

But God: The Power of Reversal Humor in Spiritual Formation

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Introduction

One of the signature moments in the African American worship experience is the testimony service, also known as devotion. This is a time of singing, praying, and “telling your story.” The testimony or testifying part allowed people to give their autobiographical account of how God intervened in their lives. This story could be from a time in the present or a time in the past. These testimonies were meant to help others see not only the goodness of God but the potential for God to move in the other's situation.

One of the pivotal moments in telling the testimony would be what will be defined as a “But God” moment. This would be a point in the testimony where the generally expected outcome from the testimony is reversed.

The “But God” exclamation acts as a crescendo when the testimony is on where God intervenes. This statement lets others know what a holy reversal will be. Conrad Hyers refers to this phenomenon as a comic absurdity.¹ The absurdity makes one feel it is over, but God brings about the reversal.

Theological Research Problem

This study will explore how holy reversals in the black church context affect spiritual formation. The But God moments in testimony service reflect an understanding of God and how he can help the person overcome. The But God moment is humorous, not always in its content, because often people are suffering, but it is humor in that the enemy thought they had the individual, but God turned it around. This is what this study will refer to as a Holy reversal.

A holy reversal is when God turns around a situation that looks bleak and turns it into a fortunate moment for those who follow him. As Hyers suggests, this is a comic absurdity, but it is in that absurdity that spiritual formation takes place. The study will look at the potential for Holy Reversals through a correlation of history, the Biblical text, and personal experience from Wesley Union AME Zion church members. The subject matter is worthy of exploration due to the lack of study, firstly, in humor and theology. The bulk of the work in humor has been conducted through the lens of philosophy.

¹ Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox press, 1987), 32.

Aristotle, Plato, John Morreall, and Karl-Josef Kuschel have performed work in this area. Others have looked at humor from a psychological standpoint. Work from Sigmund Frued and Donald Capps. Their focus has been more on the effects of humor on personality.

Conrad Hyers, Elton Trueblood, and Richard Cote have wrestled mainly with the appropriateness of humor and Christianity. Jacqueline Bussie and Bernard Schweizer have looked at the liberating effects of humor.

African Americans have wrestled with humor from a historical perspective. The work of Lawrence Levine and Mel Watkins looked at the distinctness and cause of African American Humor. Others, such as Daryl Dance and Henry Louis Gates, have showcased humor from the perspective of slavery and how slaves used humor as a tool. Lastly, there has been work in black theology. The work of James Cone, Dwight Hopkins, and Robert Rabeau covered theology as it pertains to African Americans. There has been little work on humor from an African American perspective on theology.

This study will be centered around Wesley Union African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) church in Harrisburg, PA. This study has limitations. The first limitation is due to the distance between the researcher and the church being researched, the opportunity for an ethnographic study was not possible. Because of this, information gathered for the study was performed via survey. Secondly, due to the use of a survey, only a tiny sample of the church could be taken.

The study will look to answer the following questions. The first question will be what makes the But God moment so powerful. There appears to be a connection between these moments and spiritual formation. This question looks to locate a link between the two. The second question will explore the But God moment and the African American experience. But God moments are not exclusive to the African American church, but it is a prominent moment. Finally, the study will explore how these moments affect spiritual formation.

Experience

The But God moment is one of the testimonies of how God has moved in your life. The first thing is to understand the nature of African American worship. African American worship is reminiscent of the worship found in Africa. When Africans arrived in America, they were stripped of many things. Dale Andrews states, “The separation of Africans from their ancestral homes, traditions, and living patterns.”² They were introduced to Christianity but used the Bible to reinterpret their world. Major Jones states, “The black church took the religion of the oppressor and made of it a tool for the survival of an oppressed people, and this was achieved under the watchful eye of the oppressor.”³ This reinterpretation took stories of the Bible and applied them to the people burdened with oppression.

² Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 12.

³ Major J. Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1980), 40.

James Cones points out how slaves looked at the stories of liberation in The Bible and read themselves into the story. Cone points to the liberation of the Jews from Egypt in the Exodus story as a seminal story for the enslaved church. Despite their current predicament, the slaves knew God would set them free like the Israelites. An anonymous slave states, “ I’ve heard ’em pray for freedom. I thought it was foolishness, then, but the old-time folks always felt they would be free.”⁴ The hope of freedom is what powered the church in its worship.

