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MUSIC IN THE LITURGY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS

Introduction

Music

Under the toil and the striving,
Under the sorrow and stings,
Always serene, aye persistent,
Something in every heart sings.

And erst a grand oratorio
Into life's harmony swells,—
Erst a song, plaintive and tender,
Up from a slave's bosom wells.

Or in the high or the lowly,
Still God's great, wonderful gift—
Music to bind all in kinship,
Music to soothe and uplift.[1]

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[1]Jon Michael Spencer, ed., *Unsung Hymns by Black and Unknown Bards*, a special issue of *Black Sacred Music* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1990): no. 77. The term "erst" is an archaic poetic term for "ere" meaning formerly or originally.

"Under the Toil and the Striving," published in a collection of *Poems* in 1925, was penned by Sarah Collins Fernandis (1863-1951), one of many Black and unsung hymnists, whose productive life covered eighty-eight years. Her hymns of discipleship, mission, and social justice evolved from the core of religious fervor that inspired her energy as a hymnist, poet, community activist, and a teacher. Like many persons of her era who accepted opportunities to pursue a graduate education, Fernandis engaged in activities that affirmed the importance of Christian discipleship and intellectual pursuit. She was an alumna of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), who graduated while the founder of that institution was still serving as "principal," the position later titled "president."[2]

The extent to which the hymns of Sarah Fernandis were used in African-American worshiping congregations has not been determined. In fact, except for the inclusion of hymns by identifiable individual African-American hymnists (authors of texts), or composers of music in some African-American denominational hymnals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is no recorded evidence of the extent to which hymns by African Americans were actually used in African-American worship. The fact that African people in America from 1619 forward **sang** their faith is well documented in extant Spirituals, many of which have been analyzed theologically! There is also documented evidence of the publication and use of hymnals compiled by African Americans for congregational use beginning in 1801 and continuing in various published documents into the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, few African-American denominations kept records of the use of hymnals as a "liturgical" resource during the

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[2]Ibid., 8-9. Sarah Fernandis was author of the Hampton Institute's alma mater in use from 1902–1935.

eras in which they were printed. But the fact that published song books existed indicates that church leaders knew the importance of documenting some aspects of liturgical life.

As a particular Black worshiping people, we have relied upon our oral heritage as the main channel through which theological thought was transmitted. This NOT to be denied and is in fact endorsed as an excellent reminder of the creative gifts of a people who might have otherwise lost much of the heritage of faith experiences and expressions of theology.

It is important to begin with a reminder that communication among Africans enslaved in an alien land was difficult—but not impossible. A "singing" people transported by force from numerous linguistic traditions along the west coast of Africa were required to establish a means of communicating far from home. This did not happen overnight. The earliest form of communication for an African people was no doubt facilitated through song. The natural propensity to sing by rote in a call and response fashion was the initial means of group communal identity. Whether working in fields, or in stolen (clandestine) moments of togetherness, a melody would find a meeting place across linguistic barriers.

The focus of this article is to provide evidence of the various genres of music used in African-American worship as an acknowledgement of a broader spectrum of music available for use in worship. Clearly from 1801 forward, the arena of the "toil and striving" of Blacks in America continually expanded. A creative people found ways to utilize what was available to them as they toiled under oppressive and unjust situations. Many among the ancestors thought that the available music was important enough to be documented. And hidden among these documented treasures are untapped resources that should be unveiled for present and future use.

Liturgy: The Work of the People

The choice of the term *liturgy* in the title is a deliberate effort to affirm an interpretation of worship that expresses more *having church* as if this were not a theological "call." Too often *having church* is interpreted to mean that one can *have* or *do* church as if it is all humanly designed within a limitation on space and time. The term, *liturgy*, like many other words that African Americans have borrowed, is from the Greek term, *leitourgia*, which means ministry, service—the work of the people. Although the term initially referred to work rendered to offset a payment of service unrelated to religious matters, New Testament usages incorporate "The priestly service of the members (Luke 1:23; Heb. 8:6; and 9:21); the practical faith of the members of the church (Phil. 2:17); and the assistance of service that believers provide for each other (Phil. 2:30).[3] This means that the gathered and scattered community of faith functions as a people of faith in mission and ministry, both inside and outside of the worshiping community.

There is a concept of liturgy that has prevailed since the fourth century. This concept assumes that liturgy **is a particular (fixed) order** of the elements in worship, with a focus on the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Of such is the understanding of **THE** *liturgy*, a basic pattern established and subsequently prescribed by ecclesiastical action of a central seat of authority. This perspective is indeed central to services of worship where African Americans are represented, which is appropriate since **THE** *liturgy* as established in Eastern traditions is of strong African

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[3]W. E. Vine, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Original Greek Words and Their Precise Meaning for English Readers* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 757.

roots, including Ethiopian Orthodox and Coptic Churches.[4] Ethiopians used the term *Kedessa*, rather than "liturgy" to describe the service of worship in their tradition. It is of interest to note that *Kedessa*, which means "praise," contains possible options rather than a rigidly "fixed" form.

The use of *liturgy* is also in concurrence with scholars who identify Protestant Liturgical Traditions, as inherited habits and assumptions about worship, passed on from generation to generation.[5] **THE** *liturgy*, a basic pattern of Christian worship inherited and continued among African-American Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, emerged out of actual lived experiences of the people following the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Following the pattern established by the Hebrew people—the one Jesus observed in the synagogue—early Christians connected the teachings of Christ with these pre-established designs in the synagogue and minimally to Temple worship, adding their own interpretations in the light of their belief in the resurrected Christ. Building upon their faith in Jesus the Christ, who was after all a Jew, they continued to read the ancient Scriptures, celebrating the common meal, which during the first century after the death of Christ had established new meanings.

The Lutheran liturgical scholar, Gordon Lathrop, is quite helpful in his presentation of the development of the basic pattern of the *ordo* of Christian Worship as found in the juxtaposition, or setting of one thing next to another, as a way of mutual-

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[4]For details of the African liturgical roots, see Melva Wilson Costen, *In Spirit and in Truth: Music in African American Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). (This title is scheduled for release from the publisher December 2004.)

