

Friday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 24, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 306, "1925," pp. 307-308, "The New Negro," pp. 336-346, "Church" (part one)

In chapter 13, Anthea Butler describes the importance of Black churches in America and their influence. "After emancipation, some Black religious figures took a new approach to demanding justice: they ran for political office. One of the first was Henry McNeal Turner, a minister in the A.M.E. Church.... In 1868, Turner and more than two dozen other Black men in Georgia won races for the state legislature, running as Republicans. In response, white Georgia lawmakers introduced a measure to expel them... In the wake of this violence and with a newfound understanding of the futility of working within the system, Turner evolved in new directions. Discouraged by his experience in politics, he became a bishop in the A.M.E. Church, and a more radical voice. He had always advocated an accommodationist relationship with white people; now he began to preach a version of Black nationalism: the belief that Black people should have their own autonomy, even their own country. He became a proponent of the Back to Africa movement, and believed that slavery had existed in order to expose Africans to Christianity.... Turner would eventually plant churches in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa. He believed that Christianity would make Africa a great continent if it was brought there by free African Americans in the form of the A.M.E. Church..."

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.
(Proverbs 14:34)

The separation of church and state has long been a doctrine espoused by leaders through our nation's history. And for good reason – the establishment of a state religion can strip its citizens of their freedom to worship, or not, as they choose. But does this mean that people of faith must refrain from political action? The Bible is clearly on the side of people of faith advocating for justice for their nation. When any person or group is denied their rights, abused, or otherwise discriminated against, we as people of faith have a duty to advocate for them, even when the one denying their rights is the very government that is supposed to protect them. Black Americans have long understood this. Will those of us who enjoy White privilege be willing to stand with them?

Prayer

God of justice, empower us with your mighty Spirit, convict us of our sin of complicity, and inspire us to stand alongside your people in righteousness. Amen.