



Deloris Causion Carpenter*

A RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR EXAMINES AFRICAN-AMERICAN HYMNOLOGY

Introduction

In 1985, as the first Black pastor of a Black congregation within a predominately white denomination, I realized that the hymnal used in worship did not include familiar hymns. I stopped singing to listen; I heard an almost "non-singing church." Exclusive of choir members who rehearsed the hymns each week, most of the congregation viewed the hymns as foreign. Home visitations confirmed this. When asked what song should conclude the Holy Communion services, families responded: "God Will Take Care of You," or "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross." Neither of these was in the hymnal in the pew.

At a mid-week service, members suggested songs they would like to sing. This led to "The Growing Hymnal." Not too many years later, a hymnal supplement was placed in the sanctuary and used more and more in the regular Sunday services. Visitors asked to buy the supplement. One pastor commented that the songs in it were the same ones that the members of his church liked to sing. This confirmed what I suspected: there is a large body of Black sacred music which is ecumenically sung throughout the Black Church. In the rural South, churches frequently would not meet every Sunday. So families would travel from church to church—one Sunday Baptist, another Methodist, and another Pentecostal. They moved with great ease among these

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churches partly because of the familiar hymns regardless of the denomination. Though quite young, I remember the Baptist deacons from my grandmother's home church bringing Holy Communion to her once a month. At other times, the Pentecostal preachers' sound systems broadcast the gospel to the bar and barber shop across the street, targeting those who had gone astray. They sang much the same music, though there were some distinctively Pentecostal hymns.

From about age seven, I sang for my grandmother and attended religious services around the Baltimore area, leading to my founding the "Children of Zion," a singing group of four female vocalists, ages eight to fourteen. We appeared on gospel programs, warming up the crowd for the major artists. By then I had moved to the city, singing in the "Number Two Choir" at the Freewill Baptist Church on Sundays and president of a fifty-voice youth choir, across town on Tuesday night. This choir, organized by Rev. Harold and Amanda Williams, included young people from several denominations. Singing in five different groups at the time, I followed the "Clinton Utterbach Choral Ensemble" as far as New York City—the first gospel choir to sing at Carnegie Hall. I also sang with a regional choir for the Freewill Baptists, and on Sunday nights at First Apostolic Church, listening to the "Echoneers." All this establishes the fact that I could walk into almost any Black Baptist, Methodist, or Pentecostal church and sing without much effort. I knew the songs. This is the reality of the ecumenical nature of Black church music. J. Alfred Smith, an Advisory Committee member for the *African Heritage Hymnal*, has written an essay on this subject to be included in the hymnal.

After marriage, I encountered my first serious investigation of music in the white church. Here I was submerged in

the great tradition of standard Protestant hymns. Living in St. Louis at the time, I would hear the "O'Neill Twins" on Sunday evenings to retain continuity within my own tradition. These hymns were beautiful, but something was missing. Nowhere is the soulfulness of Black worship more poignantly felt than in its music. We sing some of the same songs as white Christians, but we sing them differently. We either slow them down or swing them. As Rev. Lucy Smith of Chicago once said, "People come to my church and we swing our music in order to help people swing out of their troubles."

Origins of the African Heritage Hymnal

My journey toward the *African Heritage Hymnal* began within my own denomination. The Black Ministers' Fellowship appointed a task force to investigate a hymnal for use in our African-American congregations. As chair of the committee, we made reports, completed research, and engaged in a process of finding the right participants to plan such a hymnal—both ministers and musicians. Shortly after the task began, the denomination passed a resolution to produce a new hymnal. As usual, the making of an African-American hymnal was cooped into a multicultural hymnal. I had looked carefully at other such attempts and observed that the quantity of music sung by Black Christians was always a few spirituals plus a few contemporary pieces. Aware of the fact that we have an extraordinarily rich reservoir of music melded into artistic expressiveness, this was too great a gift to sacrifice upon the "altar of multiculturalism." In the 1950s our denomination had passed a resolution for an Afrocentric hymnal but it was never produced. Even in the 1990s, sponsorship for the Afrocentric project was reject-

ed by the Board of Trustees of the National Convocation, a fellowship of over 500 Black churches.

