-space/>. Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (The Crossroad Publishing Company: 1999), 155-156.

²⁵ George C Lichtenberg, “Simple Image Quotes for Daily Inspiration,” www.graciousquotes.com, accessed July 1, 2021, <http://www.graciousquotes.com/>.

SECTION THREE: TRANSFORMATION'S IMPACT ON CONGREGATIONAL/SOCIAL DYNAMICS

This third section will introduce the effects of change from a congregational perspective and its impact on the faction in congregational space interpreted as the family legacy group(s). Additionally, we will compare our previously stated impacts of reformed family legacy group members to Malcolm X's transformation and the effect his transformation has on the power dynamic of whiteness in America and the Nation of Islam.

In Assessing a few members of the family legacy group who experienced congregational reform through a transformation in the church away from an ideology created by the family legacy group(s) lived out in an oppositional way, their newfound habit of existing and functioning in the church was frustrating to those who subscribed to the method of operating that was antithetical to the established/traditional polity of the church. No consideration was taken concerning the positive changes that came from their transformation. They were viewed as traitors by the family legacy group instead of individuals who learned a new way to live out their Christianity in ways that adhered to the church's established/traditional polity and practice.

One would have hoped that mutuality would have emerged and become the new standard. In looking at how these new reformers' lives have been affected inside and outside the church by a new outlook, a fresh hermeneutic, and a lived practice, encouragement to continue their steps to total transformation should have been a motivating cry from the masses. Instead, they were discussed, ostracized, and viewed as pastor supporters. The impact of transformation did not bring the people together; it drew them apart. The family legacy group members had a flawed version of what Paul Tillich calls the ultimate concern. Psychologist and Professor Emeritus Tom G. Stevens, Ph.D.,

from California State University, Long Beach, offers insight into Tillich's philosophical perspective in an article entitled *Our Search for Happiness and Self-Actualization*.

Concerning Tillich's philosophy, Stevens says, "Our ultimate concern is probably the most important single factor determining our personality and life. It is our most important value. He called it our personal "god," because it is so powerful. Our ultimate concern determines other values, beliefs, goals, feelings, and actions."²⁶ The family legacy group(s) within Black Baptist churches seeks to maintain its system of governing and control. While a reshaped understanding of congregational functionality lived out in ways that create mutuality could be beneficial to the congregation and the community collectively, it would inevitably restructure the power dynamic in the church by bringing it in line with the offices and structures of authority and leadership sanctioned by the official Black Baptist polity which would dismantle the systems developed by the factions in the congregation who exist as members of the family legacy group(s).

In like fashion, we observe a similar experience based on the life of Malcolm X. In his autobiography, while reflecting on his transformation before leaving Mecca, Malcolm shares sentiments about the impacts of his social encounters with whites. At one point in his life, Malcolm suggested that "Islam is a Black man's religion and that whites were barred from Mecca."²⁷ Later, he wrote in his autobiography: "You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But, on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced has forced me to rearrange much of my thought patterns previously held

²⁶ Tom G. Stevens, "Your 'Top Goal' in Life as a Major Cause of Happiness or Unhappiness, Part 3: Life's Top Goal--Your Ultimate Concern," accessed April 7, 2022, <https://home.csulb.edu/~tstevens/h13topgo.htm>.

²⁷ Payne and Payne. *The Dead Are Arising*, 440. Kindle.

and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions."²⁸ Malcolm would further state, "We were truly all the same (brothers) – because their belief in one God has removed the 'white' from their minds, the 'white' from their behavior, and the 'white' from their attitude."²⁹

THE EFFECTS OF RESHAPING

This lived experience and encounter reshaped how Malcolm saw whites to a degree and allowed him to imagine what America could be if whites in America embraced a traditional Islamic hermeneutic and practice. In his autobiography, Malcolm says, "Each hour here in the holy land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what is happening in America between black and white. I could see from this that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in reality the oneness of Man – and cease to measure and hinder and harm others in terms of their 'difference' in color."³⁰ While admirable in thought, America in practice has been built on racism. Dismantling colorism in America would inevitably dismantle this country's system, formally understood as the social construct of whiteness. Unfortunately, that will never happen.

Thus, as positively impacting as this transformation was to Malcolm, we must be clear that this transformation positively impacted Malcolm, not America. Mecca was a sacred space for some Muslims, occupied by a specific group who gathered to share in this collective experience. In my context, this would be like what we call a retreat. Like most retreats, when we return from the mountain, most of what was already present in our context still exists. We may have been positively impacted momentarily, but the

²⁸ Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 347.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 347.

issues we left in the valley are ever-present. Similarly, although transformed, Malcolm has come down the mountain and faces the reality of an unchanged white America. Thus, he continues his fight against white supremacy.

Edward E. Curtis IV, in *Islam in Black America*, writes, "Malcolm X faced what he called a 'double burden' namely, to be true to his universalistic interpretation of Islam while also promoting the particularistic goals of Pan-Africanism."³¹ Malcolm's reshaped hermeneutic, based on the principles of a traditional Islamic understanding and practice (Sunni), informed how he assessed his faith context. Although Malcolm X's fight against white supremacy continued to be rooted in his Islamic faith, it was now crucial for Malcolm to assume a unified front with non-Islamic African American faith leaders and groups. So, while still ongoing, his fight against white supremacy was exercised in a vastly different way. Thus, the establishment of the OAAU, the Organization for Afro-American Unity, created that mutual space where Black people of all faith and social contexts could put their theological and religious differences aside and work together for the greater good of Black people socially, politically, and economically. In his autobiography, Malcolm writes,

It was a big order – the organization I was creating in my mind, one which would help to challenge the American Black man to gain his human rights and to cure his mental, spiritual, economic, and political sicknesses. Substantially, as I saw it, the organization I hoped to build would differ from the Nation of Islam in that it would embrace all faiths of Black men, and it would carry into practice what the Nation of Islam had only preached.³²

Malcolm's transformation fostered a different tension with the NOI. While the creation of the OAAU was his new corporate headquarters for his fight against white

³¹ Curtis, IV, *Islam in Black America*, 85.

³² Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 322.

supremacy in America, the Muslim Mosque Inc. (MMI) would exist as a space of spiritual liberation for Muslims from the anti-Quranic teachings of Elijah Muhammad. According to Manning Marable in *Malcolm X, A Life of Reinvention*, the "Muslim Mosque, Inc., was designed to offer African American Muslims a spiritual alternative to the Nation of Islam, but the act of incorporating MMI, viewed from the NOI, was seen as a deliberate provocation."³³ NOI members were seemingly provoked based by the teachings of traditional Islam, which opposed the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. As DeCaro, Jr. recounts, "Let us fervently pray," wrote one Algerian Muslim, "that the readers of The Courier will not confuse the sect of Muhammad with that of true Islam. Islam does not preach hate; it does not preach racism; it only calls for love, peace, and understanding."³⁴ The reference to The Courier speaks to Elijah Muhammad's column in the Pittsburgh Courier.

Malcolm could not return to America and perpetuate a doctrine that did not align with his reshaped hermeneutic. DeCaro, Jr. writes,

Malcolm seemed very much concerned to emphasize Islam and his desire to see it advanced in the United States. In fact, he not only spoke of the Muslim Mosque as his attempt to provide an Institute for Islamic studies but made a point in his al Bilad interview to express sharp criticism of the Nation and of Zionists in the United States who, Malcolm charged, were hindering the presentation of true Islam to the African American community in their distinctive ways.³⁵

The tensions Malcolm confronts with the Nation of Islam and the United States government also serve as examples of encountering flawed versions of Paul Tillich's ultimate concern. During both phases of his life, Malcolm X impeded the ultimate

³³ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X, A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 217-18. Kindle.

³⁴ DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 146, Kindle.

