

## **Sacred Resistance and Missional Praxis: Practical Theology in Black Church and Urban Ministry Contexts**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses how narrative-based research, in conjunction with practical theology and missional church models, can and should be integrated into the wider circles of Black Church traditions and urban ministry. Using historical and biblical premises, the article elucidates how pastoral theology can be used as a source of refuge to marginalized groups and a stage to promote social justice, healing and community change. Through narrative inquiry, case studies, and ethnography, the study explores how Black Churches move through the intricacies of systemic racism, economic inequality, and cultural upheaval as avenues toward resilience and hope. Results indicate that sacred resistance and community thriving are the outcomes of integrating scriptural values—in this case, values of liberation, justice, and Ubuntu—with culturally responsive ministry practices and creative leadership styles. The article presents a holistic system aimed not only at overcoming systematic oppression but also at boosting economic improvement, social activism and wellbeing. By so doing, it renews the missional identity of the modern church and provides sensitive advice to leaders moving forward in maintaining faith, justice, and transformation within the urban and global contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** practical theology, Black Church, missional church, sacred resistance, narrative inquiry, urban ministry

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### **Introduction**

Practical theology offers a vibrant interface between theologizing and practice, between concepts of abstract truth and the realities of everyday, communal, faith life. This discipline holds special weight in the context of the Black Church tradition, where pastoral care has traditionally included much more than individual spirituality; rather, it has reached out in various ways to social justice, economic empowerment, and social healing of the oppressed (Steyn & Masango, 2011). Founded on histories of slavery, segregation, and contemporary racial injustices, the Black Church has been a sanctuary and a source of change, and it has offered a theological foundation with regard to resilience and resistance (Allen,

2023). Meanwhile, the mindset of the missional church, premised on the Great Commission, emphasizes that genuine congregational vitality is the result of purposeful interaction with the surrounding environment, both locally and globally. Missional praxis calls churches to look outward, acting as the conduit of God's mission through advocacy, service, and imaginative witness in the public square (Kigya et al., 2025). Coupled with the liberation theology and community empowerment proclaimed by the Black Church, this missional orientation enlarges the theological imagination and equips congregations to combat systemic injustice and promote spiritual and social thriving (Mlambo, 2025).

This paper reflects on these aspects and presents a modern interpretation of the sacred resistance, community flourishing, and missional praxis. Relying on the principles of practical theology, narrative inquiry, and urban ministry practice, it postulates an all-encompassing approach through which faith communities can combine theological insight, cultural relevance, and visionary leadership to proactively respond to the multifaceted challenges of the current era.

## **Theological and Historical Context**

### ***Theological Frameworks of Sacred Resistance***

Conceptualized by James Cone, Black Liberation Theology interprets sacred resistance as a theological and political reaction to anti-Blackness and the existing system of oppression. Cone is adamant that the preferential option of God towards the oppressed means that the Church cannot remain merely a house of worship but a liberating agent. Kelly Brown Douglas continues the tradition through her idea of moral imagination by helping the faith communities to imagine a future beyond established injustices and to develop the theological answers grounded in hope and also resistance (Douglas, 2016). The Ubuntu theological explanation by Michael Battle presents a relational and interdependent African ethic, a reminder to the Church that a communal identity is crucial to the flourishing of human life (Nwokoro, 2025). Likewise, Stephen Charleston takes notice of indigenous survival theology as a storehouse of resilience wisdom, providing paradigms of how faith communities survive and change under systemic marginalization (Hasiholan et al., 2023).

This discussion is also supplemented by narrative and practical theologies, outlined by John Swinton and Harriet & Charles Wilkes, that legitimize storytelling, testimonial authority and lived experience as authoritative sources of theological knowledge. In this perspective, theology is not the offspring of abstraction but an outgrowth of living: through suffering, against oppression, toward constructive ministry (Niyonsaba, 2018). Together, these views offer a multi-dimensional theological vision in which the possibility of sacred resistance and communal flourishing cannot be disassociated with the everyday lives of underrepresented groups.