Soon after this, a former executive of my denomination said, "Delores, why don't you produce the hymnal commercially?" I seriously examined hymnals of the publishers of those that I especially liked. I was drawn to the newer ventures, the *New National Baptist Hymnal* and *Yes, Lord*, published for the Church of God in Christ by Benson Publishing, a white company. My experience with the National Baptist Publishing House did not achieve the desired results. It was then that a pastor placed *Lead Me, Guide Me* in my hands. It was the relatively new *The African-American Catholic Hymnal*. This introduced me to the publisher, GIA, Inc. and to the president, Ed Harris. He became a great encourager along with the musical talents of Nolan Williams Jr., my assistant minister, who gave me the confidence to undertake this project. I asked Rev. Williams to be the musical editor and invited pastors of significant pulpits across the country to serve on the Advisory Committee, some of whom provided their musicians for the effort.

Over five years ago, I signed a contract with GIA, Inc. to produce a new, ecumenical hymnal for African-American churches, colleges, and families. An important selling point for the hymnal was newly-developed biblical readings and a Black Church Year with a litany for each of the fifty-two Sundays, including brief references to Black history. This hymnbook can take its place next to the Bible and the Black history book. For what would our history be without a song? For Blacks in America there has never been a songless movement. What motivated and sustained us through hard times were the Holy Scriptures and the songs of faith and trust in God.

The Advisory Committee spent much time developing the title of the hymnal. We arrived at the name, *African Heritage Hymnal*, independently of any conversations with my colleague, Cain Hope Felder, about the Afrocentric Bible he was editing. We voted upon our title before *The African Heritage Study Bible* was published and were astounded to realize the similarity of the titles.

Initially, there was great enthusiasm for the project. We lost Robert Fryson, a great talent, along the way. He had received over sixty new songs solicited for review. We defined a hymn as any music suitable for congregational singing. Because our churches are highly participatory, rather than spectator-oriented, different kinds of music are appropriate. Music introduced by choirs and soloists quickly become congregationally sung as members, through repetition, learn them and sing along. Thus, hymnology in our tradition has a dynamic nature, changing and shifting with what is popular at the time. This dynamism has generated the need for a heritage hymnal. It is all right to forge ahead to the new, but our churches can benefit from the rediscovery of the effectiveness of older songs slightly modernized. For example, as much as we discuss hip hop and rap today, I can play old gospel records where a creative, fast-paced narrator rapped the words in a similar fashion without the synthesizers and electronic enhancements of today.

The hymns in the *African Heritage Hymnal* range from spirituals, to revival songs, to civil-rights songs, to praise music, to traditional gospel classics, as well as adaptations of contemporary gospel. There is a special place given to preserving the congregational response for meter hymns, which have become an endangered species in some urban settings. Extra effort went into identifying several meter

tunes and for the first time, into trying to score the portion that the church might sing, after the leader has lined out one or two phrases. We knew that many young people had never heard songs sung in this way, and an increasing number of congregations had discontinued them when they eliminated the devotional period from Sunday worship.

At St. Paul Freewill Baptist Church meter hymns were sung at the four communion services during the year. No other type of music was sung on those evenings. These were lengthy services, with lots of singing. The pastor would line them out with the proper inflection of the voice, and the congregation would harmonize the response without accompaniment. A lead responder paced everyone else. You were never quite sure how long to hold your note, but you listened carefully and when the lead responder moved to the next note, you followed. You found your voice and improvised. It is still beautiful. At the end of Oprah Winfrey's film, *Beloved*, "Amazing Grace" is sung somewhat in this manner. It is a type of chanting, similar to the chanting of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, whose music was codified by the musician, Yared, in sixth-century northern Ethiopia.

Not everyone was in favor of a heritage hymnal that resurrected "the sad, old songs," as one minister characterized them. He thought such a hymnal would be a step backward. In spite of such criticism, I am convinced that such a hymnal is a must for the new millennium. The first reason is that too many younger people in our churches have never been exposed to the history and meaning behind the Negro spiritual, the meter song, the revival song, the prayer-band song, and even the standard hymn. Many are turning to the repetitious praise venue of white evangelicals. While the beat or melody is catchy and often quite worshipful, these new songs lack the

depth of lyrical expression that lifted the souls of Black folk to aspire to freedom, redemption, and liberation—themes that have shaped our national identity. We are a people with a special history and destiny. Our faith is contextual, carved out of the crucible of slavery, the Maafa Middle Passage, brutality, lynching, rape, Jim Crow, and subtle racism.