³⁵ Ibid., 240. Additional reference is provided at ibid., 336. Airgram from Richard W. Murphy, 29 September 1964, 2-4.

concerns of the U.S. government (pre-and post-Mecca) and the Nation of Islam (pre-and post-Mecca). The NOI and the United States government have systems that allow them to maintain their way of functioning in society. Both organizations long to keep their systems functioning as usual. Malcolm's reshaped hermeneutic, which offers a means of preserving identity while still working in mutuality with individuals and groups outside of Malcolm's religious and ethnic makeup, hinders the systems of the NOI and the U.S. government.

In assessing the comparative mode between the Malcolm X story and the church context, attaining mutuality that moves the corporate group to embrace an established/traditional system of polity, power, and practice does not appear to be a working option. The plans of the power dynamic of the family legacy group, the Nation of Islam, and the U.S. government are simple; maintain the status quo and encourage conformity to their created ideology for anyone who connects themselves to their space. The only recourse to the tensions they associate with the impact of mutuality that pose a problem for their way of life was to cut off the source that would empower others to break free from their control and adopt a reshaped hermeneutic and practice that would alter the very fabric of the given space. Hence, in the church context, I was targeted for resistance. Malcolm, as the source for a reshaped America and Islam in America, was assassinated based on his inability to exist within the parameters of the status quo of the Nation of Islam and the U.S. government.

SECTION I: CONCLUSION

Research module I sought to investigate the similarities between the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X during the pre-hajj period of his life and the flawed hermeneutics and social behaviors lived out in oppositional ways by the family legacy group(s) in the Black Baptist church. Furthermore, I attempted to investigate a brief portion of the pilgrimage period as an example of how flawed hermeneutics lived out through oppositional social behaviors can undergo the process of transformation through encounter and exposure to a traditional hermeneutic and practice (Sunni). Thus, experience and encounters rest at the core of what contributes to developing our identity formation. Moreover, influential voices in our social contexts and their impact on what we deem essential produce different outcomes. While these outcomes shape our hermeneutical approach to life, one of two results occurs: either a hermeneutic inhabited in a flawed/oppositional way will keep us trapped in the conditions shaped by sociocultural influences and practice, or a reshaped ideal for functionality and governance in the local Black Baptist Church and practice inhabited in a manner characterized by mutuality will potentially foster a space that creates room and equity for all.

Transition precedes transformation in assessing these lived experiences and encounters. Additionally, detachment is not the direct effect of social tensions alone but a byproduct of exposure to a new hermeneutic, coupled with the lived experiences and encounters associated with this new hermeneutic that reshapes how we see ourselves and the world around us. Therefore, exposure to a reshaped hermeneutic unhinges us from what is normative and liberates us in ways that produce new experiences and opportunities to engage the world in new ways. James Baldwin echoes this sentiment in

his book entitled, *Nobody Knows My Name*. Baldwin writes,

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety, and at such moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or thought one knew, to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free he has set himself free for higher dreams, for greater privileges.³⁶

Lastly, I posit that the experience of transformation is subjective. If a situation, a social/shared context, is transformed, it is altered in a way that affects all involved, and so is objective in this way. But the way that transformation of the shared-social context is experienced depends on which side of the change you are on, i.e., where your vested interests are. So, in that case, it could be subjective, i.e., as a good/joyful thing or a bad/painful thing. If it is a liberating transformation, we might want to say it is a good thing for all involved, an objectively good thing, even though it is experienced as bad/painful by those who resist it and do not want it because they prefer/benefit from the non-liberating status quo. Thus, the outcome or effects of change differ based on which side of the transformative work you exist on. I can only conclude a vital truth; liberation is excellent for the oppressed but challenging for the oppressor. In second II, we will offer more detail concerning the process and participants of transformation and how this experience and encounter posits itself through an ethical lens in congregational/social spaces.

³⁶James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: The Dial Press, 1961), 117.

INTRODUCTION: PART II

Sandra L. Barnes, in *Black Church Culture and Community Action*, writes, “Cultural theory posits that social groups possess a cultural repertoire or tool kit that reflects beliefs, ritual practices, stories, and symbols that provide meaning and impetus for resource mobilization.”³⁷ Thus, a cultural repertoire is a byproduct of factors that derive from a group’s social reality. I define the term cultural repertoire as “the aggregate of options utilized by a group of people and by the individual members of the group for the organization of life.”³⁸ This interpretation suggests that any group’s actions and beliefs ground themselves with preserving life as its goal. The implications of how belief and behavior, whether positive or negative in their expression, impact those within a given space may not be a consideration. Sustainability and survival may exist as the engine that moves the group along. Often, what we witness as the results of the options selected by a given group appear oppositional in their understanding and practices. Still, we seldom investigate a group’s social experiences to understand why they function, exist, believe what they believe, and behave how they behave. For this reason, I am engaged in this work.

Recently, I served in an urban-based Black Baptist Church in Passaic, NJ. During my service as a pulpit supply, the social interactions at the church were promising. Once selected to serve as the permanent pastor, over time, I witnessed factions in the church

³⁷Sandra L. Barnes, “Black Church Culture and Community Action,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (December 2005): 967–994, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0003>.

³⁸ Itamar Even-Zohar “The Making of Culture Repertoire and the Role of Transfer,” *Target | Test site* January 1, 1997, accessed May 3, 2023, <https://benjamins.com/online/target/articles/>.

function in ways that I assessed as oppositional. During the following three and a half years, I noticed a congregational behavior aligned with a set of beliefs that did not match my understanding of Baptist polity but grounded itself on a system of thought this faction developed as a means of survival. Baptist polity in this written context represents “how we in the church order ourselves and our resources to be and do what God calls us to. It involves patterns of relationship, ways of believing and acting, and ways of marshaling our forces to fulfill God’s mission.”³⁹

Suppose a congregation is not focused on the ministry of reconciliation, and transformation is no longer an active goal in the church. Whatever system is in place that governs the beliefs and behaviors of the congregation is in contradiction to the “divine mission of Jesus for His church on earth.”⁴⁰ Therefore, what I deem a created system of ideas and ideals of the family legacy group in the Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored appears antithetical to what I understand to be an established polity and practice. For clarification, my assertion of an established system of congregational governing and practice does not seek to embrace or reject a conservative ministry methodology. Whether traditional, moderate, or progressive in its forms, methods of ministry presentation and structures should have a foundation that they stand on that best represents the divine mission of Jesus. Related to my specific context and congregational experience, I have watched family legacy group members live out a system of created ideals antithetical to the established system of rules in the church and align their human behavior in ways that negatively impact a congregation’s attempts to develop

³⁹ Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson, *Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

transformation and communal mutuality amongst themselves, its members not associated with the families in the church and the community.

In Research Module I, I compared the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X, the American Muslim Movement known as the Nation of Islam, and the family legacy group in the Black Baptist Church in ways that offered similarities to a belief system and aligned behavior grounded by the impacts of their social conditions. Comparable to the family legacy group introduced in Research Module I, the Nation of Islam was the model for what I assessed as the problem. The problem was with what they believed, how that belief was interpreted, and how the Nation of Islam community practiced a human behavior consistent with/aligned with the belief that did not represent a traditional understanding of their faith context.

I termed what I describe as a flawed/distorted belief comparable to the traditional view of Islam known as Sunni Islam and an established polity and practice of the Black Baptist Church as a created ideology in Research Module I. To reintroduce this terminology in this section, I define *created ideology* as “patterned clusters of normatively imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations. These conceptual maps help people navigate the complexity of their political universe and carry claims to social truth.”⁴¹ The problem with the behavior of the family legacy group was not that it was out of alignment with created ideologies but was in alignment with the wrong belief, with a distorted/flawed interpretation based on feeling instead of facts associated with a traditional faith

⁴¹Paul James and Manfred Steger, *Globalization and Culture, Vol. 4: Ideologies of Globalism* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), xii.

context. This understanding is witnessed/expressed similarly with family legacy groups in the Black Baptist Church and the Nation of Islam in Research Module I.