[5]James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 42-43.

ly reinterpretive patterns so that a flow can be established. Beginning with the structure of Christian prayer, there is the *ordo* of praise and beseeching. Humans are instructed in the faith and then baptized, so there is the *ordo* of teaching and bath.[6] With the conversion of Constantine the church "went public"; the classical shaping of the liturgy was solidified in ways that provided documentation of the specific actions or work of the people as a means of providing discipline that could be regularized.

The "work of the people of faith" in African-American traditions can be interpreted through a similar method of juxtaposition—setting one thing next to another through a different set of lens. Seventeenth-century Africans in a strange land could rely upon their African heritage as the foundation upon which their lived experiences could be understood. Many of the African slaves were familiar with African ways of praying and invoking, finding such ways useful as a means of praising, beseeching, and protesting. In general, according to historical accounts, these elements were in constant juxtaposition to survival. The stylistic elements in spirituals and blues functioned in juxtaposition in services of African-American worship but also remained intricately a part of each other.

The blending of sacred texts, traditional African spirituality and musicianship, with a natural propensity for the involvement of one's whole being in response to the love of God provides the impetus for responses to acts of God in history, so characteristic of African-American religious music. This is noticeable in each of the religious musical genres contributed by African Americans to the world, beginning with the Spirituals, and continuing in the outpouring of Black Gospel Music. When iden-

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[6]Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 55-68.

tifying the importance of [Negro] Spirituals as *the original creative religious musical form in the New World* (now United States of America) W. E. B. DuBois, an African-American statesman, declared that Spirituals are ". . .the rhythmic cry of the slave [which] stands. . .not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but not withstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people."[7]

In keeping with this declaration, this article includes: (1) an historical evolution of distinctive forms and styles of African-American music used in worship from 1619 (the year of the arrival of communities of Africans in America) to the present day; (2) current trends in African-American music for worship; and (3) a brief glimpse into the future. The important historically Black denominations, which remain the beacon light of African-American worship, as well as Black congregations that are part of Euro-American denominations are honored. To omit the latter category of assembled Black folks in a discussion of music in the Black Church allows an encouragement of Black on Black oppression.[8] For the purpose of this discussion, the genres of African-American vocal music incorporated into the context of the liturgy are the following:

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[7]William E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1903; reprint, Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1961), 181-182 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[8]As a prime example of this form of isolation of Black communities from Black communities, see especially Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 22.

1. African Chants
2. Spirituals
3. Other Songs of Improvisation
   (a) Meter(ed) Music
   (b) Euro-American Hymn
   (c) Chanted Sermon and Congregational Involvement
   (d) Keyboard Accompanied Sermonic Celebration
   (e) Chants, Moans, etc.
4. Hymns Composed by African Americans
5. Spiritual Arrangements
6. Black Gospel Music
   (a) Traditional
   (b) Modern
   (c) Contemporary
7. African Songs (Communal and Recently Composed)
8. Gospel Rap
9. Holy Hip Hop

Worship Among African Americans

We are indebted to colonists' records that document two early baptisms of Blacks in what would later be called North America. The first was an infant named William, the son of African parents, Isabella and Antoney (no recorded last names) whose baptism was administered by the Church of England in 1624 or 1625 (the records are not clear).[9] The second recorded baptism was administered to a Negro [sic] woman in 1641 in

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[9]Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1982), 31.

Dorchester, MA, who was "well approved. . .for sound knowledge and true godliness."[10] It can be assumed that like others who were being catechized in the principles of religion during that time, this "unnamed" woman was introduced to psalm singing. Whether psalms were sung on this occasion is not indicated. Nor is there any indication of what happened to this woman after her baptism. These references to baptism are included as a reminder that most African-American denominations consider baptism as a rite of entry to a community of faith.

Historically and culturally, African Americans are part of African heritages through which one can trace unique factors that continually help shape African-American liturgical practices in general and musical expressions in particular. Out of an African milieu has come the natural propensity for a people to improvise old songs and to create new ones. Africa provides basic core beliefs and worldviews which transcend denominational distinctions and help individuals and communities view life holistically. In 1619, Africans, at the behest of slave traders, were brought to this strange and alien land appropriately equipped to make sense out of unfamiliar situations, and so, adapted to newness of life as needed. In the process they also brought to his land—in their blood streams—the basic foundation upon which they built and continue to build varied and adaptable worship (liturgical) practices according to the necessary "work of the people," gathered (*kononia*) and scattered (*diakonia*).

In this new environment, early Africans understood and still understand the necessary responses to a faithful and loving

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[10]See Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), [1]; also John Winthrop, ed., *Journal*, "Savage II," 26; quoted in Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England 1620-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 257, n. 3.

God. Under the power of the Holy Spirit new theological understandings emerged out of their old primal worldviews. Biblical and theological awareness helped to shape new melodies and opened untapped creative sources for new rhythms, new styles, and forms of congregational singing. Old and new songs and singing styles were shaped for a more practical application to their existential situations. Melodies and new texts were supported by traditional harmonies, rhythms, and natural bodily movements by which God could be praised and glorified.

No doubt it was the sturdy, creative African heritage which moved them liturgically—armed and committed to minister to each other in the community. With a diversity of fervor and "quiet" intensity, some of them—many of them—were divinely empowered to survive harsh slavery, continuous struggle, and oppression into the twenty-first century. Their natural musical gifts and their "notoriously religious" nature provided opportunities for the development of diverse forms and styles of African-American music and worship.[11] Geographical and sociological differences initially generated diversity in music for worship. Circumstances under which exposure to Christianity took place dictated the forms and styles of communal responses which would help establish the ethos of local worship services. Oppressive rural slave environments, for instance, yielded particular texts, forms, and styles of musical expressions reflective of a people longing to be free. "Officially" legislated freedom from bondage (albeit limited) and migration to urban communities produced yet another form and style of worship and music. Opportunities to worship in separate, hospitable space (rural and urban) engendered the kind of joyful and

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[11] For a more detailed discussion, see Melva W. Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

enthusiastic musical responses so often identified with African-American worship. Enthusiasm comes easily to a people who trust deeply in a God who always comes on time (*kairotic*) and always fulfills promises. This is often balanced by responses that are deeply emotional, yet not expressed quite as visibly.