### ***Historical Evolution of Sacred Resistance***

The history of the Black Church reveals the extent to which these theological principles have been realized in lived practice. The Black Church played a dual role as a place of worship and a safe space to conspiracy-plot during slavery, where a prayer could serve as a coded message of resistance (Barber, 2015). During the Reconstruction and Jim Crow periods, preaching, song, and the establishment of parallel institutions of education and mutual help kept the spirit of the Black congregations alive.

The Civil Rights era raised the position of the pastor as prophet and activist, and ministers like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reflected the combination of theology with social justice. Sermons turned into calls to action, worship services into organizing events, and theology into a method of public witness and fight against systemic racism (Compton, 2019). This tradition has been enriched by the naming of the unrecognized contributions of Black women by womanist theologians like Delores Williams and Emilie Townes, whose spiritual nurture, social leadership, and economic strength broadened the ontology of sacred resistance (Scott, 2025).

### ***Integrative Theological and Historical Foundations***

Whether in the early image of the Black pastor as moral visionary and leader described by W.E.B. Du Bois, the liberationist theology of Cone, the moral imagination of Douglas or the Ubuntu philosophy of Battle, theological reflection within the Black Church has been inseparable from the lived struggle. The indigenous survival theology of Charleston supports this path, making resilience, memory, and adaptation theological mandates (Vellem, 2015). Collectively, these frameworks are a reminder that it is not only about survival when it comes to sacred resistance but also about envisioning and modeling flourishing, even within the context of systemic oppression (Jones et al., 2023).

### ***Missional Praxis and Narrative-Based Ministry***

#### ***Missional Praxis: From Program to Mission***

Missional praxis is another paradigm shift, one that emerges when responding to program-focused activity through mission-based interaction. Instead of determining success by growth within or structured events of an event-focused programming, missional churches focus much more on ministry that is directed outward based on the life and struggles of the communities they live in (Baron, 2019). This praxis highlights spiritual formation and social responsibility by stressing holistic discipleship via small groups, mentoring, and networks, which foster spiritual formation and social responsibility (Barton et al., 2014; Pembroke, 2025). It also forges the inclusion of economic programs such as community

cooperatives, financial literacy education, and job readiness, which directly address the economic inequities that impact the people of the congregation. The urge to pursue justice through policy work, advocacy and witness, or working in coalitions, becomes a natural extension of the spiritual mission of the church (Opuni-Frimpong, 2021).

### ***Narrative-Based Ministry: The Power of Story***

Narrative-based ministry places theological reflection in the lives of individuals through their stories. Trauma, survival, resilience, and hope are not incidental to theology but are considered to form a vital component of comprehending the existence of God in history and within the context of community (Holton & Snodgrass, 2023). The theological implications embedded in testimonies of survival under systemic oppression, migration, or economic distress are underrepresented in the discourse on theological texts. Stories are not merely a visualization of theology, as John Swinton points out; they are theology set into action, determining the care of pastoral and collective imagination (Endress, 2021). Narrative-based ministry promotes dignity and offers a space of communal healing and transformation through giving voice to silenced experiences (Delker et al., 2019). The Narrative-Based Ministry Model illustrated in Figure 1 is the conceptual framework of overlapping parts of worship, discipleship, advocacy, and economic empowerment as the dimensions of sacred resistance.



Figure 1. Narrative-Based Ministry Model of Sacred Resistance and Communal Healing

### ***Missional Praxis in Contemporary Ministry***

The present-day manifestations of missional praxis can be observed in churches where faith formation is purposefully linked to community transformation. Hosanna Community Church, for example, has combined discipleship in small

groups with economic success programs and affordable housing. Their model—*Reach, Teach, Serve, Love, Accept*—shows that evangelism, discipleship, and justice are not separate efforts, but are interconnected facets of a whole missional identity. Parallel models have demonstrated how congregations can deploy members into local service initiatives, neighborhood networks, and interfaith coalitions, implying an abiding mission of God beyond the sanctuary walls (Kim & Menzie, 2015). As displayed in Table 1, traditional and missional church models stand in sharp contrast to the traditional program-centered model through their emphasis on more engagement, discipleship, and community transformation practices.