I posit that the conflict within the local Black Baptist church I formerly pastored centers itself on tensions between survival mode dynamics of family legacy group members and a leader-implemented system of polity and practice aimed at transforming the congregation in ways that would reshape and inform their identity, belief, and human behavior in new ways. I no longer serve as senior pastor of the congregational space that grounds my research for this project. Still, the problems in the Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored and any congregation in general that wrestles between the pillars of survival mode dynamics and established polity and practices in a congregational context can be remedied if the church undergoes what I posit as the three stages of transformation.

Section II will be organized into three parts:

1. Pilgrimage and Liturgy - Engaging in Transformative Practices.
2. Understanding the Social Origins of Family Legacy Group Members.
3. The Right Belief, the Right Behavior – Leaders Living out their Faith.

First, I will analyze the pilgrimage's premise as a step toward transformation. Topics on journeying, ritual practice, safe space, and community will emerge as tools to redevelop family legacy group members' thought processes and behavioral patterns. Additionally, this initial stage will introduce the concept of liturgy as an active vehicle the collective congregation can use as a transformation exercise. We will look at Lent and its tenets of sacrifice, death, and rebirth as a catalyst for transformation. This stage will be understood as the "bridging" stage in the transformation process. If/when this

bridge is created, the congregation and the community can begin developing a new fundamental belief, actualized in a modified behavior that transforms the congregation.

Our second stage will seek to develop awareness concerning the family legacy group's social origins. This stage does not seek to establish a proverbial right or wrong dynamic but rather create an understanding of the social makeup and congregational experiences that shifted family legacy group members into a survival mode. Although teaching must thread itself through every stage, this stage is a space created to establish awareness, comfort, and, eventually, social acceptance. As a reference, we will look at the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam to understand how social conditions impact the continuation of beliefs and behavioral dynamics that do not represent a traditional/established faith understanding.

Stage three will seek to look at the leadership in the Black Baptist Church and develop a behavioral approach that offers a social ethic/human behavior aligned with their faith context. This stage aims to provide content to leaders in the Black Baptist Church regarding the importance of maintaining a faith disposition needed by family legacy group members navigating through transformation. Our faith context must be lived out in ways that aid in transforming family legacy group members. Due to layers of trauma based on the social conditions of black bodies, leaders in the Black Baptist Church must exhibit a lived behavioral context that aligns with their faith understanding in ways that contribute to survival mode relapse. An analysis of White and Non-White, Sunni Muslims in Jeddah and Mecca, will provide an analysis of how human behaviors aligned with a faith context can alter how individuals see leadership, the church, and themselves.

While Malcolm X was practicing in the Muslim tradition, and I am offering a transformation model for Christians, my goal is not to attempt to inform Christianity from an Islamic theological lens. Instead, I aim to view the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X to critique the tensions that exist in the Black Baptist Church between survival mode dynamics and the implementation of an established system of polity and practice. Malcolm X's transformation movement provides a model of what is needed, what needs to happen, and what can and sometimes does happen to address the congregational conflicts formed by the creation of ideologies of family legacy group members and their aligned ethic antithetical to the established understanding of belief and behavior in the Black Baptist Church.

Although informing Christianity through an Islamic lens is not wrong, I do not seek to wrestle with this perspective in this project. I do affirm that Drew Theological School encourages inter-faith dialogue. Thus, I do not mean to suggest that Christian-Islamic dialogue is wrong or that Christians have nothing to learn from their Muslim neighbors. I ground my perspective in interpreting the second letter to Timothy, chapter three, and verse sixteen: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness."⁴² My understanding of the term "all" does not limit God's act of scriptural inspiration to my canon. As a matter of principle, I am clarifying my stance for this project in the particular theological context of the Black Baptist Church, that the topic/content of my work will not be Christian-Muslim dialogue on theological issues.

Instead, I will speak to the specific elements of personal transformation concerning the structures involved in critically examining created ideologies that shape

⁴² 2 Tim 3:16 (NRSV).

identity and the social behaviors that can be similar across differing religious, cultural, and ethical contexts. This framing will synthesize my thoughts in ways that translate the experience of Malcolm X into an easily approachable valuable perspective in a congregational/social setting in ways that do not superimpose Islamic views or practices. While my research will position itself for usage in the Black Baptist church, my model created by my conclusions is not limited to Black Baptist churches.

SECTION FOUR: PILGRIMAGE AND LITURGY – ENGAGING IN TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES

Section four will offer an analysis of pilgrimage as a step toward transformation. Topics on journeying, ritual practice, safe space, and community will emerge as tools to redevelop family legacy group members' thought processes and behavioral patterns. Additionally, this initial stage will look at congregational liturgy as an active vehicle the collective congregation can use as a transformation exercise. We will look at Lent and its tenets of sacrifice, death, and rebirth as a catalyst for transformation. This stage will be understood as the "bridging" stage in the transformation process. If/when this bridge is created, the congregation and the community can begin developing a new fundamental belief, actualized in a modified behavior that transforms the congregation.

WHAT IS PILGRIMAGE?

George D. Greenia, in his 2018 article in the *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* entitled, "*What is Pilgrimage?*" offers a working interpretation of the term that will ground our understanding and use of the term in this section of the project. Greenia writes, "The term 'pilgrimage' has become commonplace in modern conversations about any travel that is announced as 'intentional,' 'purposeful,' 'transformative,' or simply promises to be 'authentic.'"⁴³ Thus, the tenets of our understanding of pilgrimage see pilgrimage as a journey grounded in purpose that transforms the lives of those who participate in its practice. In assessing the lived

⁴³ George D. Greenia, "What is Pilgrimage?" *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 6, no. 2 (2018): 7, <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol6/iss2/3/>.

experiences and encounters of Malcolm X as our example of journeying from transition to transformation, I posit that pilgrimage is a necessary step that leads to change.

Malcolm's transformation would not have been as impactful apart from his pilgrimage to Mecca. Although Dr. Shawarbi was instrumental in teaching him traditional Islam (Sunni Islam) pre-hajj, his pilgrimage was a bridge between who he was and whom he would ultimately become.

Heather A. Warfield, in *Quest for Transformation: An Exploration of Pilgrimage in the Counseling Process*, writes,

The desire of humans to connect with an element of the sacred is evident from the writings of our distant ancestors to modern publications. This desire has manifested itself through rites of passage, rituals, and structures dedicated to the object of one's veneration. Often the site of the physical structure or area of land evolves into a meaningful connection point with the sacred or divine. As such, once the site has been identified as this connection point, individuals or groups continue to visit the site through a journey identified as a pilgrimage.⁴⁴

Based on Warfield's assertion, pilgrimage is not experienced apart from a connection to sacredness. The implications of pilgrimage in the context that I wish to present as a practice applicable for family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist church speaks of a journey of the mind that contributes to the reshaping of what we believe and how we behave. The sacredness of pilgrimage "can be defined in terms of physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual constructs."⁴⁵ Practices of prayer and meditation can transport our minds to another place, even though our physical bodies have not moved. Although Hajj (pilgrimage) is considered a requirement of the Islamic

⁴⁴ Heather A. Warfield, "Quest For Transformation: An Exploration of Pilgrimage in the Counseling Process," *VISTAS* (2012), article 35, https://www.counseling.org/resources/library/vistas/vistas12/Article_35.pdf

⁴⁵ Ibid.

faith, leave-taking does not have to be a requirement for the family legacy group member who engages in this reframing of pilgrimage. What we must embrace are ways to encourage the need for pilgrimage as a necessity in the local Black Baptist Church. By associating pilgrimage with Christian faith practices, we can connect what we already do, i.e., prayer, meditation, exercise, and the like, and use our faith practices as a participating partner in our expression of journeying. Thus, I wish to expand its interpretation. A pilgrimage does not limit its practice to a traditional sense of physical leave-taking. Instead, it offers an augmented lens that incorporates mental, emotional, and psychological leave-taking as an option for family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church.

