



Melva Wilson Costen*

AFRICAN-AMERICAN WORSHIP: FAITH LOOKING FORWARD

Introduction

At a rapidly advancing rate, more people of faith are seeking churches according to the style of worship and music rather than differences in denominational doctrines or geographical locations. Amidst the steadily growing traditional churches, the movement toward mega-churches, meta-churches, and para-church organizations continues at a phenomenal rate. Each organizational structure requires a different approach to the shaping and nurturing of Christian faith as consideration is given to twenty-first century diversities of lifestyles and cultures. In each instance, there is evidence of established faith traditions set forth from biblical times and a concern for new expressions of "Faith Looking Forward" toward new centuries.

With this reality in view, it is predicted that the first two decades of the twenty-first century will experience more and more "revolving-door worshippers" whose basic hunger for God and spiritual nurture are often confused with "instant joy." Even with increases in diversified ministries and congregational involvement in the total life of the community, spawned by faith experiences in worship, church folk generally measure the reality of life of the congregation by the excitement engendered in worship. Fresh new ways of praising God in Jesus the Christ will burst forth in new and old ways of singing, preaching, praying, and offering thanks. The liturgy, God's work through the people, will continue through drama, dance, and the sharing of songs across cultures.

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This issue of *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* builds upon the contents of the revised and enlarged edition of the *The Black Christian Worship Experience* (Black Church Scholars Series, Volume IV, 1992). There is an intentional exploration of a few cutting-edge issues in African-American worship from a broad perspective of experienced researchers, writers, and public theologians. The authors recall faith traditions of the past and summon readers to look forward with hope and integrity to new expressions of the faith. Our songs will be different because they are now widely published, used globally, and returned to congregations for current and future use. Challenges are presented that encourage worshippers to constantly keep a "finger on the pulse" of justice issues and the historical and theological foundations of the faith.

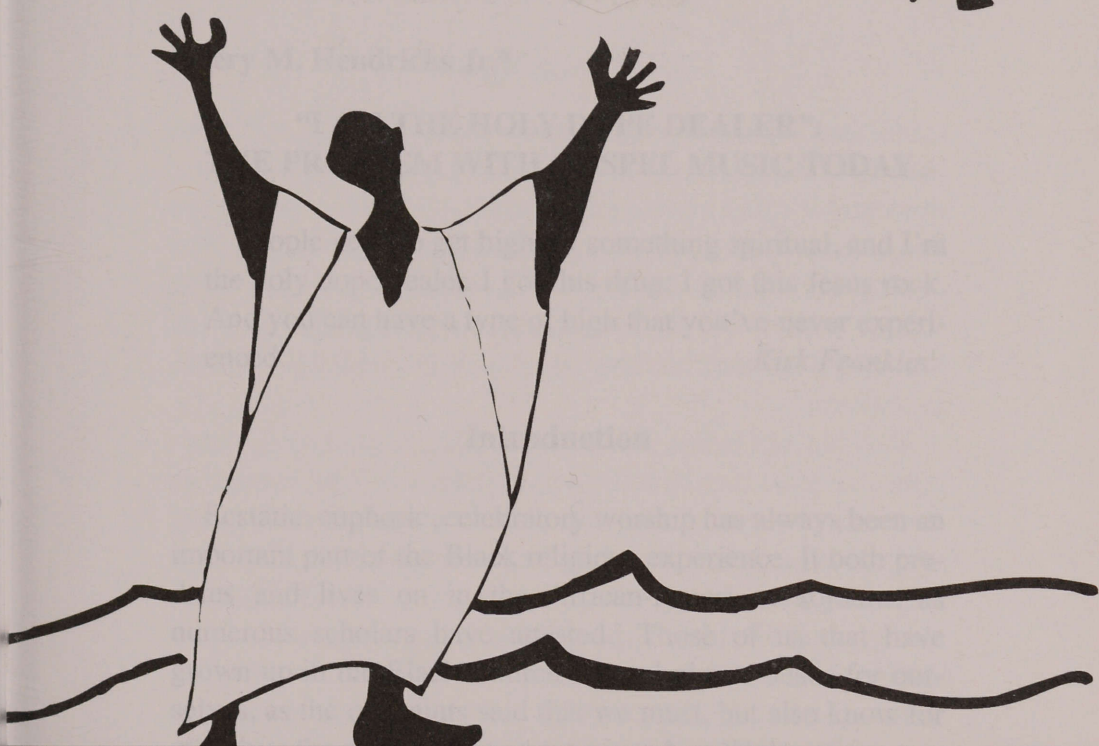
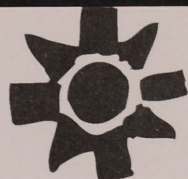
We are reminded of our journey into the twenty-first century as intergenerational and multicultural members of a global village where, because of technological advances, people from a variety of cultures can view each other from a distance and, within hours, can be in the same worshiping space, sharing faith traditions through direct interaction. There are local and global paradigm shifts with newly evolving ways of viewing the world, the church, and particularly the liturgical elements. Diversity in worship is not a new phenomenon! However, diversity becomes problematic if theological seminaries, public theologians, pastors, musicians and other worship leaders, as well as congregations, are not clear that faith is an important factor in shaping worship and life.

The manner in which faith is formed over the centuries depends upon the people's response to God's acts in Jesus the Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. In pictures, symbols, and words, this issue provides a glimpse of the

fecundity of gifts and imagination utilized, as faith undergirds the inseparable actions of corporate worship and the actions of the people in the world.

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WILLIAM W. COOPER



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