Worship of the slaves, though often done in secret, was powerful. Former slave Steve Weathersby spoke of this worship, “De slaves did like ter git tergeter an’ praise de Lord. Dey would set fer hours on straight oncomfo’table benches an’ planks, while some would be seated on the ground or standing. Dey would hum deep an’ low in mournful tones, swayin’ to and fro.”⁵

These worship experiences were called hush harbor meetings. Robert Raboteau says of these meetings, “In the secrecy of the quarters or the seclusion of the brush arbors (hush harbors) the slaves made Christianity their own.”⁶These meetings were places that the slaves would steal away to engage in worship in private. Dwight Hopkins states, “Only in their own cultural idiom and political space could black slaves truly worship God. Raboteau states,

⁴ James Mellon, *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember, an Oral History* (New York, NY: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 190.

⁵ *Ibid* 187

⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion the “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 212.

“Slaves frequently were moved to hold their own religious meetings out of disgust for the vitiated Gospel preached by their masters’ preachers. Sermons urging slaves to be obedient and docile were repeated ad nauseam.”⁷ .⁸They would sing and pray and preach in private.

This worship carried a mystical element to it. When speaking on mysticism, James Wiseman states, “...and accordingly convey a sense of what’s hidden or secret.”⁹ The slaves would pray and worship in secret to keep this away from the slave owner, but also because they understood that their prayers and worship were directly to God. The slaves understood that these private meetings brought them closer to God. Howard Thurman states, “The mystic experiences unity – not identity; but it is a unity that penetrates through all the levels of consciousness and fills him with a sense of God.”¹⁰ This unity with God is what the slaves sought in the private meeting with God.

When the black church emerged post-slavery, they modified the liturgies of the churches to fit their style of worship. We see this with the AMEZ, which comes from the Methodist tradition and has a very structured form of worship.

⁷ Ibid 213

⁸ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Marynoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 18.

⁹ James A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View*, PDF (Maryknoll , NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 7.

¹⁰ Howard Thurman , “Mysticism and Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* , January 1, 1970, 23–30, <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.pba.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=7a5ae339-823d-472b-9150-cc29274f5138%40redis>, 24.

To accommodate more freedom within the worship experiences, many AMEZ churches would include a devotion service.¹¹ This service was a call back to the bush arbor days of slavery with similar elements, prayer songs, and testimony. This service was a precursor to the more formal worship experience. They were generally used to motivate the congregation and allow them to be free in their worship.

This freedom in worship opens the door to the but God moments. During the devotional service, people would give their testimonies, generally when God turned around a crazy situation. This would lead to celebration in the church. Celebrating what the Lord did for someone else gives hope that God could do the same for you. These moments are what lead to spiritual formation.

Response Criticisms

Over the past few years, testimony services have fallen out of favor in many African American churches. The opportunity to give or hear testimonies has slowed. When talking with Rev. Dr. David Miller, he suggested that the service changed from something uplifting to something that has become more of a show and entertainment. Miller said, “ The service went from testifying to testalying.” Because of this sentiment, many churches, including Millers, have opted to forgo the service.

The removal of the testimony service appears to be a break from the church's tradition. The Bible speaks a lot about the power of testimony.

¹¹ Ethnographic knowledge

Revelation 12:11: they triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. This verse is often quoted in black churches, showcasing the importance of testimonies¹². Where are people showcasing their testimonies if not in the church?

As Miller suggests, these services have lost their importance due to divulging into a time of “testilying.” This is where you make up a false narrative of a But God moment to gain people's sympathy or empathy. This is also the pushback against the use of humor in the church. The church is said not to be a place of entertainment. It is a severe task to worship God. Many want to protect the seriousness of the church. The But God moment is often painful but can cause laughter when God moves.