Table 1. Missional vs. Traditional Church

Dimension	Traditional Church	Missional Church
<b>Primary Focus</b>	Internal growth, maintaining programs, preserving traditions	Outward engagement, contextual mission, community transformation
<b>Ministry Model</b>	Program-driven; emphasis on events, services, and activities	Praxis-driven; emphasis on discipleship, justice, and service
<b>Community Orientation</b>	Attractional (expecting people to come to church)	Incarnational (church goes into the community)
<b>Role of Leadership</b>	Clergy-centered, hierarchical	Shared leadership, empowering lay participation
<b>Discipleship</b>	Often classroom or sermon-based	Relational, small-group, and life-on-life discipleship
<b>Measure of Success</b>	Attendance numbers, building size, and program participation	Community impact, discipleship depth, justice initiatives
<b>View of Mission</b>	Separate from daily church life, missions as a program	Integrated into every aspect of worship and ministry
<b>Social Justice</b>	Often peripheral or secondary	Central expression of faith and discipleship
<b>Economic Engagement</b>	Limited, often through charity drives	Direct initiatives: co-ops, financial literacy, advocacy

### *Integrating Narrative and Praxis*

The integration of narrative-focused ministry with missional praxis creates a highly contextual, justice-minded, and transformative theology. Stories of lived experience guide the church in its strategies of mission, and the missional activity

feeds into more effective accounts of hope and flourishing. This accommodation enables the Black Church not only to fulfill its traditional mission of sacred protestation but also to rethink itself as a living witness of God's liberation in the contemporary urban reality (Banda & Saayman, 2015).

### **Narrative-Based Practical Theology and Case Studies in Urban Ministry**

Narrative practical theology highlights that stories of struggle, survival and hope of communities are crucial forms of theological knowledge. These narratives serve as homiletical and pedagogical theological books that influence deliberation and ministration (Magezi, 2019). Narrative inquiry, ethnography, and case studies can help congregations attune to the voice of communal memory, testify to the authority of testimony, and base pastoral practice in the truths of trauma, structural oppression, and strength (Ballantine, 2021).

This combination of discourse and practice can be demonstrated through the practices of various churches today. Hosanna Community Church represents a comprehensive approach to discipleship and community involvement, in which small group networks provide gospel-centered spiritual formation as well as neighborhood home repair outreach and financial literacy training (Mora-Ciangherotti, 2022). In this sense, the congregation links spiritual development to practical community change. The Alfred Street Baptist Church is a good example of how a historical congregation can utilize its resources in systematically transformative work through social justice advocacy, scholarships, and large-scale community service efforts to better show how storytelling as a community relates directly to structural change. Nexcellence Church is a digital-first model that brings sacred resistance to hybrid and online settings. Through the development of digital storytelling spaces, online discipleship communities, and international prayer networks, the church affirms narrative testimony as a theological habit, that connects members across diverse contexts (Zaluchu et al., 2023).

Collectively, these illustrations indicate how narrative-based theology can be put into practice through case study praxis. Theological reflection is envisioned not only to give expression to stories but to inform the practical ministry of discipleship and advocacy, economic empowerment, and digital innovation (Engelbrecht & Schoeman, 2021). Acting as a medium of relaying and broadcasting local stories, churches can provide spiritual resistance that bridges the gap between spiritual care and the reorganization of structural change.

### **Application to the Contemporary Church**

Coupled with socially unjust practices that still plague society, churches must face a twofold challenge: dwindling membership and digital disruption. Within this context, the incorporation of sacred resistance and missional praxis offers not only the theological context but also a pragmatic blueprint of renewal (Cooper et al.,

2021). Its practical application implies that pastoral care should purposefully shift toward being trauma-informed, focusing both on spiritual formation and on the innermost wounds of historical and modern-day injustices (Pembroke, 2025). The healing process is both intimate and communal, drawing congregations into the ministry of wholeness.