Researchers are persistent in noting the sacred-oral communal "work of the people" in creating new songs out of biblical texts contextualized and stylized by the Black preacher. Enslaved Africans in America were also gifted in their ability to take both the texts and tunes of standard hymns and re-create them for appropriate use in nascent liturgical settings.

In addition to these informal and orally related creations and usages of music, some African Americans found great joy in singing from hymnals and from octavo scores. These creators and consumers of music in worshiping environments are not always included by some African-American scholars as valued liturgical expressions. There were numerous published hymnists during the eighty-eight year life span of Fernandis, with the largest number of this group gaining popularity because of their gospel style. However, a careful reading of some of the hymn texts by Black composers such as Fernandis are reminders of the little talked about theological and doctrinal thinking of Black hymnists. When a wider spectrum of songs is added to the available congregational resources, the repertoire of liturgical music can broaden the perspective of the gifts and perspectives of worship shaped out of a variety of Black contexts.

The focal point for shaping rituals that can be viewed as pertinent to the shaping of African-American liturgy must be seen through the lens of worship in Invisible Institutions, in clandestine places of meetings. Walter Pitts Jr., while referring to Afro-Baptist worship, speaks broadly and can indeed provide insights into early Black Christian worship before denomina-

tional distinction was possible. By using the term, "ritual frames," Pitts is able to include a bound event that has meanings of its own that leads to other ritual events, until the community has been spiritually grounded and is ready for the next event. The "Devotional Service" sets the momentum and is actually two ritual frames: that of devotion and of service.[12] An interpretation of the "classical" shape of African-American liturgical foundations is provided by Pitts in his exposition of "ritual frames" in early Afro-Baptist worship, thus, providing a foundation for understanding traditional African-American worship.

Music to Bind All in Kinship

The dialogical nature of worship, both vertical and horizontal, makes communication through music and movement a major element of worship. Through the constantly unfolding texts and rhythms of songs, the community of faith responds to God, comments on problems and joys, voices hope in the midst of despair, and asserts the fact that "We all belong to God." What is often not spoken but understood as an African people is that, therefore, we are responsible for each other. The echo is from the African understanding: "I am because we are; because we are, therefore I am." Through music, rooted in the emotions, the community can express the inexpressible and become so immersed in rhythms and melodies that "troubles of the world" are at least temporarily forgotten.

Differences in denominational polity and theology continue to affect the choices and styles of music for worship. However,

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[12]Walter F. Pitts Jr., *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), 31.

one can find variances *within* denominations to the extent that these distinctions are not always determining factors for music used in worship. Many congregations include in their repertoire traditional African-American songs (Spirituals, Black Gospel songs, metered hymns, Gospel Rap) along with Euro-American hymns, psalms, anthems, old and new forms of "praise songs." Musical instrumentation used to accompany congregational singing runs the gamut from non-use of instruments to the use of various kinds of organs, pianos, and other keyboard instruments; in addition to snare drums; numerous forms of African drums, strings, full orchestras, brass band ensembles; as well as electronically produced sounds.

As a community of faith accustomed to communal song and total group participation, African-American worshipers are at home with congregational participation. Long before hymnals were used out of necessity, or available for congregational singing, community-binding was happening naturally and without coercion. There was no need for responsive readings, prayers, and other joint liturgical participation; worshipers created unity and true *koinonia* through their innate physical involvement and verbal responses interjected by individuals—on behalf of the community. This is especially noticeable in the responsorial, musical preaching style in many congregations today. There is often informal interaction between the preacher and the congregation where worshipers respond to the Word of God by expressing their verbal agreement to what is said. This is augmented by verbal and physical responses to some action or dramatic movement by the preacher who may engage in the preaching moment to help describe or reinforce a point. When congregations demonstrate some hesitancy about responding, a preacher might solicit responses, through such (sermonic) interjections as: "Say Amen, somebody!" and "Can I get a witness"?

It is not unusual for a member of the congregation to begin singing, humming, or moaning softly underneath the preaching or praying of the worship leader. This undulating melodic line is soon picked up by others in the congregation, so that music undergirds all else that happens for an extended period of time. In some congregations, musical dialogue takes place between the preacher and the keyboardist, who has an unusual ear to "find" the exact pitch and provides symphonic undertones during the Holy Spirit-filled celebration. Long before these dynamics were in place there is a history little known by many worshipers, especially those who accept the current trends as the only ones. Since there are colonial records from northern cities, a brief journey there is necessary.

Religious Music Activities Among African Americans in the North

Among often overlooked historical facts is that Roman Catholics were first to establish a community of Africans in lands that would later be named North America. The oldest town was actually a Black town, and more significantly, a Black Catholic town, *Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Moses*, north of St. Augustine, Florida.[13] Long before its establishment in 1738, a significant number of escaped slaves had arrived from English-based slave settlements from North and South Carolina and Virginia. What is missing from the Catholic documentation is information about communal singing.

The fact that European slave-holding colonizers were not at all in agreement about evangelizing Africans is prevalent knowl-

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[13]Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 140-144.

edge among most readers of *The Journal of the ITC.* In the north from New England down to Philadelphia there were clusters of English settlers with a concentration of Congregationalists. Dutch clustered around the Hudson and Delaware Rivers, Germans in Pennsylvania, Swedes and Finnish on the lower Delaware with English (Puritans) filling most of the ethnic gaps along the way. Slavery assumed a milder form than in the south, but slavery and harsh forms of racism persisted. The Quakers were first and foremost in their interest in the dilemma of enslaved Africans.

It was the Church of England, however, that recorded the name, William, infant son of Antoney and Isabella, as the first baptized African on this Continent.[14] The fact that the year of William's birth (1623? 1624?) nor the date of baptism are exact confirms the lack of enthusiasm by the Church to record this as a historical moment. His parents were among the first slaves who arrived with indentured servant-rights. Little did this pioneering foursome realize that their position at the Holy Font would soon become a point of political and religious discontent as it was affirmed that one's baptism did not assure human freedom. . . .