While participating in retreats has served as a means of pilgrimage in the past for members of the local Black Baptist Church, our most recent experiences with Covid -19 and our nationwide isolation suggest that the concept of retreat must expand itself beyond the practice of leave-taking. Thus, what we claim as a designated point or location of a pilgrimage can no longer exist in ways that present pilgrimage as a disconnection from our current physical site. Instead, we must employ the option of mental trekking. This premise can transcend our minds and teleport us into another space. Kathryn M. Rudy, in *A Guide to Mental Pilgrimage: Paris, Bibliotheque de L'Arsenal Ms. 212*, posits this concept as a “mental or virtual pilgrimage.”⁴⁶ While Rudy shares my premise of mental trekking, her use of the concept also uses symbols and manuscripts as a supportive tool of mental pilgrimage. She writes,

⁴⁶ Kathryn M. Rudy, "A Guide to Mental Pilgrimage: Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal Ms. 212," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 63, no. 4 (2000): 494-515.

Arsenal 212 is a manuscript with text and images that evoke the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and provides prayers to be read in praise of the Temple of the Lord according to the rubric (fol.2). The corresponding image depicts the church's exterior. The manuscript then provides prayers and closely related miniatures evoking chapels within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher: The Chapel of the Virgin Mary, the Chapel of the Magdalen, the Chapel of the Flagellation, and the chapel marking the place where the soldiers divided Christ's robe.⁴⁷

Although a manuscript specific to pilgrimage for family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church has not been created, I believe several topical books on prayer, meditation, and journeys would be theologically appropriate as a companion tool for pilgrimaging in place. Therefore, any space can become sacred, where we can center ourselves and connect with the divine. When pilgrimage, through mental leave-taking, creates a different construct, we can utilize this new construction to reshape the social constructs that historically informed our cultural, social, and religious identity in ways that previously were antithetical to God's original design for the local Black Baptist Church. I will investigate this premise in my following sub-section, sacred space.

SACRED SPACE

Elizabeth Hoffman Ransford offers her view of a historical interpretation of sacred spaces in her Loyola University Chicago dissertation entitled *Sacred Spaces, Public Places: The Intersection of Religion and Space in Three Chicago Communities, 1869-1932*, on religious landscapes. She writes,

Manifestations of religion on the landscape and in conceptions of space illuminate a variety of cultural impulses. As the most tangible displays of religion on the landscape, religious structures embody and shape the theological understandings, cultural assumptions, and social aspirations of believers; sacred buildings convey how congregations perceive themselves and how they aspire to be perceived by others. Moreover, because houses of worship serve as visible markers of the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 497.

cultural authority and political status of their builders, religious structures also reflect the secular values and aesthetic fashions of the public sphere.⁴⁸

Congregational landscapes are no longer centralized to buildings and erected cathedrals. Congregational landscapes are also depicted as cyber sites and Zoom rooms. While many of our traditional congregational spaces still exist, and several members still attend in person, many congregants do not frequent the fixed location as they did in the past. Considering the impacts of Covid-19 on our world in general and the local Black Baptist Church in particular, how do we assess congregational landscapes in today's climate? What serves as markers that determine how we define sacred space? Most of our local Black Baptist Churches have had to readjust how they function. According to the American Family Survey, "Religious attendance has declined significantly in the past two years. The share of regular churchgoers is down by six percentage points, from 34% in 2019 to 28% in 2021."⁴⁹

Family legacy group members may need to reassess how they think about congregational governance since the church's landscape has changed. While I do not seek to appear insensitive to the myriads of families who have experienced loss over the last three years due to Covid-19, I do wish to posit a reassessment of Covid-19 in ways that offer a different lens of interpretation. Could Covid-19 be perceived as an act of divine disconnection? What if the church no longer demonstrated a lens of Christianity that mirrors God's intended design for God's church; could Covid-19 be interpreted as a

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Hoffman Ransford, "Sacred Spaces, Public Places: The Intersection of Religion and Space in Three Chicago Communities, 1869-1932," (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2010).

⁴⁹ Wendy R. Wang, "Number 2 in 2022: The Decline in Church Attendance in Covid America," Institute for Family Studies, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/number-2-in-2022-the-decline-in-church-attendance-in-covid-america>.

religious/congregational break? If so, how do we reimagine sacred space? How do we reassess journeying? As previously inferred, sacred space can no longer exist as a representation of concrete buildings alone. If we, the members of the local Black Baptist Church, must reimagine how we understand sacred space, maybe reimagination can transcend itself and offer opportunities for reshaping created ideas and ideals. If this happens, what we learn and how we learn in this liminal space can help family legacy group members reshape and transform.

OPEN TO LEARNING

Like Malcolm, family legacy group members must develop an appetite for learning that catalyzes pilgrimage. For Malcolm, understanding his traditional faith context grounded his transformation due to his ousting from the NOI. Malcolm's break from the Nation of Islam provided the opportunity needed to develop new associations and learning partnerships. This experience and premise might challenge family legacy group members easily influenced by family dynamics. Family dynamics refers to the patterns of interactions among relatives, their roles and relationships, and the various factors that shape their interactions. Because family members rely on each other for emotional, physical, and economic support, they are one of the primary sources of relationship security or stress.⁵⁰ Specific to family legacy group members in the Black Baptist Church I previously pastored, their congregational connection is an extension of their bloodline association. Thus, the opportunity for openness related to new

⁵⁰ Bahareh Jabbari and Audra S. Rouster, "Family Dynamics - StatPearls - NCBI Bookshelf," Family Dynamics. National Library of Medicine, July 25, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK560487/>.

associations and new ways of interpreting how things should be done according to an established understanding of polity may be problematic. It all depends on who exists as the voice of influence within the family legacy group and who in the group is open to varying interpretations, if for nothing else but a comparison tool. In *Constructing Reality and its Alternatives: An Inclusion/Exclusion Model of Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Social Judgment*, Norbert Schwarz and Herbert Bless support my claim. They write,

Individuals do not retrieve all knowledge that may bear on the stimulus, nor do they retrieve and use all knowledge that may potentially be relevant to constructing its alternative. Rather, they rely on the subset of potentially relevant information that is most accessible at the time of judgment. Accordingly, their temporary representation of the target stimulus, as well as their construction of a standard of comparison, includes information that is chronically accessible, and hence context-independent, as well as information that is only temporarily accessible due to contextual influences.⁵¹

Referencing Malcolm X, family legacy group members who want to undergo the reshaping process must discover ways to establish mental freedom while remaining in congregational proximity to family legacy group members who wish to maintain the status quo. Malcolm's independence from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam afforded him the "freedom to deepen his knowledge of Sunni Islam."⁵² Family legacy group members desiring redevelopment are still connected to the group in the church who live out their survival mode dynamics. Even if they opt to remain in their domiciles as an act of disassociation from other members of the family legacy group, it

⁵¹ Norbert Schwarz and Herbert Bless. "Constructing Reality and Its Alternatives: An Inclusion/Exclusion Model of Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Social judgment," in *The construction of social judgment*, ed. L.L. Martin and A. Tesser (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum 1992), 217-45, at p. 218.

⁵² DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 202.

does not change the fact that they exist as bloodline associates. Our only hope is that the practice of sacrifice, seen in the spiritual discipline of self-denial, can contribute to ways family legacy group members see Jesus and ultimately see themselves.