In other words, we were exposed to Christianity at a time in our history that framed a distinctive spirituality. We tied our trust to a loving God who alone could rescue us against the overwhelming odds: “Father I Stretch my Hands to Thee, No Other Help I Know” was the order of the day. Sometimes, we have to mourn the memories of times which continue to plague our souls. These scars and the healing they represent define who we are. We are the overcomers. We do not want to forget, though for many years we were in denial because of the shame it evoked. In our faith tradition, as in the Jewish and Korean, it is all right to look back and remember. It is all right to tell our children how we have come up the rough side of the mountain. It is all right to moan. In fact, if we do not do this, we risk a tremendous generational gap. We must remind young people that Africans knew God long before white missionaries taught them about Christianity. We must tell them that God was on our side and delivered us from atrocities for a special purpose, sometimes at the hands of Christian slave masters. We must tell them that those of us who have survived carry the strength of that purpose in our DNA, in our spirits, and in our souls. We have stood in a unique relationship to Jesus and the power of his blood because we too have experienced the dregs of human sin piled upon our heads like a pyramid of oppression. When we sing

“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains,”

we feel that we are authorities on the blood. For it was not only the blood of Jesus, but the ocean shed by many Africans in the Maafa Middle Passage and during slavery. When we see the Atlantic Ocean, we do not just see a body of water, we see an ocean of blood where many bodies are buried. The same is true of the Mississippi River.

This remembrance is reflected in the hymns we sing. Kirk Franklin framed this well.

Someone asked the question
Why do we sing”?
When we lift our hands to Jesus,
What does it really mean?

I sing because I'm happy.
I sing because I'm free.
His eye is on the sparrow!
That's the reason why I sing.

It is a collective consciousness, the sum total awareness of our history, that keeps us singing “His Eye Is on the Sparrow and I Know He Watches Me” or “Precious Lord Take My Hand, Lead Me Home.” We realize that this world still is not our home, and we are not yet treated as we deserve. That is why “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” is one of our favorite hymns.

We are pilgrims through this barren land.

I am weak
but Thou art mighty.

Hold me with thy powerful hand.

We researched the congregations of our Advisory Committee and the Hampton Ministers' and Choir Director's Conference. What songs are your congregations singing today? What version? What lyrics? There is variety in how each song is sung regionally and even within the same city. Our meetings were filled with "I remember it this way. I remember it another way. Which way will we go?" Resource persons were consulted in Alabama, Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, New York, Oakland, and Connecticut. After some initial publicity we went underground. The interest is so great, and we are not in a position to release the volume quickly, so we decided to stop talking about the hymnal until its completion. I am making this exception today because we are three-fourths finished and can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Along the way, we found few Black church musicians able to notate Black church music fully with soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voicing. Those who can are in demand, performance driven, and busy publishing new music of their own or others. We knew that we wanted quality first and have been willing to wait for excellence. Some of the revised submissions do not meet the high standard of the committee, something we call now "the GIA style." It has slowed us down considerably in the completion of the last 100 songs. Almost 400 are already engraved. This is not merely a compilation of music that appears in other hymnals. Great effort is being made to make necessary changes to reflect

our music more adequately. This experience has taught us that there is an urgent need for more Afrocentric sacred music programs of study at institutions of higher education. We desperately need to produce more hymn writers, who can both read and write their compositions and those of others accurately, preferably using computer software.

Another observation along this journey has been the centrality of the Bible in the hymns that we sing. While selecting a companion biblical text for each hymn title, it was amazing to discover how many of the lyrics come straight from the Bible itself. Some of the hymnals now available use the same biblical citations for the same songs. It is as though one copied from another. The *African Heritage Hymnal* has not done that. We are striving to handle the biblical material with integrity.

William McClain, professor of Preaching and Worship at Wesley Seminary and general editor of *Songs of Zion*, pointed out that the production of African-American hymnals at the end of the twentieth century has led to the revision of hymnals within white mainline Christianity. New multicultural hymnals have emerged in response to this renaissance of Black church hymnals. There is now a Counter Reformation, which demonstrates the widespread influence of Black church music. In other words, *Songs of Zion* (Methodist), the *New National Baptist* (Baptist), *Yes, Lord* (COGIC), *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (Episcopal), *Lead Me, Guide Me* (Catholic), and, *This Far by Faith: An African American Resource for Worship* (Lutheran), as well as this *African Heritage Hymnal* in progress, have all emerged at about the same time historically. These hymnals have challenged the mainline white church, which has large numbers of Black parishioners, to revise their hymnals, hoping that their Black

membership will continue to buy within their denominations. Of course, many of the prior hymnals were quite old. For example, the *Christian Hymnal* used by my congregation was developed in the 1930s. Though there was an intervening one, it was not as well received. Therefore, for over sixty years, generations have used this hymnal.

