**Melva Wilson Costen***

# AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITURGICAL MUSIC IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Musa Teremka
Uende chini kule nchira misri
Mwambie mzee farao
Wacha watu wangu waende
Translated by Rahab Gitonga[1]

## Introduction

"Mwambie mzee farao, Wacha watu wangu waende"—"Tell Old Pharaoh, Let my people go!" This Swahili translation of "Go Down Moses," one of the most familiar of over 6,000 extant African-American spirituals, sets the context of this study of "African-American Liturgical Music in a Global Context." To hear this translation emotionally rendered in services of worship in Limuru and Nairobi, Kenya, and translations of this and other texts of African-American songs in Debrechen, Hungary; Johannesburg, South Africa, and at numerous ecumenical meetings in other places around the world, awakened a new awareness of the impact of African-American songs on the global community. Not only is there evidence of cross cultural sharing of biblical interpretations and experiences of the faith of a people captured and enslaved in an alien land, there is also a reminder of God's gift of song

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*Melva Wilson Costen is Helmar Emil Nielsen Professor of Worship and Music, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

[1]Rahab Gitonga, a senior student in the Master of Arts in Christian Education degree program at Interdenominational Theological Center, is a member of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

through people in a variety of circumstances. Like many of the songs created by African-American communities, "Go Down Moses" is a universal call to obedience to God with a special concern for social justice, which transcends time and liturgical boundaries. This and other songs are classical examples of ways in which God speaks to the world through sincere expressions of the faith of a people. African-American liturgical music has impacted the world in ways that have not yet been fully explored.

It is clear from the beginning that all songs created by African Americans were not initially intended for use in Christian liturgical settings. Some members of the community who participated in the creation and transmission of songs during the early period of history were not Christians and had no intention of connecting with the religion of the oppressors. The texts of many of the earliest songs, including those that were incorporated into the liturgy after exposure to the Euro-American form of Christianity, contain primal beliefs common to both African traditional religions and Christianity. For African peoples, there is an inseparable link between religion and the whole of life, actions and thoughts, and songs and physical movement. Their natural love for double *entendre* is evident in the creation and use of songs that convey dual messages, thus making them available for multiple purposes. Africans in diaspora in all places of the world make extensive usage of masks and symbolic language for the purpose of concealing critical comments of unjust actions of people. Equally significant is the poetic and dramatic gifts of African people who are adept at "telling the story" in ways that invite listeners into the story.

Undoubtedly, many of the songs used in early African-American worship reflect all of the above aspects. Worship

services allowed the community opportunities to offer themselves totally to God. This process continues into the twenty-first century as songs and musical expressions move in and out of corporate worship, with the essence of life—the "smell of life"—returning in song and action as part of the musical praise and offering to Almighty God.

The purpose of this article is to: (1) set the context by providing brief historical information on the creation and utilization of music by African Americans; (2) identify forms of African-American liturgical music created (as the work of the people) initially in the "Invisible Institution" and imported for use in worship in visibly established institutions; (3) explore the **global impact** of certain of these forms and performance styles (spirituals, gospels, and devotional songs of praise) on people and cultures beyond the African-American worship experience; and (4) provide reflections on current and future trends in the use of this music in an ongoing multicultural, global context.

## Historical Background

The music of the church has been and continues to be one of the basic modes of creative expression among African-American Christians. Long before institutional churches were formally established, Africans in America were creating musical forms, texts, and performance styles that provided a rich and glorious heritage embracing generations of the African-American worshipers. The communal creation and singing of songs, rhythmical bodily movements, and improvised percussive accompaniments continue in some worshiping congregations as a viable conveyor of religious momentum. New songs and new musical forms evolved from exist-

ing practices in different contexts, with both the old and the new overlapping in a reflection upon present realities, and the envisioning of a hopeful future. This is not to deny changes that are basic to an evolutionary process of any artistic form. It is, however, an affirmation of the unique African-American identity which is maintained during the creative process.