Simultaneously, the process of economic empowerment should be regarded as an essential element of pastoral responsibility. Ministry initiatives like community-based entrepreneurship, financial literacy training, and cooperative efforts go well beyond worship. They are into the business of livelihood, demonstrating that the gospel has something to say to those who want to survive and thrive (Kyeyune & Ntayi, 2025). This new praxis is also evident in churches that have adopted digital and hybrid forms of ministry and realize that the community can no longer be restricted to physical walls. Through online discipleship, worship and outreach, the congregations provide an inclusive environment that addresses the realities of a globally connected world (Niemandt & Niemandt, 2025).

Equally crucial is the prophetic work of the church, which addresses evils in the world today through moral clarity in opposing systemic racism, economic injustice, and cultural marginalization. Sacred resistance also places the church into a living witnessing role that does not just cultivate faith among its members but also opposes oppressive systems within the larger society (Okoro, 2012). Lastly, the use of this model requires deliberate thought and appraisal. Churches are encouraged to consider flourishing beyond the metrics of numerical growth or turnout on Sundays, but in terms of lives that have been transformed, communities that have been strengthened, and dignities that have been reclaimed by those long overlooked at the peripheries (Irawati, 2021). By doing so, theology occurs in action, and ministry serves as an agent of justice and societal well being.

### **Future Implications for Theology and Ministry**

Moving forward, the future of practiced and missional theology lies in being able to change with culture yet keep to the gospel that calls to justice and hope. Theology also needs to remain attuned to the lived stories of the vulnerable, considering the accounts of survival and struggle as irrefutable wells of wisdom (Duke, 2021). Such a story-centered method will enable the church to be sensitive to the voices of the previously silenced and, thus, to facilitate ministry in a responsive, healing, and transformative manner.

Similarly, the integration of digital technologies and platforms presents a new opportunity for the ministry. Virtual discipleship, hybrid forms of communal fellowship, and online worship are not emergency protocols but long-term necessities that increase the ecological impact of the church and generate new sources of belonging (Tagwirei, 2024). Ministerial training and theological education will also have to change accordingly, producing leaders who can navigate

the religious and technological universe of modern ministry. Its implications also stretch to the public role of the church. A theology of sacred resistance will always need audacious prophetic advocacy, so that congregations are positioned as agents of systemic change, not helpless witnesses to social decay. In combination with economic empowerment and pastoral care based on narratives, this vision enables the church to play a crucial role as a public institution, capable of fostering resilience, hope, and justice (De Wet, 2014).

By adopting this trajectory, not only will the church maintain its relevance, but it will further enhance its identity as the changer of culture in society. The future requires flexibility, innovation, and commitment to both convention and innovation. Rooting itself in sacred resistance and missional praxis, the church can be a source of healing and a driver of flourishing for all the people of God in a changing world.

## Conclusion

This article has introduced an interactive vision of practical theology where sacred resistance and missional praxis offer a pathway to holistic ministry. By integrating theological thinking with narrative inquiry and practice, the church can combine the two tasks: fostering spiritual development and striving to transform society. Rooting theology in the lives and testimonies of oppressed populations makes the ministry not abstract but practical, establishing hearing and mending.

Such a direction will enable the Black Church and urban ministries to be simultaneously spiritually healthy and socially relevant in the twenty-first century. Sacred resistance enables congregations to become instruments of justice and wholeness, and missional praxis transforms faith into concrete attempts toward economic, cultural, and structural change. Narrative-based theology responds to this affirmation of communal memory and resiliency as central resources of wisdom, informing ministries that explicitly address trauma, hope, and thriving.

The future of practical theology lies in its ability to combine tradition, innovations, spirituality, and social change, care, and advocacy. With its roots in sacred resistance and its eye on mission, the church can remain a robust agent of wholeness, hope, and communal flourishing in an ever-changing world.

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