From the time of Homer, people have had a problem with laughter. In his work, Homer was against the laughter that the gods offered up. Karl-Josef Kuschel states, “So, the laughter of the gods is a laughter verging on malice, morally unconcerned about the weakling, who does not have the laughter on his side but against him.”¹³ Plato picks this idea up. Kuschel states, “Because for Plato, what human beings laugh at and what prompts this laughter in a person is something fundamentally inferior, reprehensible.”¹⁴ This means when we laugh, we feel superior to another. This is the basic idea of the superiority theory of humor. This is why laughter has been viewed as the antithesis of holiness.

¹² Ethnographic knowledge

¹³ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Laughter: A Theological Essay* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid* 9

Theologians have pushed back against humor having a place in the church. John Chrysostom pointed out that Christ never laughed.¹⁵ There is no text stating directly that Christ laughed. The closest biblical laughter of the divine is in the Psalms. Three verses are pointing to the laughter of God.¹⁶ This laughter is at the hubris of man. God's laughter is not laughter that appears to be celebratory. This is further echoed by Richard Niebuhr: "Laughter must be heard in the outer courts of religion, and the echoes of it should resound in the sanctuary, but there is no laughter in the holy of holies."¹⁷ For these theologians, the idea of humor in the worship experience is an insult to the holy work of God.

Later, humor theologians began to push back at these ideas. That humor and laughter are very much a product of God. Hyers mentions that humor helps us realize we are made in God's image. Hyers suggests babies don't fully reflect the Imago Dei until they smile. All the prior actions of the baby are animalistic, looking to seek its own needs. It's when the child smiles he moves to something more. Hyers states, "Somehow, in that hesitant and toothless smile, one has the feeling that one is looking in the face of God, that this has something to do with the image of God."¹⁸ That smile grows and becomes laughter.

¹⁵ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Laughter: A Theological Essay* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994), 26.

¹⁶ Psalms 2:4, Psalms 39:13, Psalms 58:8

¹⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, ed., "Humour and Faith," essay, in *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 111–31, 111-112.

¹⁸ Conrad Hyers *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox press, 1987), 18.

Conrad Hyers states, “Laughter is fundamentally an act of celebrating existence. Laughter is an expression both of enjoyment and thanksgiving.”¹⁹ When we laugh, we demonstrate to God that we are grateful for all he has done. Holy laughter is not laughing at others but being thankful for all God has done. Laughter has been associated with festivals and celebrations. Laughter is truly a gift from God.

This laughter and celebration can be seen in the worship of the black church. From the preacher to those sitting in the pews, the black church's worship reflects God's holiness because it celebrates and thanks God for all he has done. The vitality and celebration that can be felt in the service reflect the thanksgiving and freedom of knowing that God will fix it. No matter what transpires, the opportunity for the holy reversal of God is prevalent. Those who laugh understand that they are laughing at the situation's absurdity and believe God will fix it. Hyers states, “ Faith without humor becomes fanaticism; humor without faith becomes cynicism.”²⁰ When people celebrate a But God moment, they laugh with the cross.

The cross is one of the greatest moments of absurdity for all parties involved. For the Pharisees, they thought they stopped Jesus' popularity. The disciples felt their political aspirations were done. The devil believed that God's breaking through in the world had ended. Only three days later, Jesus was resurrected, reversing the absurd thoughts that it was over.

¹⁹ 1. Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox press, 1987), 14.

²⁰ 1. Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox press, 1987), 18.

This is the most significant example of holy reversal. “ Hyers states, If Good Friday symbolizes sin, death, and sorrow, it also symbolizes love and redemption. And Easter is the triumphant seal of that salvation: the recovery of life, the renewal of hope, and laughter and rejoicing. “²¹ Christ's resurrection reversed the plight of those headed to destruction.

Praxiological Intent

This church is primarily composed of an African American congregation in the heart of Harrisburg. The average age of the congregation is around 65. There are very few children in the congregation. There were only four reported. The congregation is primarily made up of women. The pastor is Rev. Dr. David T. Miller. Miller is a native of Catawba County, NC. He took over the congregation in 2016 after serving in Vallejo, CA.²²

Wesley Union AMEZ is located in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Harrisburg is the capital of the state of Pennsylvania. The church was founded in 1816, right after the War of 1812. The church is the oldest black church in the city. “With a membership that grew quickly to about one-quarter of the total black population by 1830 (115 out of 484), it was a dominant influence in the black community.”²³

²¹ 1. Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox press, 1987), 26.