Music for African-American worshipers serves as a divine umbilical cord connecting God, the source of life, with humanity. An observation by Cynthia Pearl Maus appropriately affirms this divine-human connection:

> The songs of a people keep alive their spiritual aspirations....They furnish the atmosphere and wings by which mortals can, for a little time at least, get almost free of matter, and rise as on wings to the realm of pure beauty....Thus by the aid of music, they may be lifted...nearer to God.[2]

The taproot of this divine heritage for African Americans extends deeply into religious soil on the continent of Africa. Although shackled, enslaved, and removed from their home environment, Africans in diaspora were never severed from this taproot. African slaves continued their natural propensity to create communal songs about life, death, promise, and faith in God's power to intervene in human concerns in God's own time! Equipped with a survival primal worldview, Africans in diaspora struggled to secure their own freedom, and through their music, were able "to rise as on wings that lifted them [and kept them] in the presence of the Almighty." Over the centuries as existential situations created changes in liturgical contexts, their music maintained its unique African-American

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[2]Cynthia Pearl Maus, *Christ and the Fine Arts*, rev. and enl. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 20.

identity with its stylistic freedom and improvisatory core, making possible the transformation of everyday life into creative artistry.

The earliest communal songs were probably poly-lingual African chants which no doubt expressed the heartbeats and soulful yearnings of enslaved "folk at work." These songs were not created with worship gatherings in mind, nor were they intended for future global exposure. These were songs of a people whose immediate environment was not at all a happy place, and whose vision of a better place was their home in Africa, at least for those who could remember! Singing and other forms of communal music-making are natural gifts of African people; and so an African people in bondage created songs which ultimately helped them to forge a common language, bind them together, and keep their spiritual aspirations alive.

Along with African chants and African melodies brought with each shipment of bonded servants, the intricately related African custom of making music while attending to work-related activities was easily maintained. There is power in communal ritual action, especially in communal singing! Through corporate gatherings the Creator empowers communal renewal, communal prayer, and a unified releasing of human tensions. Africans in early America, at work and worship, were empowered to create folksongs. Variously identified as "work songs, "melodic calls," "field hollers," and "field cries," these folksongs are the basic foundation for "shout songs," "jubilees," "spirituals," and other liturgical music. Communal singing is also foundational for *leitourgia*, "the work of the people" gathered and scattered. It was this early context that provided the arena for direct encounters with the Creator, in and through Jesus the Christ, under the

power of the Holy Spirit. In this and subsequent environments, faith traditions were shaped and nurtured, and optimism could grow out of and transcend the pessimism of life. As Howard Thurman declared, "It is optimism that uses the pessimism of life as raw material out of which it creates its own strength."[3] Creators of African-American liturgical forms had no idea that the "raw materials" of their enslaved environment would be shaped into tones that could create sufficient strength to encircle the globe.

## Liturgical Music Forms in the Invisible Institution

The sparse and reluctant attempts of slaveholders to provide religious instruction for the slaves are now generally well known. Objections to evangelization offered by slaveholders were many and varied, but none was quite as anti-Christian as the fear that instructions leading to baptism would force the planter to emancipate their slaves! After six of the colonial legislatures passed laws (by 1706) declaring that baptism did not alter the status of the newly evangelized slaves, other problems emerged for the slaveholder. Two of the many incredible concerns were the claim to equality in communal fellowship that a baptized slave would have, and that Christianity would ruin slaves by making them "bold and cocky" ("sassy" as understood by later African-American communities)! While some of the enslaved Africans might have known of these and other objections, there was an urgency to engage in ritual actions necessary to create and sustain community bonding. The best possible option would

[3]Howard Thurman, *Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain of the Negro Spirituals* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 56.

be to "Steal Away" to private places and allow their primal worldviews and faith experiences to shape appropriate rituals. This secret worshiping space would later be called "Invisible Institutions." The label "invisible" provides an affirmation of the clandestine or "invisible nature of events where mutual relationships, worldviews, behavior patterns, and social and political actions were 'officially constituted by slaves.' "[4]

Musical forms (genres) that emerged in brush harbors, hidden cabins and other clandestine settings, and later in "praise houses" and other visible places of African-American worship, provide key interpretations for the total human experience of a people oppressed and marginalized by systemic racism. Early genres of liturgical music that evolved in separate worshiping spaces are identified as spirituals, meter (or metered hymns) and other improvised hymns. Other musical forms and styles that evolved in visible places were "praise music," and all forms of gospel music (traditional, modern and contemporary). In time, hymns and anthems by African Americans were composed and presented as liturgical offerings to God. The timeline below is a graphic representation of approximate time periods and a natural overlapping of musical genres, thus indicating a continuation of genres and foundational connections between genres.[5] Categories of gospel genres may vary.