As I attended introductory workshops on the United Church of Christ's *New Century Hymnal* and the Disciples' new *Chalice Hymnal*, I noticed the participants were excited by the Black gospel songs included. They asked to sing more of them. Again, the African influence upon American and global culture is being demonstrated within Black sacred music, as was the case with the assimilation of the Negro spiritual into the musical repertoire of many white choirs.

What is new is that now there are a few Black church musicians, such as Evelyn Curenton, who can notate our music so that others can play it more like we sing it. Before, we relied upon those who played by ear. Thus, many of those who played by notes were not able to play the music as we sang it. But now, what we have enjoyed through the ear is becoming sight and coming into print. Praise God! Prior to the present we argued that the improvisational nature of our music could not be captured in print. Today, fortunately, we are moving beyond this idea, trying to transcribe as closely as we can, knowing that Black people will always improvise. Because of the publication of these more expanded versions, non-Blacks will be able to replicate the harmonies and rhythms, which until now were unavailable. I told someone jokingly that if we do our job properly, the *African Heritage Hymnal* will be a greater gift to other ethnic communities than to the Black community.

A Brief History of Black Sacred Music

Gratitude is expressed to Wendell Whalum, Wyatt Tee Walker, Jeremiah Wright, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Pearl Williams-Jones, Melva Wilson Costen, James Abbington, and others who have written about Black sacred music more expertly than I. Much of the following information is drawn from the *Encyclopedia of African American History and Culture*. Articles by Horace Clarence Boyer, Irene Jackson, and Dominique-René De Lerma were consulted. The essays written for the *African Heritage Hymnal* by J. Alfred Smith and Otis Moss are informative.

Black sacred music evolved from the field hollers, slave songs, spirituals, and Protestant hymns sung on the plantation. Wendell Whalum notes that African-American church music has an oral tradition which manifested itself in the spirituals. The genesis of African-American church music predates the founding of Black denominational structures. Thus, it is originally ecumenical. Although Black pastors such as Bishop Charles Harrison Mason of the Church of God in Christ and Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church wrote hymns, the main antecedent of gospel music was the Isaac Watts hymns. Watts emphasized a call-and-response approach to religious songs with mournful but powerful rhythms. Thus, in the nineteenth-century, African-American hymnody in mainstream denominations did not differ considerably from music performed in white, Southern churches. An important point is that the majority of African Americans have not been separatists. While affirming their own culture, they have consistently incorporated from other groups that which serves them well.

In 1801 Richard Allen published two collections of hymns

designed for use in Black churches. These volumes were the forerunners of similar collections forming the basis for music performed in most nineteenth century Black churches. Yet, they were quite similar to restrained white Protestant hymnody. Around the middle of the nineteenth century a new type of music known as "gospel hymns" or "gospel songs" was being composed in a new style—lighter and more songlike than traditional hymns. White composers such as Dwight Moody, Ira Sankey, Philip Bliss, Robert Lowry, and William Bradbury wrote some of these.

At about the same time, within a minority of Black churches, the belief arose that spiritual growth required a deeper and more personal relationship with God. These primarily Pentecostal churches were participants in the Latter Rain movement, which sought to "irrigate the dry bones of the church." This was a natural progression due to Africans already having a well-defined structure of faith long before they were introduced to Christianity. In other words, Africans knew God long before they came to know Christianity. Thus, they adapted Christianity to their own form of spirituality in which the Spirit was already vitally important. In 1889 the Church of the Living God in Wrightsville, Arkansas, under the leadership of William Christian, accepted this doctrine. So did the United Holy Church of Concord, South Carolina at its first convention in 1894 under the leadership of L. M. Mason. The Holiness doctrine proved controversial within the Black church, as did its music. In 1895 Charles Harrison Mason and Charles Price Jones were forced from the Baptist Church, and together they organized the Church of God in Christ in Lexington, Mississippi where music was heavily influenced by worship at Los Angeles' Azusa Street Revival under John Seymour. Early forms of gospel music such as

sung or chanted testimonials were used to complement prayers in the Holiness churches. Drawing on the call-and-response tradition that dated back to slavery times, members of the congregation would take inspiration from a phrase of a sermon or testimony and spontaneously compose a simple melody and text. Such a song was "I'm a Soldier." The preacher would sing "I'm a Soldier." The congregation would respond:

In the army of the Lord

I'm a soldier.