²² All information was provided through interview with the pastor

²³ Wesley Union Church history pg 1

After the church needed a place for the black people in the area to be buried, the church purchased land for a cemetery. “On November 17, 1827, the name Lincoln Cemetery was chosen, and burials began shortly after that.”²⁴

Wesley Union played an essential role in the African-American fight for freedom locally and nationwide. One of the members was a part of the underground railroad. “Harriet McClintock Marshall, a church member, helped with the care of runaway slaves.”²⁵ The church was also involved in the fight for civil rights. “In 1865, the church was host to a State’s Equal Rights Convention, consisting of Negro leaders from throughout Pennsylvania. This convention was held in Wesley Church when it was located on South Street & Tanners Avenue to secure equal rights for all American Negroes.”²⁶

On two separate occasions, capital building expansion forced the church to move from its location to another part of town. The first move was from their second location on Tanners Ave and South St. They were forced to move to the new location on Forster and Ash. This led the church to carry two mortgages. “Since the state refused to pay the replacement cost for the building on South Street and Tanners Avenue, the congregation was forced to carry a heavy mortgage on the Forster Street church, which was not liquidated until the mid-1940s.”²⁷

²⁴ Wesley Union History pg 1

²⁵ Wesley Union History 2

²⁶ Wesley Union History 2

²⁷ Wesley Union history pg 3

After fifty years in this location, the state expanded again, and the church was forced to move to where it is located on Fifth and Camp St. The property was gained because of a resolution by The Harrisburg Restoration Society. It sold the church the four plots it currently sits on for \$1 each. The history showcases how the church is entangled within the city itself.

A survey of the congregation was given through the use of Google Forms. The form asks for some demographic information. The participants were asked for their name, gender, age, and years they attended the church. The option to remain anonymous was given to all the demographic questions except the question on years at the church. The length of time at the church would provide an impression of status in the congregation. The following two questions asked the participant to give their But God statement and how it aided their understanding of God.

The survey was initially sent out in late November of this year. There were sixteen responses to the survey. Of those responses, one respondent gave two separate responses. So, there were fifteen different individual respondents. Of those fifteen respondents, there were eleven who self-identified as female and four who identified as male. Giving the females 68.8% and males 31.2%. The ages ranged from one person 18-21, one person 22-30, two people 40-50, three people 50-60 and nine being 60+. Of the years of attendance, six people attended the church under ten years, three that have attended more than twenty years, and six with more than thirty years of attendance.

The testimonies presented a few significant themes: finances, opportunity, and health. Many of the respondents gave testimonies of God providing for their finances. One respondent spoke about how they were evicted from their home. He found a place for his family to stay and was off alone. The respondent stated, “I remember I was driving and I got so emotional and sad, I pulled over and started to cry and asking God was is this happening to me?”²⁸ He states as he is emotional, he gets a call from his wife. “And the phone ring it was my wife telling me we have this apartment on here we need to go right now and look at it.”²⁹ Another financial testimony involving housing was about a person looking to purchase a house. The person stated that towards the end of the process, the seller required ample cash at closing. “When we arrived home I had received a notification of unclaimed property from a prior refinancing of our current home. The unclaimed funds totaled the amount needed for the new home.”³⁰ Again, God shows up and covers the finances.

Others spoke of God providing opportunities. One of the respondents said of not having a job and was feeling down about it. They did not speak about these feelings, and God opened an opportunity. “The but God moment came when I position opened up to to work on a long term project with the organization.”³¹

²⁸ Respondent 10

²⁹ Respondent 10

³⁰ Respondent 14

³¹ Respondent 4

Another example of opportunity was a respondent offered a chance to graduate early from college. They did not want to do this because they had a plan for their lives, and this early exit from college was not a part of their plans. "I had changed from two majors to one, had to hurry to find a job and place to live, and ultimately moved away from the strict plan I set for myself."³² This change of plan was difficult, but it was an opportunity for growth.