LENT AS A PRACTICE

An analysis of the Christian congregational calendar posits the season of Lent as a suitable teaching companion for reshaping family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church. Lent is about repentance, soul searching, sorrow for sin, and ascetical disciplines of self-denial.⁵³ To reshape, I will look to the practice of Lent through its interpretation of self-denial as a spiritual discipline. If I posit that family legacy group members subscribe to a created perspective that offers a varying understanding of how the local Black Baptist Church should function, giving something up aids in the reshaping process. Although Lent does not serve as a supportive companion to materialistic practices of American society, Lent, by contrast, is a time for pondering the mystery of suffering, a time of self-abasement, a time for doing without, purging and cleansing, for purification.⁵⁴

Lent creates the space where individuals undergo self-reflection and reevaluate what matters. Through this reevaluation process, family legacy group members have an opportunity to reassess the sacrifices of Christ comparable to what they are willing to give up for Christ. This teaching component must make Christ the point of interest, not the concept of reshaping. Reshaping must be a voluntary act of the family legacy group member whose connection to Christ motivates them to reassess ideas and ideals that do

⁵³ See Rodney J. Hunter, "Preaching Lent: Challenges and Opportunities," *Journal for Preachers* 43, no. 2 (Lent 2020): 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

not align with a mission of reconciliation and transformation. As previously stated, the mission of Jesus and Jesus's church grounds itself on the actions of reconciliation and transformation. This is the fundamental, established interpretation of how the Black Baptist Church must govern itself. Thus, when teaching the principles of self-denial during the Lenten season, individuals in the congregation can rethink how they interpret mission, ministry, and congregational governance. During this period of Lent, members in the congregation can create prayer partners, develop topic-specific reading assignments, and foster personal and collective spaces of meditation and self-reflection.

For family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored, I posit a reimaging of Lent lived out through the concept of Lent as a lifestyle. Lent, for some, must expand its practices beyond a short-lived season. Challenges with congregational sustainability in specific perspectives exist because the methods needed to foster redevelopment and transformation are limited to a particular timeframe. While the leadership of the local Black Baptist Church wants to see the Black Baptist Church reshaped and transformed, often, we do not invest enough time and patience for family legacy group members to go through the process needed to redevelop a new perspective, a new ideal of congregational understanding and behavior. We must be intentional and consistent in our strategy of teaching Lent. While some will latch on and forge ahead, for others, it may take some time to “lay aside the weight and the sin that clings so closely.”⁵⁵

So, what practices present themselves for family legacy group members within the framework of the Black Baptist Church in ways that produce transformation? What

⁵⁵ Hebrews 12:1

dramatic alteration formulates practices that family legacy group members in the Black Baptist Church can adopt during transitioning from their congregational norm? I assert that the transformational practices that developed new ideals begin with a pilgrimage. Pilgrimage must exist as the answer that disassociates family legacy group members from mindsets grounded in survival mode dynamics. The concept of pilgrimage must transport family legacy group members through congregational trauma, transition, and transformation stages. In assessing pilgrimage as an introduction to the stages of transformation, family legacy group members must expand their scope of pilgrimage and see journeying through a new lens of mental travel. While physical retreating has been a historical practice for journeying, our current social climate has altered how we assess and understand retreat. Thus, the concept of sacred space is no longer limited to journeying to secluded resorts. The idea of pilgrimage and sacred space is reimagined, and our minds can foster seclusion without physical leave-taking.

Additionally, we looked at Lent as a spiritual discipline that aids in the reshaping process. Through the teaching of self-denial and the implementation of ritual practices, family legacy group members can participate in personal and corporate prayer gatherings, meditation, and topic-specific textual readings that encourage a redevelopment. Lastly, we conceptualized a new interpretation of Lent that posits Lent as a lifestyle practice. We aimed to present this concept in ways that offer Lenten practices beyond the Lenten season. Through continuing self-denial as a practice, family legacy group members can reshape ideals and behaviors that hinder the possibility of survival mode dynamic relapse.

SECTION FIVE: UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF FAMILY LEGACY GROUP MEMBERS

This section of the paper will investigate the social origins of family legacy group members in ways that provide awareness of their congregational/social experiences. Those congregational/social experiences contributed to developing their survival mode dynamics. Thus, survival mode dynamics ground the formation of created ideologies and aligned human/social behaviors depicted as antithetical to the established system in place in the local church. My research in this section will look at the experiences and encounters of Malcolm X and the NOI and assess the social conditions and lived experiences comparable to family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored.

While Malcolm's and the NOI's encounters and experiences have a racial component to the development of their social origins, I am not suggesting that similar issues surrounding race contribute as significantly to the development of the created ideologies of family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored. I posit that social conditioning, black identity formation/development, and community interactions impact the development of ideas and ideals and its aligned social behaviors viewed as oppositional. Additionally, analyzing system theory to create awareness of the development of antithetical social behaviors and mindsets of family legacy group members will serve as a resource for leaders in the local Black Baptist Church. Dr. Joy DeGruy will serve as a primary conversation partner based on her work in her book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*.

MOVING PAST UNNECESSARY PRACTICES

Dr. Joy DeGruy, PH.D., in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, writes, "The legacy of trauma is reflected in many of our behaviors and our beliefs, behaviors, and beliefs

that at one time were necessary to adopt in order to survive, yet today serve to undermine our ability to be successful."⁵⁶ Considering the history of the St. Paul Baptist Church of Passaic, NJ, what I frame as a created ideology and an aligned human behavior lived out in an oppositional way, could be interpreted as a trauma-based behavior and belief that was a necessity for their survival during gaps periods of leadership in their congregational history. Throughout its ninety-six years, the St. Paul Baptist Church of Passaic, NJ, had seventeen pastors and many gap periods lasting up to three years where the church had no elected leader.

Regardless of a negative reputation, church members were left to look within themselves to develop ways to survive. Family legacy group members assumed leadership and developed congregational ideals for survival. While the basis of what they deemed necessary worked during transition periods, family legacy group members no longer needed to remain in survival mode once the congregation selected a pastor. Thus, the challenge in the church was not based on a created system and an aligned behavior necessary during gaps periods of leadership. Still, rather the maintenance of the same mindset and behaviors post pastoral selection. The church no longer needed to be in survival mode.

I also posit that family legacy group members sustained their survival mode dynamic based on their history of unexpected short-term leadership. Challenges with unpredictable short-term leadership in the church may have motivated family legacy group members to function as they always did. Comparable to the NOI, the social

⁵⁶ Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukee, WI: Uptone Press, 2005; reprint ed. 2018), 117.

construct in America was not changing. While the NOI could have embraced a traditional hermeneutic of Islam, the fact remained that the conditions of American whiteness kept the NOI in survival mode. Thus, the goal was racial and economic empowerment of the black race, not implementing traditional religious tenets as a daily practice of Islam. This similar position is witnessed in the lived experiences of family legacy group members whose experiences did not afford them the comfort to consider another way beyond the way they knew they could readily depend on, whether there was a permanent leader or not.