As indicated above, a Black woman had been catechized and baptized by the Dutch Reformed Church as early as 1641. With *a cappella* Psalm singing as an important factor in the shaping of piety, it is not surprising to find African Americans engaging in these practices even from their special segregated pews. The practice of lining-out and setting the tune for the Psalms would also be appealing, since the call and response method was an African process as well. Enslaved Africans sang Psalms with whites in churches, in large and small family gatherings, at weddings, funerals, and numerous informal gatherings. There is some evidence that Blacks sang Psalms at the meeting which they

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[14]Bennett, *Before the Mayflower,* 31.

organized for themselves, but there is no documentation whether Psalmody satisfied their inner-musical yearnings.

One wonders why Psalm singing did not reoccur among African Americans in "Invisible Institutions"—but maybe such singing did indeed occur there under a different name. There are no comments about singing Psalms in the recorded slave narratives. Neither are Psalms included in the early hymnals by Black compilers. The style of singing, referred to as the conventional style, or the "common way," of singing Psalms was slow, grave, foreboding, and serious. It is likely that some of this style continued in the singing of meter hymns. Documentation exists to confirm the importance and continued usefulness of the songs of Isaac Watts. This practice became so popular that the meter-song style that emerged was and is still identified as "Dr. Watts," although the songs subjected to "metering" are not always songs by Watts. Psalm singing reached the point among Euro-Americans that the need emerged to learn to sing by rules, established by music notation. Singing schools were established in an effort to reform the poor singing practices, so that singers could learn to sing by notes.

Although Blacks were not complaining—or should it be said that they were not "free" to complain—nevertheless, Black singing school teachers emerged and were highly respected for their teaching skills. The first African Singing School Master was African-born Occramer Marycoo (1746-1825), who arrived in America at the age of fourteen, and sold to a prominent Newport, Rhode Island merchant, Caleb Gardner. Occramer soon adopted or was given the name Newport Gardner. Because of his unusual musical aptitude and remarkable voice, Newport excelled as a student, completing his first musical composition in 1764, at the age of eighteen, and shortly thereafter established his own Singing School for Black Children. His contributions included

the founding of the first Black church in Newport, Rhode Island, The Colored Union Church. He returned to Liberia as a missionary and is well known as a composer. Among his compositions is an anthem titled "Promise Anthem" in January 1826. Northern communities could also boast of its large number of Black instrumentalists, whose presence was noted because the colonists' newspaper advertised a list of Black musicians available "for hire," "for sale," or listed among the "runaway slaves."

The inclusion of choirs in African-American worship was led by an Episcopalian congregation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvannia in 1828. By 1830, many progressive urban churches had introduced choral singing into their services. This raised quite a disturbance among the members to the extent that some congregations lost members. Similar disturbances arose when organs were introduced in worship. Nevertheless, church sanctuaries became the major arena for choral concerts and for introducing budding African-American artists to the public. African Methodist Episcopal churches took special pride in the state of music in their churches. In 1888, Bishop Payne observed: "In a musical direction what progress has been made within the last forty years! There is not a church of ours in any of the great cities of the republic that can afford to buy an instrument which is without one; and there are but few towns or villages where our Connection exists that are without an instrument to accompany the choir."[15]

These comments could be made now by many but not all African-American congregations. For many, music in some form is nearly 85 percent of the worship service. In others, music might be limited to three hymns and special music by the choir.

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[15]See Daniel Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville, TN: Arno Press, 1888).

Thus, the point of emphasis: although there are common cultural roots, common histories, common genres of music and common practices, one should not assume that all African-American Christians will express faith in God through music in one homogeneous musical voice! Rather, diversity in music is to be expected among the many and varied African-American worship traditions.

Nevertheless, there are unique African-American expressions of music in worship which can be identified and acclaimed as significant to the total life of Christian communities everywhere. The importance of vocal music in worship early in African-American history is attested to by the fact that one of the first published liturgical documents by and for African-American worshipers was a hymnal. Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, prepared an assortment of books for his parishioners in 1801, including a hymnal containing fifty-four hymns entitled *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister.* A second edition of this book appeared in the same year with Richard Allen changing his title to "Minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church." Ten additional hymns were added. This book is also the earliest published source in history that attaches "wandering choruses" or "wandering refrains" to hymns.[16] This meant that a short chorus or refrain could be freely added to any standard hymn. It is apparent that this improvisatory practice may have been in general use by African Americans as an extension of their oral folk tradition. These early worshipers apparently favored Isaac Watts, since most of the songs included were from his pen. There were no Spirituals in

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[16]Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 53-54.

either collection but, according to Eileen Southern, many of the hymns served as source materials for the spirituals of the slaves.[17]

Impact of the Historical Evolution of Forms and Styles

It has long been established that music is a mirror of the culture. This can be underscored in terms of music for worship in African-American liturgical traditions. Music for worship developed both outside of and during worship—long before a regularized pattern for worship had been established. Africans brought to America in 1619 as indentured servants (for a period of time) and later as "servants for life" continued to sing familiar African chants as they continued the creative process of their oral folk song tradition. Among the embryonic creations of the slave community, foundational to subsequent religious songs, were new chants, work songs, cries for deliverance, hums, and moans. Members of the antebellum slave community in a hostile environment were greatly dependent upon oral transmission for communication. Information was quite often transmitted through songs created "on the spot" or improvised on familiar tunes. Thus, the earliest songs basically served a social function as New World Africans adapted to a new life and worked at synchronizing their religious beliefs with the form of Christianity as practiced by slave-holders.