When it comes to But God moments involving health issues, one of the respondents spoke of their daughter needing surgery at only four days old. "When my Daughter Bianca was born, she underwent Open Heart Surgery at the Age of 4 "Days" Old. She was diagnosed with Transposition of the Great Arteries. Doctors also repaired two holes in her Heart after 13 hours of Surgery."³³ The following account was of a person whose mother prayed to God to keep her alive a while longer. "After her surgery, as her five daughters were standing around her hospital bed, she told us, " I prayed God allowed me to live because I knew my death so soon after your Father 's death would be too much for you all."³⁴ This mother lived for fifteen more years following the stroke. A third respondent mentioned how they overcame breast cancer. "It is a battle with breast cancer that God told me I would overcome. Then, years later, on three separate occasions, I had to get further tests & biopsies, and each time benign, so I said, " But God.

³² Respondent 12

³³ Respondent 3

³⁴ Respondent 2

” Finally, one respondent spoke of a story about a friend who acquired cancer and the prognosis was so severe the doctors were calling for him to be on hospice. The respondent spoke about how she felt her prayers would not be answered. Through her giving the situation over to God, the situation has changed. “Not only has he been released from the hospital, but he has resumed his normal lifestyle...cooking for himself, driving, exercising and lifting weights at the gym! We were admonished about rearranging my friend's home...he said, “Guess you all thought I was gonna die, huh”? God is Good!”³⁵

One story that stood out was one of personal safety. One of the respondents spoke of being in a bad relationship. “When I was laying on my living room floor with a gun being held to my face by my ex. We had been engaged for 10 years, purchased a house together and he married someone else while still living with me. He still expected me to be with him and when I refused he broke into my house and held me at gun point. I laid there and prayed that God would accept my soul, a peace came over me that was unexplainable. God decided it wasn't my time to leave this earth. All I can say is But God!”³⁶

These stories had one central theme from these testimonies: God's providence. Most respondents grow closer to God by recognizing that God is in control. One of the respondents spoke about having a drug addiction. They realized that God was the only one who could help them overcome the addiction. “When all else failed I asked

³⁵ Respondent 5

³⁶ Respondent 16

God to Deliver me from my Addiction.”³⁷ This person showed that God is only one could provide through these hard times. Another respondent spoke of a time when they were waiting on a response from a job, and because of the time of day, they were sure it wasn’t coming. They received a call that evening offering them a job. They stated, “We were limiting God, only thinking in terms of man's time-line, limitations, etc...but this experience showed me how I was limiting God. God is not limited by man's schedule.”³⁸

The respondents showcased that their testimonies led to a greater understanding of God. The respondent, who mentioned her faith being challenged by their friend being sick, explained how this experience changed her perspective on God's operation. “I have learned a valuable lesson....either I’m going to trust God or not. Trusting God means turning it ALL over to Him.”³⁹ The understanding of how God works in his own time.

Others understood that God is a provider. In dealing with their daughter going to college, the mother further understood that God can provide the resources that are needed financially. “I have ALWAYS been obedient to GOD & his teachings. He taught me patience that he may not come when you want him BUT, he's RIGHT ON TIME.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Respondent 6

³⁸ Respondent 7

³⁹ Respondent 5

⁴⁰ Respondent 3

Another respondent mentioned how God would answer the desires of your heart. You saw it in the healing that God would do in the world. The respondent who spoke of defeating breast cancer said, “It helped me be more intimate with Him & know that His word is true.”⁴¹ Again, there is a reflection on learning to trust in God.

The respondents showcased how a person’s understanding of God can be deepened by recognizing the Holy reversals of God. The common theme of the reversal of fortunes helped them understand God better and draw closer to him.

Strategies for Transformation

After the research was completed, a conversation was had with Rev. David Miller about the findings. The following step suggested to the pastor was incorporating the testimonies into the worship experience. From the findings, the members who delivered their But God moments demonstrated a deeper understanding of God because of their experience. Sharing these experiences with others could empower people to go deeper with God. This could be done by allowing a few people to give a prewritten testimony occasionally. Humor is an essential part of spiritual growth. Richard Olson suggests, “People’s gift of humor, whether it is a hearty laugh, the willingness to tease or be teased, or the irresistible punster can enliven a group.”⁴²

Another suggestion is for the preacher to teach and preach on God’s holy reversal. This is common in many black churches.