1619: African Chants, worksongs, field hollers, etc.
1750s-1760s Spirituals (religious slave songs)
1770s: Metered hymns; "Dr. Watts's" style

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[4]Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 36. See 36-49 for a fuller account of the "Invisible Institution."

[5]See Costen's detailed timeline published in *This Far By Faith: An African American Resource for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 18.

1800s: Devotional period emerges; continues today especially among Baptists

1801: Published Hymnal by Richard Allen; evidence of newly composed texts by Allen; 1816, inauguration of published hymnals by African-Americans

1906: Congregational praise songs (and testimonies) among Pentecostals

1919-1949: Traditional gospel songs; 1932 gospel choirs in some churches

1950s-1960s: Golden age of gospel

1969: Modern gospel; spectacular display of choirs, e.g., Edwin Hawkins

1975-2000: Contemporary gospel forms continually evolve

## African-American Spirituals

Spirituals are the earliest religious folk songs created spontaneously, nurtured, and transmitted through the creative oral process of Africans in America. Folk songs by nature are oral expressions created and claimed by the community rather than by individuals. Such songs are always "in process of becoming." Wherever they are sung at any moment in time, new meanings unfold according to existential conditions; therefore, one song could have many meanings. As it is with other folk songs, there were certain factors which shape this tradition: (1) continuity which links the past with existential situations in the present; (2) variations which spring from the creativity of the group, and the needs of local situations; and (3) the selection by the community, which helps determine the forms and styles in which the music survives. During oral transmissions communal folk singers were not bound by pre-

scribed, musical customs or "original" versions, since communal needs and instincts serve as a guide for the reshaping of the earliest productions.

Spirituals are the largest genre of slave songs published in early collections.[6] Since a majority of the slave creators of the spiritual during the earliest period of their development had not received religious instructions from the Christian European colonizers, nor were all adherents of the Christian faith, many of the religious inferences were probably from African primal worldviews. It has been determined that some of the religious phrases, biblical names, and terms in spirituals function as masks and symbols, reflective of the African poetic way of concealing criticism, sending coded messages and getting at the root of existential life.[7] Likewise, many so-called secular folk songs have a deeply religious import. However, slave songs are considered religious in the sense that they are concerned about life as experienced by the enslaved community. It is apparent that with exposure to Christianity and acceptance of the faith, enslaved Africans incorporated biblical terminology both to recall stories and to use as coded messages for themselves. Spirituals are undoubtedly the foundation upon which other African-American liturgical music forms have evolved.

Many spirituals were composed during worship as a result of the "enchanting and mystical powers of music" in the delivery style of the African-American folk preacher. William C. Turner notes:

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[6]See William F. Allen, Charles Ware, and Lucy Garrison, comp., *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York, 1867; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1971).

[7]John Lovell Jr., *The Forge and the Flame: The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1972), 45-46.

> Musicality expresses that which is beyond the literal word, it takes rational content and fires the imagination.... [A]t the point of celebration all that has been generated in the cerebral process is offered up in the moment of exultation.[8]

Turner advances the theory that Black preaching, filled with drama and musicality, has performative power that is expected to move people and cause reaction. The response of the people can be singing, humming, saying amen—all of which reflects the power manifested in "musical" preaching. Building upon his thesis with similar occurrences today in some Pentecostal settings, one can understand how songs can be created during these moments. Musical phrases and texts from the preacher's sermon are often reiterated by the congregation and additional lines added. In some instances the congregation might respond to some oft-repeated musical phrase of the preacher, adding words of belief or commitment in musical phrases to a homiletical request. Thus, a new song is born! The test of the ultimate shape and longevity of a song depends upon further use by the congregation or community as a "spiritual" form of liturgical music.

Eileen Southern refers to another process that leads to the shaping of "homiletical spirituals." This form originates with the folk preacher during worship and the new song is taught to the congregation by the preacher or a designated deacon.[9] In addition to this process, some preachers, under the power of the Holy Spirit, have led the shaping of a spiritual during the preaching moment. Spirituals originating in the emotionally charged atmosphere of the worship service have been

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[8]William C. Turner, "The Musicality of Black Preaching: A Phenomenology," *The Journal of Black Sacred Music* 2 (Spring 1988): 22.