Initial exposure to Christian teachings and communal worship with Euro-Americans was, for most African Americans, void of hospitality, love, and freedom to praise God holistically. As they searched for truth of the Gospel, slaves established ways

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[17]Ibid., 52.

to express their faith in worship and their daily lives commensurate with their understanding of the biblical message. With its strong tradition of storytelling, especially in the Old Testament, Christianity for Africans in a new world provided a rich source of materials for use in continuing African religious practices. Secluded in the woods, swamps, deep gullies, "brush harbors" or "bush harbors" and slave cabins, slaves transformed Christianity into familiar forms with which they could identify. This was done most often by grafting "Christian ideas onto traditional African roots."[18] This secret worship life of the slaves later became known as the "Invisible Institution," and ultimately became the kind of separate environment in which African-American denominations and congregations could be established. This was also the sacred space for the birth of African-American songs for worship—*Spirituals, metered hymns, gospel songs: traditional, contemporary, and gospel rap.*

Spirituals

The first religious music shaped by African Americans was the well-known communal folk song genre known as "Spirituals." Although it is difficult to establish an exact date for the origin of Spirituals, it is clear that they were created (shaped, and orally transmitted) by slave communities shortly after their arrival in the U.S.A. in 1619. While they were not always identified by the African-American creators as a separate "spiritual" or "religious" phenomenon (since in African traditions there is no sharp line of distinction between sacred and secular), researchers

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[18]Leonard Barret, *Soul Force: African Heritage and Afro-American Religion* (New York: Anchor Press/DoubleDay, 1974), 96.

have concluded that this body of literature clearly existed before 1767 with an approximation of the date of origin between 1755 and 1760.

"Spirituals" as an African-American musical genre, can be defined as the body of folk composed (or created) songs transmitted orally by the community during the period of antebellum slavery. Spirituals represent a combination of African traditions and American socio-religious elements. The texts, generally based on biblical materials, provide theological reflections of life, beliefs, glimpses of personal experiences, contemporary values, hopes, and longings of a particular people in particular places at a particular time in history. Inherent in this body of unpretentious artistic literature is an outpouring of a people whose unswerving faith in God caused them to experience hope in the midst of adversity. The broad range of poetic usages gives evidence that religion and life are inextricably bound. Their powerful religious symbolism, this oral documentation of "Black Theology," and the emotional depths of spiritual yearnings, have contributed to the resurgence of these songs during particular periods of struggle, e.g., the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.A., and the ultimate survival of over 6000 Spirituals for four centuries.[19]

Spirituals were not always created in worship, nor were the persons who helped shape and transmit them always Christians. They originated, rather, from a variety of sources, traveled widely, and served numerous functions, only one of which was litur-

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[19]John Lovell Jr. *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1972), 19. Lovell provides sufficient evidence to refute the findings of George Pullen Jackson in *White and Negro Spirituals* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1943). Jackson attempted in this and other publications to deny the existence of an authentic African-American spiritual.

gical. While a number of attempts have been made to categorize Spirituals by content, dominant themes and purposes, one would have to concur with those who contend that there is a "complex world of thought underlying the Spirituals," and further conclude that theological analysis would only scratch the surface of their inherent meanings.[20]

Whether in worship or at work, the earliest creators of the Spirituals were part of a slave system. On the one hand, much of the content was the urgent need for a radical change in the social order: "I'm a Rolling Through an Unfriendly World," "O Lord, How Long"? and "This is a Sin-Trying World." On the other hand, there is lots of praise: "Ain'-a That Good News," "Great Day," "I Know the Lord's Laid His Hands on Me."

Spirituals clearly mirror the social context in which they were "forged and flamed." Not only were they considered religious from their inception, they functioned during the slave period in a "dualistic manner" to communicate messages from one person or group to another. They announced escape routes for slaves and signaled the need to abort plans if necessary. Spirituals could be freely improvised to serve as a way of gossiping, scolding, and teaching.

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[20]James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: The Seabury Press, Inc. 1972), 19. For interpretations of dominant thrusts, see especially Christa Dixon, *Wesen ünd Wandel Gestlicher, Volkslieder: Negro Spirituals* (Wuppertal: Jugenddienst-Verlag, 1967); Lovell, *Black Song*; Howard Thurman, "The Meaning of Spirituals," in *International Library of African American Life and History*, vol. 6, ed. Lindsay Patterson (New York: Publishers Company, 1978), 3; Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1953); Mary Grisson, *The Negro Sings a New Heaven* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969); Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

Spirituals in Worship

Spirituals have been used continuously in some African-American worshiping congregations and more sporadically in others. There was a period of demise in their use immediately following the emancipation of slaves in 1861 when numbers of freed slaves migrated to large cities, and there was generally a high level of "embarrassment" in the old "slave-sorrow songs." Interest was ignited by African-American college and university choirs on tours from 1877 through the early twentieth century, seeking to raise money for their institutions. Enthusiasm was further enhanced by the availability of anthem-style arrangements by African-American university composers and chorus directors in African-American colleges and universities. At the turn of the century, there were also first-generation college educated and/or theological seminary trained pastors and college educated church musicians in congregations who encouraged the inclusion of traditional or anthem-style arrangements of Spirituals for church choirs.

Compilers of African-American hymnals often use European and American hymnals as models but have always included Spirituals in their published musical offerings for worship. This is an indication of the vitality of Spirituals in the worship and work of congregations and an affirmation of the importance of Spirituals as part of the liturgy. However, as an oral people who were not always adept at reading from a printed page, the availability of published hymnals did not determine the choice of songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. Testimonies from former slaves indicate that existing Spirituals were most often the only music used for worship, and new ones were frequently forged as the biblical messages and sermons evoked new poetic thoughts. Among the musical gifts brought from Africa was the "call and

response" communication technique that not only allowed the entire congregation to participate, but helped create community—a community in constant dialogue. There are numerous examples of this "call and response" process in contemporary worship services, underscoring both the importance of "liturgy as the work of the people," and reliance upon the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This practice facilitates praise to God in worship, flowing in melody and poetry into praise in the daily lives of individuals and communities.

The inclusion of Spirituals and other African-American songs in denominational hymnals and subsequently in worship has increased especially since the 1970s. It is significant that these inclusions are listed liturgically and theologically rather than as an isolated category of ethnic contributions. It is advisable for planners of worship to use Spirituals in worship with the same liturgical awareness as applied to other music. It is wise to help congregations develop some understanding of their origin and appreciation for their enhancing worship.

Since Spirituals are a folk genre, it can be assumed that while they are final perhaps in form, they can remain open to a continuous process of creation, as congregations claim them and their history as part of the total history of Christendom. It might be necessary to dispel a previous notion about these songs as strictly "fun songs for camp meetings." For African Americans these songs served and continue to serve a liturgical purpose—a significant musical form for worship.