In expanding her thought on trauma, DeGruy says,

In addition to the family, the legacy of trauma is also passed down through the community. During slavery, the black community was a suppressed and marginalized group. Today, the African American community is made up of individuals and families who collectively share differential anxiety and adaptive survival behaviors – The community serves to reinforce both the positive and negative behaviors through the socialization process.⁵⁷

An analysis of the social dynamics at work for the congregation and community on Aspen Street in Passaic, NJ, posits that most members in the church are relatives and grew up together in the same community. Thus, the implication of collective sharing, whether positive or negative, is exponentially higher due to their proximity and social engagement. St. Paul Baptist Church is not only the community church on Aspen Street; it is the family church on Aspen Street. Between the ever-changing leadership of the church and the social challenges of being black in America, survival mode dynamics seemingly exist as a core component of their social makeup.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe, and Bailey W. Jackson III, in *New Perspectives in Racial Identity Development: Integrating Emerging Frameworks*, offer supportive context to my claim of socialization as a tool of racial development. Wijeyesinghe and Jackson write,

When we adjust for an appreciation of the notion that Black children are, in fact, influenced by more than racism in their midst and the collusion with racism that exists in their own community, we have to look to those experiences that introduce them to the Five elements of culture embedded in their socializing agents and institutions, namely, the biological and extended family; the Black community; faith-based institutions; social clubs; schools; and other socializing institutions that carry the uniqueness of Black/African American culture. Depending on the salience of Black culture in their growing up experience, the Black cultural messages do have an effect on the black identity development.⁵⁸

Thus, individuals in the church who seek to participate in the stages of transformation must thoroughly assess the social and relational dynamics contributing to how family legacy group members understand themselves and exist within their social/congregational context. The contributing factors that shape how they think and understand inform the mechanisms that control how they behave and react in social/congregational settings.

COMPARING OUR PAST EXPERIENCES TO OUR PRESENT BEHAVIORS

Dr. Joy DeGruy, PH.D., in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, asks, “What effect has our history had on our culture and our soul?”⁵⁹ In assessing the origins of these systems at work in the local Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored, what are the connections between the oppositional human/social behaviors of family legacy group

⁵⁸ Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W. Jackson, *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development, Integrating Emerging Frameworks* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 41.

⁵⁹ Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 111.

members in the Black Baptist Church and the social construct of America known as racism? Can racism exist as a concealed incubator that contributes to the social/congregational challenges in the local Black Baptist Church? In a general sense, I can say yes. Still, in a particular way germane to my previous congregational context, I am not sure if race is comparable to the experiences of Malcolm X, and the NOI was a contributing factor in the development of created ideals and oppositional behaviors aligned to them.

In a general sense, emotional and psychological outcomes caused by the American social construct impact the social conditions of African Americans. Black bodies in America have historically been disenfranchised, and the markers of identification, while misinterpreted, have been constructed to perpetuate trauma in black bodies pre- and post-conversation. Although seldom discussed in some Black Baptist churches, these effects are vital to understanding individuals in the congregation who comprise family legacy group members and individuals who collectively include the assembly. Referencing Malcolm, his foundation was Garveyism/Black Nationalist thought, which created a healthy/self-empowering identity formation contrary to how whiteness attempted to frame black identity at that time. Although Malcolm had a family dynamic that provided a positive construction concerning his black identity, what we later see as a religious conversation in Malcolm's lived experiences did not alter the hate he felt for the white race. Although he was a devout Muslim in his lived practice, what he learned and lived did not heal/deliver him from the impact whiteness had on his social conditioning.

Malcolm found safety initially in the Nation of Islam. Meanwhile, members of the family legacy group, whose trauma was not just a byproduct of social conditioning but also a byproduct of congregational encounters and experiences, what place of safety

can they find outside the ideals they create that serve as their safety net of comfort and consistency? Peter L. Steinke, in examining family systems, offers a note-worthy assessment in his book, *How Your Church Family Works, Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. The premise of his message seeks to “conceptualize emotional processes so that we can recognize them and, ultimately, let them serve rather than corrupt the purpose of our bonding together.”⁶⁰ Steinke suggests that the goal of “examining family systems”⁶¹ or “system theory”⁶² centers on the awareness of the emotional state and not merely on understanding it. Steinke writes, “Understanding alone will not change these processes. Suppose understanding is translated into new ways of being and doing. In that case, emotional processes can be directed toward health and well-being as we live the divine vocation entrusted to us.”⁶³

In assessing Steinke’s perspective, Steinke suggests that system theory is a valuable tool that aids family legacy group members through the stages of transformation. I understand system theory as “the study of society as a complex arrangement of elements, including individuals and their beliefs, as they relate to a whole.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Steinke writes, “System Theory is a way of conceptualizing reality. It organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point. System thinking considers the interrelatedness of the parts. Instead of seeing isolated, unrelated parts, we look at the whole.”⁶⁵ It is not enough to merely interpret the position/disposition of family legacy group members; We, the leadership of the local Black Baptist church, must

⁶⁰ Peter L. Steinke. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 28.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “Systems Theory.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., accessed March 29, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/systems-theory>.

⁶⁵ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 33.

process their intent.

This approach lays the groundwork for the strategy I seek to establish as a starting point for the transformation process. Additionally, it provides knowledge concerning the intent of the decisions made by family legacy group members. It offers answers to the "why" questions we have concerning their thought processes and behaviors. When used correctly, system theory can work to remove the emotional reactions that typically exist as a response to oppositional behaviors and foster a position that the leadership of the local Black Baptist church can take that sees the root of the problem instead of the individual exhibiting the oppositional behavior. While this approach takes on a more clinical approach to conflict resolution, this approach may be beneficial when attempting to develop an awareness of the conflicts in the local Black Baptist church.

In conclusion, I sought to investigate the social origins of family legacy group members in ways that offer awareness of how they form ideals and live out behaviors depicted as oppositional and antithetical to an established polity and practice. The lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X served as a visual depiction of how social conditioning impacts identity formation and socialization. My investigation posits that created ideologies of family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored in are closely associated with survival mode dynamics. Thus, the tension in the congregational context is not a direct result of intentional thought processes aimed to be contradictory in its practice and behavior but rather the result of a history of experiences that encourage family legacy group members to maintain a system of thought and practice they are most acquainted with.

My research sought to utilize system theory as a resource to expand how we view family legacy group members. System theory promotes a broader lens that enables

the congregational leader to assess congregational conflicts from varying vantage points and offers context that provides awareness of the intent of oppositional behaviors of black bodies in the Black Baptist church. Our task in formulating a solution must move the leadership of the Black Baptist church in a direction that creates community and acceptance. To contribute to someone's transformation effectively, we must "listen carefully and sensitively to what the situation is saying – what the thoughts, desires, and actions of the people seem to convey before deciding on a plan of action."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Archie Smith, *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (New York: Abington Press, 1982), 35.

SECTION SIX: RIGHT BELIEF, RIGHT BEHAVIOR – LEADERS LIVING OUT THE FAITH

This section will investigate the social behaviors and interactions of Sunni Muslims and Malcolm X in Jeddah and Mecca. I seek to observe these interactions in ways that provide examples of human behaviors aligned with a faith context that contribute to an individual's positive reshaping. While different in their religious/theological views, Sunni Muslims will serve as an archetype to local Black Baptist Church leaders in ways that demonstrate the impacts of human behaviors lived out consistently, grounded by a traditional faith context. This section of the paper does not seek to posit Islamic theology as a reference for Christian leaders. Instead, this section aims to analyze the behaviors of white Muslims in ways that impacted the transformation of Malcolm X and assess how consistencies relating to positive social behaviors can radically contribute to the reshaping process.

Additionally, I will highlight mutuality as an end goal of congregational transformation for family legacy group members and look at interdependence theory as a tool of interpretation relating to my understanding of mutuality.

LIVING IT OUT

Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., in *On the Side of My People, The Religious Life of Malcolm X*, writes, “Malcolm noted that the white Muslims in the East were much different from American whites since Islam had removed the “white from their minds,” and since these white Muslims were so free from color prejudice, Malcolm said, it allowed him to remove the “Negro’ from his mind—with the result that all attitudes

and behaviors had changed for the better.”⁶⁷

Note Malcolm’s comparison of whiteness experienced– he grounds his perspective based on the effects of his social encounters with white Sunni Muslims in the East. While Islam as a faith context informed the behavioral disposition of white Sunni Muslims, the encounters and social interactions, not the faith dynamic alone, moved Malcolm to rethink how he saw whites and himself. Sunni Muslims in the East are a part of the “85 percent of orthodox Muslims worldwide. They are the mainstream of the Islamic religious community whose beliefs have changed little since their development more than 1,000 years ago.”⁶⁸ For Sunni Muslims, submission to Allah is the foundation of their faith. There are five pillars of the Islamic faith. These pillars are as follows:

Shahadah - The following prayer is repeated daily - “I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, the One, without any partner. And I bear witness that Mohammed is His servant and His Messenger.”