[9]Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 189.

called "preaching spirituals" by modern writers.[10]

The simple, unencumbered form of the spirituals promotes contemplative and imaginative thought and facilitates reinterpretation in subsequent settings. The uniqueness of African-American spirituals is also located in the poetic imagination of the African-American creators. Poetic expressions that appeared to be "otherworldly" are found to be commentaries on contemporary circumstances. Their global appeal includes all of these factors plus their simplicity, depth of sincerity, and capacity to stir a communal sense of belonging among singers and listeners.

Clearly the experience of human suffering, the desire for freedom, and attempts to escape from the harshness of slavery also helped shape the theology and practices of worship. Long before attempts were made to record the evolution of slave worship practices, the music of people in bondage was acknowledged. The corporate sounds of African chants, cries and hollers, and work songs could be heard from fields of cotton, sugar cane, rice, and tobacco, as well as from cabins. The singing of individuals rang from plantation houses and other places of work. In the limited "free time" allowed, African people created their own communities as they danced, sang and listened to folk tales by the plantation *griots*.

## Meaning and Relevancy

Like many of the songs of African people in diaspora, spirituals functioned as a practical means for emotional and physical release, a conduit for the expression of deepest feelings and longings. But this is not their only focus. These are also musical settings of prayers to Almighty God who sees and knows all things, and is "always on time." They are petitions and inter-

[10]Ibid., 189.

cessions and cries, sometimes from the wilderness and at times from mountaintops. Religious themes variously identified by numerous scholars as communal expressions can be summarized as follows:[11]

1. A need for radical and immediate social change;
2. The ultimate power in Almighty God, with Jesus as the divine deliverer of humanity, from all forms of bondage, whether human enslavement, fiery furnace, the belly of a whale, blindness;
3. The corporate and individual need to be immersed in the boundless power of God, and then emerging into everyday existence, invigorated and armored and empowered by God's power;
4. Vivid, imaginative and poetic minds so gifted that a "turn of a phrase" or a shift of an accent by singers could vary the message in such a way that only the intended community could understand;
5. Faith, hope, inspiration, and assurance tonally articulated in such a way that only the intended community or group can understand meanings;
6. Problems and thoughts stated in such a way that the singing community is empowered to talk about the problem and receive inspiration from each other and from the ultimate power of God in Jesus the Christ;

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[11]See especially Lovell, *Forge and the Flame*, 223-293; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 25-37; Christa K. Dixon, *Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1953); Hildred Roach, *Black American Music: Past and Present*, 2d ed. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1992), 23-36; Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 33-63.

7. Life, death, praise, promise, protest and healing, expressed in aspects of nature (e.g., inchworm and boll weevil), as well as human inventions (e.g., steam boat, railroad, train, and engine); and
8. Beliefs about the triune God, largely influenced by the antebellum African-American preacher who stressed the importance of each person as a child of God.

## Spirituals in a Global Context

During the late nineteenth century spirituals were heard, sung, read about, and talked about outside of the United States. An examination of one published source provides evidence of what might have been sung in some African-American liturgical spaces, and also serves as the first liturgical document compiled by an African American. Published in 1801, this is the work of Richard Allen, founder and first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who "regarded it as a part of his duty to make a collection of hymns for the use of his congregation."[12] *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister* was Allen's first attempt to provide a hymnal for his worshiping congregation.[13] A second (enlarged) edition was printed the same year.

There are only a few spirituals in these collections. However, there is some indication in the hymns chosen as to the kind of materials that were used by African-American congregations as a poetic source for creating spirituals during worship. Eileen Southern notes that the hymn, "Behold the Awful Trumpet Sounds," (number ten in Allen's first hymnal)

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[12]Charles S. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, DC, 1935), 113-114.