Metered Hymns: A Strictly Worshiping Musical Style

The worshipful style of "Black metered" hymn singing is probably least known beyond African-American worshiping

communities, particularly in the southeastern section of the U.S.A. The use of the term "meter" differs greatly from the connotation of measured rhythms of accents or syllables in lines of poetry identified by numbers and nomenclature, i.e., 8.6.8.6. "common meter," 8.8.8.8 "long meter," 6.6.8.6. "short meter," etc. Having heard this term used in reference to Psalm singing, early African-American worshipers used the term "meter" to express an almost non-metrical style. Singers literally ignored the meter signature as well as the rhythm of the poetry. "Meter" hymn singing African-American congregations often refer to some of the lined hymns as "common meter," "long meter," and rarely "short meter," based on tradition rather than fact. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century worshipers heard these terms used by European-American worshipers whose intent was totally different. Most often the terminology is used to describe a particular melodic line, tune, or form of phrasing rather than rhythms of accent or syllables in lines of poetry. For the writer, as a child worshiping in this tradition, "common meter" was a reminder that the song would not be as long in duration as "long meter," which seemed to go on forever.

In shaping "metered hymns" African Americans were influenced first and foremost by their own African "call and response" heritage and three traditions in vogue at the time: (1) the songs of Dr. Isaac Watts (1674-1748), English minister and hymnist who forged a new direction for music in worship;[21] (2) the lined-hymn (call and response) tradition of psalm singing; and (3) the tradition which they had established in the Spirituals/slave songs.

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[21]Isaac Watts moved away from psalm singing to the singing of religious poems of "human composure." While this upset some of the Christians among early settlers in the U.S.A., Watts songs were quite popular among African-American slaves who could identify with his texts.

African-American "meter hymns," also identified as "Dr. Watts hymns," are best experienced rather than described. Watts hymns were popular among African Americans, basically because of their simplicity and their emotional impact. "Dr. Watts" and "Meter Hymns" style of unaccompanied responsorial congregational singing requires a devout Christian as song leader (most often male) with a strong mellifluous voice who has the ability to "raise" a hymn. "Raise" in this context means to "line out" or chant two lines of poetry in recitative (or singsong) style—slowly and soulfully, and then sets the momentum for the congregational response as they "surge-in," repeating the words just given to them.

The melody used is (apparently) familiar to the congregation and may not be similar at all to the "lined" melody provided by the leader. Persons in the congregation who are unfamiliar with the melody are able to join-in if they are willing to spend an inordinate amount of time listening for the next note or series of notes, and not be surprised if the Holy Spirit breaks-in and sends the congregation in a totally different melodic direction! Once the two lines have been sung, the leader "breaks in" with the third and fourth lines which will have a totally different melodic twist. This continues for each of the four (sometimes six) lines of poetry, followed by congregational humming of at least one stanza, which may take fifteen to twenty minutes performance/production time! A rich and sacred sound ensues, resulting from enthusiastic unison singing, a steady patting of feet by the congregation, an occasional loud cry and/or verbal and physical shouting by persons responding to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Built into this style of singing is a signal to denote the final stanza to be sung: the leader stands as a signal for the congregation to stand. When this is over, the leader, as well as the congregation, sits down and continues to hum or "moan" one stanza.

The Watts-Meter Hymn tradition did not displace the singing of Spirituals. These two traditions overlapped for a long period of time, covering the period of the Second Great Awakening of Camp Meeting Revivals. These nineteenth-century services were openly interracial and encouraged singing, shouting, and leaping for joy. "Meter Hymns" and Spirituals also bridged the worshiping periods between slavery and Reconstruction and were shaped into a "worshiping art form" especially among Black Baptists in the Southeast.[22] More importantly, however, is the impact of this style of singing on African-American worship and spirituality in the congregations, especially in small rural towns in the Southeast. Where this practice continues in worship, a period of thirty minutes or more will precede the prelude which is a carry-over from the time when members of the congregations walked a long distance to church, since families did not own cars. The time for pre-worship singing and praying was (and is) called "Devotions" where praise is offered to God in an informal matter. For African Americans, this worship structure is a precursor to what is known now as "Praise and Worship celebrations." Like the contemporary format, the quatrain (four-line) form of the Watts meter style lends itself to easy rote memory.

African-American Gospel Music

African-American gospel music, a twentieth-century musical phenomenon, is both a musical form and a style of singing. This dual idiom evolved out of African-American vocal reper-

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[22]For further information about social change in the U.S.A. and music from the African-American sacred tradition, see Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name*, 73-96.

toires, white gospel hymnody, camp meeting songs, and the instrumental styles of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African-American musicians. This music originated as "good news blues" among African Americans recently freed from bondage who moved from rural communities to urban centers in the United States. The large cities, with increased opportunities for livelihood and the realities of new and different challenges, also fostered new musical sounds to express a plethora of faith experiences. Gospel music from its inception could either be appropriated and improvised from existing sacred or secular musical forms such as hymns, Spirituals, anthems, and blues songs, or newly composed by an individual. The result is a form of urban Spiritual—a song of faith which ignites the hope and aspiration of the faithful in the face of despair and oppression, benevolence, or joy.

Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993), acknowledged as "The Father of Black Gospel Music," made no particular claim as originator of the term "gospel music." It is related to the biblical message—the good news—according to Jesus the Christ. Gospel songs emerged in the American frontier in association with white evangelistic revivals. Ira Cinch, music director of the revival campaigns claims to have witnessed the origination of the phrase "to sing the gospel" in Sunderland, England in 1873.[23] Dorsey claims that he ". . .took the word [gospel], took a group of singers. . .and embellished [the song], made it beautiful, more noticeable, more susceptible with runs and trills and moans in it. That's really one of the reasons my folk called it gospel music."[24]

Dorsey was not the first composer of Black Gospel Music.

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[23]Ira D. Cinch, *My Life and the Story of Gospel Hymns and of Sacred Songs and Solos* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1907), 50.

[24]Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 151.