In the army.

I'm fighting for my life.

In the army of the Lord

I'm a sanctified soldier

In the army.

In addition to "I'm a Soldier," Mason also wrote "My Soul Loves Jesus" and "Yes, Lord." He represented a new generation of Black composers, including William Sherwood, and Charles Jones, who wrote, "Where Shall I Be?" and "I'm Happy with Jesus Alone." The most well-known Black hymn writer was Charles Albert Tindley who composed "What are They Doing in Heaven?", "Stand by Me," and "I'll Overcome Someday," which was the forerunner of the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome." In 1916 Tindley published a collection of hymns, *New Songs of Paradise*. By 1924, Tindley's music and dynamic preaching resulted in a Methodist Episcopal church in Philadelphia having 10,000 members. Since there were no publishing houses for Black gospel, these composers began to establish their own. They also depended upon recordings and traveling preach-

ers to spread their music.

In 1921 the National Baptist Convention, USA, the largest organization of Black Christians in the world, published a collection of hymns, spirituals, and gospel songs, *Gospel Pearls*, edited by Willa A. Townsend, containing six hymns by Tindley. The 1921 convention also marked the emergence of composer Thomas A. Dorsey, who became the "Father of Gospel" because of his publishing, organizing, and teaching. Three years later the National Baptist Convention published the *Baptist Standard Hymnal* of 1924.

In Jefferson County, Alabama, workers in coal mines and factories used their lunch hours to organize quartets to sing. The secular "Fisk Jubilee" and "Tuskegee" vocal quartets inspired groups such as the "Foster Singers," and their spin off, the "Birmingham Jubilee Singers." The latter allowed the bass and tenor more prominence and freedom, raised tempos, and used more adventurous harmonies. Thus arose quartets all over the South, e.g., the "Fairfield Four," the "Blue Jay Singers," and the "Harmonizing Four," the Dixie Hummingbirds" (1928), "The Soul Stirrers" (1936), and the "Swan Silvertones" (1938).

Moving north, Thomas Dorsey opened his publishing house in 1932, the same year he composed "Take My Hand, Precious Lord." Blind singers came to prominence by performing on street corners. One of the most important was Connie Rosemond, for whom Lucie Campbell composed "Something Within Me." The blind Texas singer, Arizona Dranes, accompanied herself on piano and is credited with introducing that instrument to recorded gospel music. Among the gospel singers of the 1920s who sang with piano accompaniment were Willie Mae Ford Smith, Sallie Martin, Clara Hudmon, Madame Ernestine B. Washington, and guitarist

and singer Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Male accompanied singers included Brother Joe May, and J. Robert Bradley. In 1947 Mahalia Jackson's recording of "Move On Up a Little Higher," by Herbert Brewster, came to define the female-gospel style.

In the 1930s, accompanied gospel ensembles consisting of four or six women became popular. Clara Ward organized the "Ward Singers" in 1934. Roberta Martin joined with Theodore Frye to form the "Martin-Frye Quartet," later known as the "Roberta Martin Singers." Sallie Martin organized the "Sallie Martin Singers." Dorothy Love Coates joined the "Gospel Harmonettes" and introduced "hard" gospel techniques, such as singing beyond her range and straining the voice for dramatic effects. We cannot leave out the "Davis Sisters" and the "Angelic Gospel Singers." In 1932, Thomas Dorsey, Sallie Martin, and Willie Mae Ford Smith formed the "National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses." Roberta Martin, composer of "God Is Still on the Throne," opened her own publishing house in 1939. Sallie Martin opened hers along with Kenneth Morris, composer of "Yes, God Is Real."

Among the more prominent post-war performers and leaders whom persons remember today were Madame Edna Gallmon Cooke, Julius "June" Cheeks, Alex Bradford, Robert Anderson, and Albertina Walker who formed the "Caravans" in 1952. Among the members of the "Caravans" is still-popular Shirley Caesar who is sometimes dubbed the Queen of Gospel in the 1990s, Inez Andrews who wrote "Mary Don't You Weep," and Dorothy Norwood. Marion Williams left the "Ward Singers" to form the "Stars of Faith." Willie Joe Ligon formed the "Mighty Clouds of Joy." In 1950 Sam Cooke, who had joined the "Soul Stirrers" had two hits: "Nearer to Thee" and "Touch the Hem of His Garment."