Salat - At least five times daily, the devout Muslim must pray. The prayers, preceded by washing, are performed without shoes and involve standing, kneeling, and bowing. The ritual serves as a reminder to do good and strive for more significant causes.

Zakat - A gift is usually assessed at 2.5% of a person’s assets. This is given to the poor, orphans, and widows. It is considered a personal responsibility intended to ease the economic hardship of others and eliminate inequality.

Sawm - During Ramadan (April-May), Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. This is said to bind the community together through shared deprivation.

Hajj - Among believers who can afford it, a pilgrimage to Mecca (Islam’s holiest shrine) must be made at least once in a lifetime.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ DeCaro, Jr. *On the Side of My People*, 209.

⁶⁸ “Fundamental to Arab Life,” *Canada and the World Backgrounder* 76, no. 4 (June 2011): 15–18.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Sunni Muslims in Jeddah and Mecca lived out their faith context daily. For Sunni Muslims, an aligned social/human behavior was a way of life. According to DeCaro, Jr., “Malcolm met Abd al-Rahman Azzam at the Jedda Palace Hotel, where the latter was staying in his own suite. The suite, in fact, was turned over to Malcolm, who was overwhelmed by the hospitality of his Muslim hosts and the intervention of Allah.”⁷⁰ Malcolm never thought a non-black individual would extend this kind of hospitality. Although Malcolm was grateful to Allah, he was moved by the actions/behavior displayed by his Arab Muslim brother. Malcolm’s experiences and encounters with whites in America shaped how he saw white people everywhere. Even when social interactions occurred with white people in America who shared his perspective, he could not build with them initially due to previous experiences of racial degradation that contributed to his social conditioning involving racist whites in America.

Similarly, family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church I formerly pastored exercised resistance to congregational redevelopment based on their experiences and encounters at the church. All their experiences and encounters were not hostile. Still, when the experiences and encounters with new leadership did not exhibit a behavioral dynamic supportive of their agenda, it was easy for family legacy group members to resist the idea of reshaping and transformation. While I do not recommend that leaders in the local Black Baptist Church conform to a system in the church that does not support or embrace reconciliation and transformation, I do suggest that leaders in the local Black Baptist Church develop a behavioral disposition that provides a social/moral ethic that can affect the “Malcolm” in the church which is open to transformation. As

⁷⁰ DeCaro, Jr. *On the Side of My People*, 205.

leaders, our motivation to enact this moral/social ethic cannot be predicated on the hopes that everyone in the congregation will be transformed. Instead, we must understand that our Christian duty is a moral/social ethic consistent with/aligned with our faith tradition. Dr. Traci C. West, in *Disruptive Christian Ethics, When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, suggests, "To be a valuable resource in this morally competitive climate, a liberatory social ethic based upon the Christian gospel has to be fostered within the concrete practices of Christian faith communities."⁷¹

Leaders in the local Black Baptist Church should work to display our Christianity in ways that move individuals who interact with us to reassess their lived experiences and encounters and show that those interactions impact how they move forward in positive ways. Like the experiences of Malcolm X in Jeddah and Mecca, our interactions with family legacy group members must become so intentional that our social interactions posit an understanding that something different is occurring here, something not reminiscent of our former interactions and challenges. God, in some way, has caused a removal of sorts to happen because the behavior is different here.

Understanding this premise, in what ways can the demonstration of our Christianity cause individuals to see something in us that is so unfamiliar that it moves them to see themselves and us in new ways? What can we do to live out this Christlikeness in our local Black Baptist Church to the point that our social/congregational interactions contribute to the healing of years of trauma, abuse, neglect, and even self-deprecation? Archie Smith, Jr., in *The Relational Self, Ethics & Therapy from a Black Church Perspective*, asks, "If the concepts with which we work

⁷¹ West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, Location 126, Kindle.

toward change and the structures of consciousness are formed by the society of which we are apart, then how do we forge alternatives since our own biographies, values, and beliefs are largely determined by the very social processes we hope to change?”⁷² While I could suggest that a reshaped understanding alone helps congregational challenges, I posit that social/human behaviors that align themselves with the tenets of our faith context in consistent ways are the only way we can see lasting change in the lives of family legacy group members. When implemented correctly, local Black Baptist Church leaders can witness lives transformed, and mutuality developed.

UNDERSTANDING MUTUALITY

Congregational mutuality should be a part of the transformation conversation. To understand my approach, I look at mutuality through the lens of interdependence theory. Interdependence theory means “an approach to analyzing social interactions and relationships that focuses on how each person’s outcomes depend on the actions of others.”⁷³ Thus, my interpretation of mutuality, seen through the lens of interdependence theory, suggests that in spaces of mutuality, “partners depend equally on each other’s behavior for the attainment of desirable outcomes.”⁷⁴ Sharon Galgay Ketcham, professor of theology and Christian ministries at Gordon College in Massachusetts, suggests that “a theology of mutuality that offers shared experiences, activities, and relationships that involve each person’s agency could be transformative but requires the Church to unite diverse gifts and differing wills for the purpose of

⁷² Smith, *The Relational Self*, 79.

⁷³ *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, s.v., “Interdependence Theory,” <https://dictionary.apa.org/interdependencetheory>.

⁷⁴ *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, s.v. “Mutuality,” <https://dictionary.apa.org/mutuality>.

ministry.”⁷⁵

Congregational mutuality must exist as the next step after transformation.

Thus, positive social behaviors contribute to transformation and serve as a bridge for congregational mutuality. I will reference Louis A. DeCaro, Jr.’s full quote to support my claim. According to DeCaro, Jr.,

Apart from his own personal reevaluation of the white race and his euphoria over the spiritual kinship of the Hajj, Malcolm’s letters to the press made clear his belief both in the possibility and even the necessity of a religiously guided racial reconciliation in the United States. “The immediate acceptance of the oneness of God,” preached Malcolm, “is the only way out, the only way America can escape the inevitable destruction that every racist nation brings upon itself when it becomes too intoxicated with its power to recognize the existence of a Spiritual Power greater than all of its military and nuclear might.” By recognizing the “Spiritual Power” of Allah, Malcolm contended, whites in the United States could redeem both themselves and their nation because an embrace of the oneness of God would guarantee their acceptance of the oneness of man. “America” could be spared the destruction of “the cancer of racism” by becoming acquainted with Islam, “a religion that has molded people of all colors into one vast family.”⁷⁶

Malcolm was convinced that religion, primarily Islam, was the answer to the issues that hindered the possibilities of racial mutuality in America. In recollecting his experiences and encounters with White Muslims in Mecca, Malcolm was convinced that Islam could change the social origins of humankind, including whites, and rid America of its social cancer known as racism. Although I do not subscribe to Malcolm’s assessment of Islam as an exclusively religious context that contributes to the alteration of the social origins of humankind, I do believe that religion in all its formations can reshape our social conceptions and impact the ways we socially/religiously engage and interact with

⁷⁵ Sean Flynt, “Theology of Mutuality Can Rebuild a Declining Church, Ketcham Says,” Samford University, December 10, 2019, accessed March 4, 2023, <https://www.samford.edu/arts-and-sciences/news/2019/Theology-ofMutuality-Can-Rebuild-Declining-Church-Ketcham-Says>.