He was preceded by other African-American composers: William Henry Sherwood, Charles Price Jones, Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933), and Lucie Eddie Campbell (1885-1963). According to Horace Clarence Boyer, Dorsey stands out because "his works synthesized all of the newest of African American sacred music into a [twentieth] century whole, and because Dorsey composed in such a captivating and inclusive style that all those who were to come after him automatically, consciously or unconsciously, borrowed from and added to the concepts and practice he had established."[25]

Gospel music can be defined by its text as an individual expression or testimony in song of a collective predicament within a religious context. It is a song with a message of hope and an experience of an encounter with God in and through Jesus the Christ, expounded by one who has walked the path of trouble and hard times.

As a style of singing, it is a song, hymn, or anthem delivered by an individual or a group in a high-powered spiritual force with emphasis on vocal rhythms and calculated use of vocal textures in an effort to create great intensity and emotional impact. The blues singer and the unlettered African-American preacher with their improvisatory gifts greatly influenced African-American Gospel music. Ragtime, blues, and jazz piano styles also enhanced the intensity and emotional impact of this new genre. Through this musical idiom, African Americans are able to reclaim the African understanding of a synthesis of "sacred and secular." Prior to this era, ragtime and blues were considered beyond the realm of worship. With the emergence of

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[25]Horace Clarence Boyer, "Take My Hand, Precious Lord, Lead Me On," in *We'll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers*, ed. Johnson Reagon (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 142.

African-American gospel, night clubs and worship services embraced each other to some extent as both environments experienced the same music. It is understandable how the initial reaction to gospel music for some worshipers was negative. Many worshipers (even today) have difficulty considering gospel songs an authentic, sacred response to the acts of God in history.

An appropriate rendering of gospel music by soloists or choral groups must be intuitive because it is rather difficult to teach. The late Pearl William-Jones observed that there are two basic sources from which gospel singing has derived its aesthetic ideals: "the free collective improvisations of the African American church congregation and the rhetorical solo style of the gospel preacher. Inherent in this also is the concept of African American folk rhetoric, folk expressions, bodily movement, charismatic energy, cadence, tonal range and timbre."[26]

Congregational Gospel Singing

Historically, more attention has been given to gospel music personalities—composers and performers—than to gospel music in worship. In addition to the inclusion of gospel music in worship composed and published by individuals and made available in printed scores, the founding of the Church of God in Christ Pentecostal church provided the momentum for a more invigorating kind of congregational song. This denomination had its beginnings in California in 1906, prior to the rise of "the gospel blues." The setting was an African-American initiated religious event known as "The Azusa Street Revival." A special kind of music was needed to evoke the passion and fren-

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[26]Pearl Williams-Jones, "Performance Style in Black Gospel Music," in *Black People and Their Culture: Selected Writings from the African Diaspora*, ed. Linn Shapiro [Washington, DC]: Smithsonian Institution, 1976), 115-119.

zy necessary to encourage an emotional conversion experience—thus, the evolving of a different kind of call-and-response congregational song which usually consisted of one or two lines of poetry, a melody of three or four tones, and simple harmonies. Most of the songs were simply refrains with no contrasting sections and were composed spontaneously (like the early Spirituals). The leader was free to alter the "call" line while the congregation remained constant in their response. An example is the shout song composed by C. H. Mason, overseer and subsequently bishop in his denomination, the Church of God in Christ.

Leader: I'm a soldier
Congregation: In the army of the Lord;
Leader: I'm a soldier
Congregation: In the army of the Lord;
Leader: We are soldiers
Congregation: In the army of the Lord;
Leader: Sanctified soldiers
Congregation: In the army of the Lord. . ., etc.

Bishop Mason contributed greatly to the development of gospel music by encouraging this form of congregational song during worship services. Even today every member of the congregation is expected to lead a song; thus, a large number of gospel song composers and artists are members of the Church of God in Christ. All songs are "upbeat" with constant encouragement from song leaders to participate fully and physically in the singing. Hymns are rarely used, but when used, they are "gospelized," by ecstatic, forceful, and jubilant singing!

Music completely dominates Pentecostal worship without overpowering it. The time of gathering is filled with dramatic

testimonies, hand clapping, and foot stamping. Instruments abound! There are drums of all descriptions, wind instruments, guitars, tambourines, piano, and organs (when the latter is available). William Henry Sherwood, mentioned above, was a member of the Church of God in Christ. According to recent research, he published a collection of gospel hymns and was the first African American to publish songs cast in the Spiritual and pre-gospel mode.[27]

Early Gospel music, clearly distinguished as a genre in 1920, brought a new excitement to African-American worship. In the words of Horace Boyer, "Music and preaching were both infectious and mesmerizing."[28] In 1921, the African American National Baptist Convention published *Gospel Pearls*, the first collection of songs using the term "gospel." This historical document became popular across denominational lines and helped increase the use of gospel music in worship.

Gospel music flourished first in store-front Pentecostal congregations, most often located in poor, undeveloped sections of the city. With the exception of these highly-spirited churches, the texts of gospel songs were personal testimonies for others to hear rather than in which to participate. During the early 1940s gospel music was well entrenched in worship and in most African-American communities. By this time, gospel music generated the use of gospel choirs and soloists, accompanied by the piano, as well as *a cappella* "jubilee" quartets, both in and out of worship. Gospel harmonies at that time were simple, but gospel rhythms, were and still are determined by the singers who personalize the songs into the multi-pulses of their speech, laughter, facial expression, bodily movements, life experiences,

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[27]Horace Clarence Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel* (Washington, DC: Elliot & Clark Publishing, 1995), 26.

[28]Ibid., 41.

and religious testimonies. Soloists and choirs are required to "sing through their problems" in such a manner that congregations participate emotionally with the singers. It is not uncommon for some members to become so involved that they forget their own problems, while others are transformed above the problems of this world.