The most significant figure of the 1960s was James Cleveland, who began singing in the Dorsey children's choir at the age of eight. Another one of Dorsey's children and president of the Dorsey Music Convention, Bishop Kenneth Moales, is part of the Advisory Committee of the *African Heritage Hymnal*. By age sixteen, James Cleveland had composed his first hit for the "Roberta Martin Singers." He accompanied the "Caravans," formed his own group, and in 1963 began recording with the "Angelic Choir" of Nutley, NJ. He ushered in the prominence of gospel choirs. We should also mention that Langston Hughes wrote the gospel-song play "Black Nativity" in 1961. In that same year a gospel category was added to the Grammy awards with Mahalia Jackson as the first winner.

Gospel music played a crucial part in the Civil Rights Movement. There had been an abolitionist thrust in the Black sacred music of the nineteenth century. In the 1960s, musicians such as Mahalia Jackson, Fannie Lou Hamer, Guy Carawan, the "Montgomery Trio," the "Nashville Quartet," the "CORE Freedom Singers," the "SNCC Freedom Singers," and Carlton Reese's "Gospel Freedom Choir" appeared at marches, rallies, and meetings. Songs such as "If You Miss Me from the Back of the Bus," "This Little Light of Mine," "We'll Never Turn Back," "We Shall Overcome," "Eyes on the Prize," "Ninety-nine and a Half Won't Do," "O Freedom," "Ain't Nobody No Gonna Turn Me Around" were an essential part of the organizing work. "Precious Lord" and "If I Can Help Somebody" were favorites of Martin Luther King Jr. Otis Moss has written an essay for the hymnal, "African American Music and the Freedom Movement." Wyatt Tee Walker, another civil rights leader and an expert on Black sacred music, has writ-

ten the introduction to the hymnal.

In 1969 Edwin Hawkins released his rendition of "O Happy Day," a white nineteenth-century hymn, using smooth pop vocals, soul harmonies and jazz rhythms, including a conga drum. Record producers, inspired by the crossover potential of contemporary gospel, began encouraging gospel groups toward a more contemporary sound. After Hawkins came Andraé Crouch, Myrna Summers, Danniebell Hall, Douglas Miller, Bebe and Cece Winans, the Clark Sisters and the ensemble "Commissioned." Popular stage performances included "Your Arms Are Too Short to Box with God," and "The Gospel at Colonus." The unaccompanied vocal sextet, "Take Six," achieved huge popular success.

Other popular contemporaries included Richard Smallwood (who uses classical elements in his songs), Bobby Jones, Keith Pringle, Daryl Coley, and Walter Hawkins. The "Thompson Community Choir," the "Charles Ford Singers," the "Barrett Sisters," and James Moore adopted the Hawkins style, as well as the Mass Choirs in Florida, New Jersey, and Mississippi. Recent choral ensembles have been well received, such as the "Sounds of Blackness," the "Williams Brothers," the "Jackson Southernares," and the "Pilgrim Jubilees." These groups often use synthesizers and drum machines in addition to traditional gospel instruments. Today, Yolanda Adams and Kirk Franklin have taken gospel music to another level. The music industry has awarded gospel music six Grammy categories. I have spent considerable time on the history of gospel music, because it the most fertile ground for the newer hymns that are sung in the African-American Church today.

What's New About the African Heritage Hymnal

For what does one look in the *African Heritage Hymnal*? There are songs that have not appeared in the newer hymnals. The more recent volumes include a significant number of Negro spirituals which will also be in the *African Heritage Hymnal*. Additionally, there will be newly-published songs by contemporary songwriters. A few African and Caribbean songs are there, as well as some gospel songs that have been modified for congregational singing, such as "Order My Steps" and "Jesus Is the Center of My Joy." Some of the newly-scored meter songs include "Father I Stretch My Hand to Thee," "A Charge to Keep I Have," "I Was a Wandering Sheep," and "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah." Also included will be some of the praise songs from white evangelical publishers like Maranatha, such as "This Is the Day." This hymnal is an updated collection, representing what Black congregations are singing at the end of the twentieth century: "He Has Done Great Things," "Hold Back the Night," "How Can You Recognize a Child of God," "How Majestic Is Your Name," "I Love You Lord," "I Will Bless Thee, O Lord," "I'll Tell It Wherever I Go," "Just for Me," "Messiah Now Has Come," "Living He Loved Me," "O Lord How Excellent," "Siyahamba," "The Lord Is Blessing Me Right Now," "Victory Is Mine," "We Are Soldiers," "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise," "What a Mighty God We Serve," "The Lord Be Praised," and other favorites from the newer hymnals, including some European hymns. It includes the best of the old and the new.