⁴¹ Respondent 1

⁴² Richard P Olson, *Laughter in a Time of Turmoil* (Eugene , OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 135.

The story of things going one way and then changing is a significant theme in black preaching, but incorporating humor along with the But God moment could expand the power of the moment. The use of humor in preaching is something that is freeing to a congregation. Joseph Webb speaks of the purpose of humor in a sermon by saying, "...is to nourish, explicate, encourage, and celebrate both sides of that very human/divine, divine/human coin."⁴³ The goal of the humorous sermon is for the people to see the absurdities of life and the power of God. A preacher who embraces humor understands the delicate but powerful balance.

Finally, it is suggested that the preacher embrace black comical theology. This is where the preacher looks for the humor in the Bible. Several texts throughout Scripture display and play on words, irony, and satire. Preachers of the gospel need to embrace the use of humor, especially in the African American context. The African American church has a strong history of humor and a dedicated, humorous lens that could be employed in the text. Showcasing the absurdities in the text and embracing God's holy reversal would help empower humor and the But God moments. Hyers suggest looking at test like Jonah.

The book of Jonah may not be considered humorous by most because of the things that happen to Jonah. Actually, what helps to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory statements, i.e.,

⁴³ Ibid 129

that the book of Jonah is no laughing matter, and that there is a lot that is humorous in this short book that is included among the minor prophets, is the notion of “tragic laughter.”⁴⁴ Jonah opens with God telling the prophet to go and do an absurd thing, like preach to his enemies, but Jonah decides to do an absurd thing by attempting to run from God. God sends a storm to rock the boat, and he is asleep. One of the sailors awakened him, and they cast lots to see who caused this calamity. The lot falls on Jonah, and he asks the men to do an absurd thing and toss him into the sea. God sends a fish to swallow Jonah. While he ran from the word of God when he was home, he called on God from the depths of the fish. God causes the fish to vomit him up on dry land, but he is down the road from Nineveh. He doesn’t preach against the city like he is told; he says they will be destroyed in 30 days. When the word reached the king, he even called for the animals to fast instead of just the people fasting. Jonah climbs up on a high place to look down at the people that he hopes God destroys, and when God relents, he blames God for being too gracious. Then, ask God to die. When God denies this and gives him a plant to cool him, and then dies the next day. God calls out his prophet for caring more about a plant than the people. Jonah ends with him fully ready to die because of God’s grace to his enemies. Other similar texts can be viewed with an eye toward humor.

⁴⁴ L. Juliana and M. Claassens, “Rethinking Humour in The Book of Jonah: Tragic Laughter as Resistance in the Context of Trauma,” *Old Testament Essays* 28, no. 3 (2015): 655–73, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n3a6>, 657.

Conclusion

In this study, the focus has been on the view of the But God experience. The But God moments in the respondents' lives helped to create a deeper spiritual understanding of who God is and how God operates. The Holy reversal is a decisive moment in people's spiritual walk and aids in their spiritual walk. When all hope looks lost, God's movement in people's lives causes a deeper understanding of the nature of God. God intervenes during life's challenging moments, leading to humorous celebration and a But God moment. These moments build throughout the believer's life to help better understand who God is.

The church needs to keep hold of the past of slavery. Though slavery was a horrendous time in the life of the people and the church, it is the memory that becomes, as Metz calls it, a dangerous memory. Metz states, "In this way it is a dangerous and liberating memory, which badgers the present and calls it into question, since it does not remember just any open future, but precisely this future, and because it compels believers to be in a continual state of transformation in order to take this future into account."⁴⁵ Churches like Wesley Union should keep these dangerous memories of the devotional service alive to empower a bright future

Moving forward, more research is needed to understand the implementation of the testimony service.

⁴⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2016), 89.

This practice seems to have fallen out of favor amongst the major black Methodist denominations. Since these services have such significant ties to the church of slavery, understanding why this service is no longer relevant is something to discover. Also, this work exposes an opportunity to review God's moments in other church contexts. There are people outside the black church who might not be thoroughly familiar with the But God moment, but a comparative study of testimonies from the black church and multicultural context.

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