Gospel music receives reciprocal nurturing from other non-worship forms which helps to foster its growth. It is music for worship which moves onto the concert stage with all of the "dressing" and "hoop-la" necessary for performance and entertainment. It is a highly artistic commercial art with lots of publicity through the media and the recording industry. After this circuitous route, Gospel songs return to the worship of the church, greatly affected by all that has happened. All too often soloists and choirs learn the music via recordings, from rote teaching techniques of choir directors, and authorities at gospel music festivals. Church musicians in many African-American congregations are often skilled as keyboard instrumentalists without any formal preparation in choral music or music ministry. Gospel music offerings for worship are often selected from the weekly or monthly "top-ten-popularity list," rather than from the choice of Scriptural texts and subjects of sermons. Seldom is any lectionary made available for musicians. Thus, a repertoire of "throw-away music" is created, providing little continuous congregational music to be transmitted to future generations. Like recording artists, church choirs seek certain effects that will call attention to the musical performance rather than to the gospel message—the good news implied by its name.

Gospel Rap and Music from Hip Hop Culture in Worship

Gospel rap, a style of rhythmical repetitive speech, expressive of the good news, has not yet found stability as a congregational music form. Initially, rap was deemed as a passing fad, a nonsensical and ephemeral cultural form energized by African-American urban teens. However, evidence of pastors and other liturgical leaders are seeking ways to incorporate rap and holy hip-hop in worship. Teachers of worship and homiletics in theological seminaries are adding discussions of music from the hip-hop culture as an important item, especially with more and more persons called to ministry from the hip hop culture. The plethora of theologically-based discussion on Gospel Rap, and music from the hip-hop culture included in African-American focused journals, provide evidence that Rap and Hip Hop music are taken seriously.[29] The reader is encouraged to examine all aspects of these discussions before tossing them aside as outside the realm of the liturgy or incorporating these genres without evaluating them theologically.

Rap has been traced to ancient African oral traditions as the antecedent of a variety of contemporary cultural practices. The modern history of rap began in 1979 with the rap song, "Rapper's Delight."[30] This African origin is not to be taken lightly. Gospel Rap emerged more or less as a reaction against the negative messages espoused in "street" rap. Its use in worship has been limited to functions that draw more young people.

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[29]See Jon Michael Spencer, ed., *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1991); also 8, no. 1 (Spring 1994).

[30]Michael Eric Dyson, "Performance, Protest and Prophecy in the Culture of Hip Hop," *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 12.

Scriptures have been rapped during the services, either by a pastor who clearly understands this as an art form and the potential that it has to draw and maintain young people in worship. Opportunities are also extended to young people who may be asked to lead or provide one of the worship elements as a rap. In an effort to test the effectiveness of rap in worship, a number of pastors have "rapped" the entire service. As a result, most pastors reported that their congregations had difficult hearing the good news, and they banned the use of rap. With such a negative reaction one can anticipate the demise of this tradition.

Gospel Music Eras

Gospel music evolved in urban centers during the worst economic crisis in the U.S.A. This form and style reconnected African Americans to their non-compartmentalized world where secular and sacred are not separate entities. It is religious folk music that reflects the social circumstances of the African-American community. The fact that eras of gospel music continue to evolve is noted in the names given to certain periods beyond traditional gospel eras. In a few years the modern and contemporary periods must seek another label. Nevertheless, African-American gospel eras can be identified as follows:

Traditional Gospel	
Pre-Gospel (Foundational Gospel)	1905-1925
Classical Gospel	1930-1945
Golden	1945-1960
Modern Gospel	1960-1968
Contemporary Gospel	1968-2000
Gospel Rap	1980s-
Holy Hip Hop	

The Future of Music in African-American Worship

African Americans are by nature a singing people! The songs, rather than doctrinal statements, reveal their understanding of God in Jesus the Christ. When forced by society to worship in separate environments, an appropriate womb was provided for the creation and nurturing of various musical idioms. Spirituals, "meter hymns," gospel songs and gospel styles, hymns, chants, ancient and music from Africa, traditional and contemporary, sacred music by African composers in Euro-American idioms (hymns, anthems, cantatas, oratorios, orchestral settings, etc.), will continue to be a means of praising God and stimulating work as servants in the community. Many denominations of all ethnic traditions have produced hymnals to assure the inclusion in worship of African- and African-American music, which means that the hymn-tradition is not neglected. This fact holds true for African Americans for whom the published hymnal is ever available as the major source of practical theology.

Since the 1980s, congregations have become sensitive to the importance of inclusive language in the music of the church especially through the use of denominational hymnals. This includes terms that negatively describe people of God anywhere in the world. New hymnists from African-American communities are emerging to challenge non-inclusive texts but will be denied the full valley of these opportunities with the loss of published hymnals. Persons, both inside and outside of Christian traditions, who continually provide non-inclusive songs for liturgical usage are demeaning messages of the justice of God, through Jesus the Christ. Pastors, directors, and ministers of music who ignore any aspect of injustice in the words of song

are demeaning the gospel message. More specifically, any leader of worship who consents to allow the media to dictate music for African-American worship (liturgy), especially music for choirs and congregational singing, are demeaning the gospel.

Ordering Worship

Most services begin with an instrumental prelude and or with an occasional choral prelude led or completely sung by the choir. "Praise Services," which are now sweeping the country especially in non-denominational churches, actually had their beginning in African-American worship. For African Americans one could point to the testimonial music time of the Pentecost church or the African American Baptist devotional services. Regardless of the origin, many congregations are gathering praise teams, and joining with those who spend time getting the congregations into a communal singing mode prior to during worship. The foreseeable danger is the gradual elimination of congregational singing later during worship. Reports are already available as to the "oversimplifying" of biblical texts, diminishing and watering-down theology, in the name of "PRAISE!"

Choirs are vital as an extension of the congregation as long as they are aware of their role as an auxiliary singing group. Some but not all congregations know and respect the fact that the congregation is the true choir. However, with the recent emphasis on emerging forms of gospel music and the total involvement of all the people, many congregations will have multiple choirs, each focusing on a particular form and/or style of music. Unfortunately, in some places an emphasis on choral leadership in worship is producing congregations with spectators. With assistance from church music graduates there will be

a reversal to this trend. Music in African-American congregations will indeed continue with an increase in momentum and seriousness. With music as one of the important means of hearing the Word of God, it can be predicted that a deeper level of discipleship and spirituality is likely to prevail.[31]

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[31]The leading theological center with a church music program especially geared for music ministry in African-American congregations is located at Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.