Further, the *African Heritage Hymnal* is an attempt to ground our sacred music to a historicity that has shaped an African-American peoplehood and national identity. Through

the fifty-two litanies, beginning with Emancipation Day and ending with Kwanzaa, the celebrative readings and biblical passages link our music to our common struggle and triumph, as a people. This is where the religious educator and musician intersect. This volume goes further educationally, enabling parishioners to make the connection between what has happened to us historically and our religious expressions of song. I hope that it will assist us theologically to understand that our knowledge and awareness of Christianity came along with the torture and ordeals of the Maafa Middle Passage—slavery—our fight for equality, and our building of the nation. We will call the names of our heroes and heroines as we sing. We will remember what it is about which we have so much to sing. Cast in a positive presentation, called “Fifty-two Days of Soulful Celebration,” these readings inspire hope and optimism in the face of severe challenges and real limitations.

More than other persons, African Americans have depended upon the preacher to keep the heritage traditions alive by leading a meter hymn or spiritual before, during, or after preaching. Therefore, it is important for Black seminaries to include content of this nature in the theological curriculum. As more and more crossover artists sing both Black gospel and secular music, there is a danger that gospel music will gain celebrity status as an aesthetic removed from its origins as music to the glory of God, which helped Black people survive and thrive. We sense that non-Christians and agnostics now sing in university and agency choirs. *Ebony* did a study of the musical tastes of African Americans about ten years ago. Gospel music was rated number one. But how many people match their love of gospel music to their deepest feelings of love for and dependence on the God who has come to us in

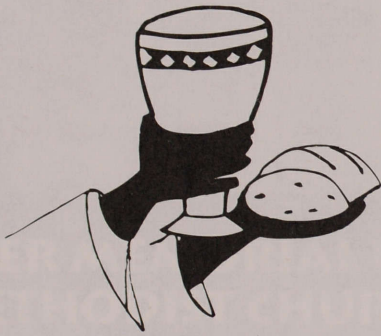
Jesus Christ? We must consider whether or not the musical-cultural art form has meaning apart from true worship of God. In a few renditions, we are not quite sure who loves whom, or worse yet, we cannot understand all the words. The words seem to be understood only by the ones who are singing them, or by others who already know them. Although I am not opposed to Christian rap music, our Black sacred tradition calls for a clear understanding of the words of the song. When the music blurs the message, it also threatens the sacredness of the song for the hearer. For faith comes by hearing the word.

I hope that the *African Heritage Hymnal* will demonstrate that Christianity is not the religion of whites alone. I hope that it teaches in a powerful way that we have consistently made Christianity our own through Afrocentric music, and liturgy. I hope that the hymns of yesterday and today, standing side by side in the same hymnal, will testify to the continuity of our faith and to the centrality of Scripture. The words of empowerment and vocation can reawaken and rekindle the theme of liberation. Today some Black people appear to be drifting in the stream of consumerism, without a clear stake in political and economic development. Similarly, many Black people seem to be drifting away from the family table and the family altar. They no longer appear to have community pride or ascribe to what I have called "villageology." They do not seem to be searching for spiritual depth or historical consciousness. Many are satisfied to leave too many of our children behind in poverty and brokenness, unredeemed and cast off to drugs, jail, and the morgue. It may take a song to redirect this tide and resurrect the firm foundation laid by Jesus Christ and appropriated by our ancestors.

It is my hope that the songs we sing will result in a rich harvest in the new millennium. I hesitate to call them hymns because the word "hymns" has a stiff, cold connotation of being somebody else's music imposed upon us. We learn it and perform it, sometimes beautifully, but it never quite reaches our souls or transforms our lives. Perhaps, the Afrocentric hymnals of the 1980s and 1990s can change that thinking. They have come on the heels of Black theology, Afrocentrism and a modern explosion of neo-Pentecostalism. Perhaps, hymns can be sung more fervently in our churches as they are sung in Korean churches. At the Hampton Ministers' and Choir Director's Conference, with 6000 persons singing, I glimpsed the power of the great hymns of the church.

The spirituals played an important part in the Underground Railroad. Today, our train to glory is above ground. But the engine of the train is still the same—wanting a better future for us and for our children. Perhaps, the right question to ask is how well is contemporary Black sacred music connected to that little engine that wouldn't say "No"? How well are the musical cars connected to the engine? How well do our hymns fuel and fire up the engine that connects us to our history and vision of the future?