⁷⁶ DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People*, 208-209.

one another. For the local Black Baptist Church, congregational mutuality must be a proverbial center where everyone works to develop and sustain communal equality and congregational equity. The congregational dynamic must dismantle the overarching issues surrounding control and power. Instead, we must create a strategy that offers shared goals, accountability, and responsibility that moves the congregation and all its participants into a space of collective leading, fellowship, and proper functionality.

In conclusion, I sought to analyze the behavioral practices of Sunni Muslims in the East as an archetype for local Black Baptist Church leaders. Unique to their daily faith practice is a social behavior that aligns itself with their traditional belief. While the goal of this assessment was not intended to infuse Islam practices into the framework of Christian congregational spaces, I did aim to inform the social ethics/human behaviors of leaders in the local Black Baptist Church in ways that would encourage the implementation of consistent moral/human behaviors that align themselves with the tenet of our faith context. I referenced the experiences and encounters of Malcolm X during his stay in Jeddah and Mecca to analyze the effects of what this hypothesis would look like when lived out in real-time.

Malcolm's encounters and experiences in Mecca offer a look at how we, the leadership of the Black Baptist Church, can assess and implement the behavioral/ethical dynamics displayed by White and non-white Sunni Muslims in our social interactions with all members of the congregation. While the implications of my previous statement are not intended to imply that Christians in the Black Baptist Church should adopt Islamic faith practices, it does seek to suggest that our Christian faith practices should be as impactful to the Malcolm/s we encounter. My interpretation of Malcolm as an

archetype speaks to members of the Black Baptist Church, who exist within a Christian faith context, whose life can potentially undergo radical transformation based on how we, the Black Baptist church, live out our faith in positive, proactive ways. What we discover through Malcolm's experiences and encounters is this; how we live out our faith and understanding contributes to the holistic redevelopment and transformation in the lives of the Malcolm/s we encounter in our church.

In assessing mutuality as an extension of transformation in the local Black Baptist Church, I addressed the importance of collective evaluation of action and behavior relating to family legacy group members and leaders in the local Black Baptist Church. My claim suggested that both parties, family legacy group members, and local Black Baptist Church leaders must develop a proverbial line that functions as the meeting space for mutuality. While my premise of reshaping was central to family legacy group members, I do suggest that leaders in the local Black Baptist Church exhibit a sustained human/social behavior that contributes to the social temperature of the local Black Baptist Church. Thus, an evaluation of methodology and intentionality or crucial to the sustainability of congregational transformation mutuality in the Black Baptist Church.

PROJECT CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this work sought to analyze congregational challenges between family legacy group members and the leadership of a specific Black Baptist Church. Tensions between ideas and ideals created by family legacy group members that grounded how they interpret mission, ministry, and congregational governance in the Black Baptist church functioned in ways antithetical to an established understanding of congregational governance, mission, and ministry in the local Black Baptist Church. I assessed their position and aligned human/social behaviors associated with their position as flawed and oppositional. An investigation of the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X during periods of pre-hajj and Hajj served as an example comparable to the problems in the congregation surrounding issues relating to thought processes and ways of understanding, practice, and human/social behaviors lived out in oppositional ways to an established interpretation of congregational mission, ministry, and practice. Through my analysis of the lived experiences and encounters of Malcolm X, I witnessed how an individual's thought processes, ways of interpretation, and human/social behaviors can transform.

Comparisons between the Nation of Islam and family legacy group members of the local Black Baptist Church I formally pastored offered a depiction of sustained mindsets and human/social behaviors that did not represent the tenets of a traditional/established faith context. The NOI's thought processes and human/social behaviors exhibited themselves in contrast to a traditional Islamic faith context, Sunni Islam. Family legacy group members' thought processes and human/social behaviors exhibited themselves in contrast to the established ideals and practices created by the

leadership in the local Black Baptist Church. An expansion of what was initially described as a flawed hermeneutic of family legacy group members was reinterpreted as survival mode dynamics. While I am not suggesting that the mindsets and aligned behaviors of family legacy group members do not need reshaping, survival modes dynamics describe how I frame how they function based on my assessment of their social conditioning. Thus, the continuation of survival modes dynamics was comfortable for family legacy group members but antithetical to the processes and practices in the church once the local Black Baptist Church selected a permanent leader.

I posited a need for reshaping family legacy group members in the local Black Baptist Church. In assessing how family legacy group members can navigate this process, Malcolm X served as an archetype in this project, creating awareness of personality development and social conditioning and demonstrating how family legacy group members journey through the stages of transition to transformation. I began by investigating the concept of pilgrimage, sacred spaces, and lent as a spiritual practice for family legacy group members interested in reshaping. Regarding pilgrimage, George D. Greenia writes,

All religious traditions worldwide have incorporated quests and displacements as rites of initiation. Sacred travel may be viewed as a ritualized sequence of leave-taking from one's normal life and social network, then during the trip an immersion in an altered state of 'liminality' or threshold, living usually within a unique polity of strangers which forms its own society or communities. Eventually, there was a reincorporation as someone transformed and endowed with holy experiences and gifts that enrich the imagined community that was left behind, whether a specific village or the scattered believers of one's congregation.⁷⁷

I assessed the need to reimagine pilgrimage from a traditional interpretation of

⁷⁵ Greenia, "What is Pilgrimage?" 7.

physical leave-taking to a reimagined understanding of mental trekking. Similarly, I posited a reimagined concept regarding sacred spaces. Due to how religious landscapes have changed due to Covid, we must reassess how we interpret and experience sacred space. Thus, sacred spaces are no longer limited to religious edifices but can exist in any space our mind seeks to transform.

In observing the behavioral dispositions of family legacy group members, I looked to posit a need for redevelopment. Redevelopment is actualized through the lessons associated with Lent in the Black Baptist Church. By implementing teachings on sacrifice, coupled with ritual practices of prayer and meditation, family legacy group members can reevaluate thought processes and behaviors that do not seek to represent the mission and ministry of Jesus in the congregational context. Furthermore, local Black Baptist Church leaders must exhibit human/social behaviors representative of the tenets of their faith context. Leaders in the local Black Baptist Church must become incubators for sustained transformation in the lives of reformed family legacy group members. An incubator is “an enclosed apparatus providing a controlled environment for care and protection.”⁷⁸ Thus, the Black Baptist church, its leadership, and its members must function in a manner that offers collaborative care and protection for each other. For this strategy to work, “a sense of solidarity with a community of fellow pilgrims” must be the church’s ethos. Individuals in the church who represent the “Malcolm” of the congregation must witness pilgrim partners in the Black Baptist Church that exhibit an ethic that aligns itself with a correct representation of what their faith context represents.

⁷⁸ *Dictionary.com.*, s.v., “incubator,” <http://www.dictionary.com/incubator>.

While Malcolm served as a working representation of those who will transform, for his context, his lived experiences and encounters with Sunni Muslims in Jeddah and Mecca exemplified a sense of consistency of faith and practice in every exchange. Every encounter that Malcolm X had with anyone who was a practicing Sunni Muslim was met with peace, love, support, and brotherhood. Thus, leadership in the Black Baptist Church must exercise their faith context in ways that display the attributes of Jesus taught in Scripture.

While I no longer pastor the church that grounds my research, this project has been life-changing. I came into this project with a specific understanding of the congregational tensions at work in my former church. While the tensions were congregation specific, I discovered a different lens through this research that moved me to reassess how I interpret varying thought processes and human/social behavior in the local Black Baptist Church. This research has led me to engage in self-reflection, relating to the exhibition of my human/social behaviors in congregational spaces. Although I may not get an opportunity to assess the outcomes of my hypothesis in the congregation that grounded my research, I believe my findings are not limited to my former church or Black Baptist Churches in general.

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