I hope that by singing the great hymns of our tradition, we may see our people reach the Promised Land in the twenty-first century, near the beginning of the new millennium. With God all things are possible. We can never give up hope. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "I may not get there with you, but we will reach the Promised Land." A song will be most appropriate, when our train pulls into the station of its destination.

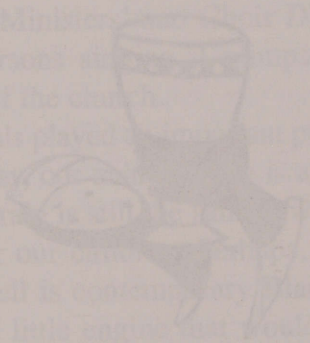


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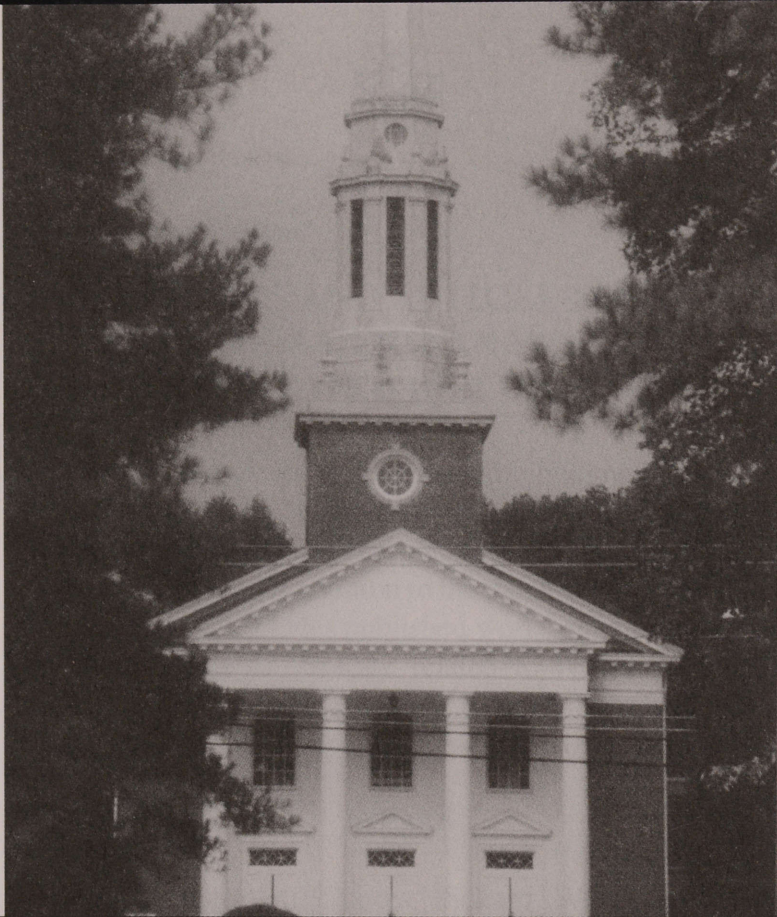
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It is my hope that the songs we sing will result in a rich harvest in the new millennium. The main reason hymns became the word "hymns" has a just, good connotation of being somebody else's music (imposed upon us). We learn it and perform it, sometimes beautifully, but it never quite touches our souls or transforms our lives. Perhaps, the Africanist hymnals of the 1970s and 1980s can change that thinking. They have come to the necks of Black theology, Afrocentrism and a modern explosion of neo-Pentecostalism. Perhaps, hymns can be sung more fervently in our churches as they are sung in African churches. At the Hampton Ministers' Union Director's Conference, with 6000 persons in attendance, we sang the power of the great hymns of the church.



The spirituals played a major part in the Underground Railroad. Today, we are above ground. But the engine of the train is still in the ground. Finding a better future for us and for our children is the right question to ask: is how well is contemporary Black sacred music connected to that little engine that wouldn't stop? How well are the musical cars connected to the engine? How well do our hymns fuel and fire up the engine that connects us to our history and vision of the future?

I hope that by singing the great hymns of our tradition, we may see our people reach the Promised Land in the twenty-first century, near the beginning of the new millennium. We tried all things not possible. We can never give up hope. As Rev. Luther Klug Jr. said, "I may not get there with you, but we will reach the Promised Land." A song will be most appropriate when our train pulls into the station of its destination.



**HOOSIER MEMORIAL UNITED
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CURRENT EDIFICE COMPLETED: 1959**

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