[13]Richard Allen, ed., *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors* (Philadelphia: T. L. Plowman, 1801).

might have furnished the "poetic timber for any number of spirituals with its themes of Christians preparing for the Judgment Day and its vividly drawn motifs: of the trumpet sounding to raise the sleeping dead and call 'the nations underground.'"[14] The Allen hymnal was not widely recognized as an important document in the history of African-American church music. We are indebted to the pioneering scholarly work of Eileen Southern[15] who brought to the attention of hymnologists Richard Allen's position among the pioneers who included camp meeting songs and "wandering refrains" in published hymnals.[16]

Assumptions as to origins and a brief listing of spirituals were published in subsequent publications, notably *Slave Songs of the United States*,[17] which aroused hundreds of interested readers and music lovers. Following the Civil War, a number of church organizations dedicated themselves to the education of the newly-freed African Americans. Fisk University, established in Nashville, Tennessee, by the Congregational Church, utilized the musical gift of nine singers to raise money for the institution. The initial repertoire of the touring "Fisk Jubilee Singers" in 1871 did not include spirituals that the students sang during chapel. Two spirituals later included on the program were received enthusiastically and provided the momentum for additional spirituals. By the end of the year, the Singers had not only gained national recognition but also became the inspiration for other

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[14]Eileen Southern, "Hymnals of the Black Church," in *The Black Christian Worship Experience*, rev. and enl., ed. Melva W. Costen and Darius Swann (Atlanta: The ITC Press, 1992), 131.

[15]Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 75-80.

[16]Ibid., 79. See also introductory materials in the reprint of *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Philadelphia: Mother Bethel African American Episcopal Church, 1987) and Jon Michael Spencer, *Black Hymnody* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

[17]William F. Allen, Charles P. Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: A. Simpson, 1867; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1971).

African-American institutions to utilize touring choirs not only to raise money, but to publicize their viable existence as educational institutions.

In April of 1873, the "Fisk Jubilee Singers" carried the spirituals (in concert) to the continent of Europe. This initiated global recognition for the excellent musical quality and musical genus of an enslaved African people. At first the singing was viewed as a form of entertainment, related to the eighteenth-century antecedents of "minstrel songs" and "Ethiopian Minstrelsy" currently in vogue.[18] The formal settings of the concerts, and the "polished" European and Euro-American choral standards imposed on the singers added a new dimension to the function of the sacred and soulful outpouring of the origin of the spirituals. Nevertheless, the outpouring of sacred encounters of bonded African-American people exuded a power that touched the souls and stirred the emotions of people, regardless of ethnicity. The spirituals also brought to the world a more effective pronouncement of the reality of harshness of American slavery experienced by a people who honed and shaped their God-given musical talents despite the odds. Through concretized spirituals, a new movement was established for the freedom and rehabilitation of African peoples on the African continent and in diaspora.

With the addition of similar tours by the "Hampton University Singers," the "Tuskegee Choir," and singing groups from other historic Black Colleges and Universities, the late 1870s through the early twentieth century can be considered a period of "Black sacred music revolution" in a large segment of the world. This "revolution" initiated by singing groups was further advanced by individual African-American concert artists who toured America and Europe. Over a peri-

[18]Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 89.

od of ten to twelve years, the singing of spirituals had become a world phenomenon. Lovell notes: "Like the songs they sang, they started a conflagration for freedom which spread around the world."[19]

During the decade of the 1890s the Bohemian composer, Antonin Dvorak, became the director of the National Conservatory in New York. It was here that he met Harry T. Burleigh, the distinguished African-American singer, who introduced him to a wide spectrum of African-American folksongs. Dvorak is noted for his observation that the future music of the United States must be founded upon what is called the Negro melodies.

> This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition developed in the United States....These are the folksongs of America, and your composers must turn to them....In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate, melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay, or what will you say.[20]

Dvorak's focus on a Nationalistic school of music did awaken interest in folksongs among composers of this time, and led to the founding of the Wa-Wan Press in 1901 for the purpose of publishing compositions by American composers. Unfortunately, as Eileen Southern notes, there are no African-American composers represented in the Wa-Wan Press catalogue![21] However, among the list of Black Nationalist composers who consciously turned to the folk music of African

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[19]Lovell, *Forge and Flame*, 407.

[20]Antonin Dvorak, "Dvorak on Negro Melodies," *Musical Record* No. 378 (July 1893), 13. Reprinted from the *New York World Herald* (25 May 1893).

[21]Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 268.

Americans as a source of inspiration are Harry T. Burleigh, Will Marion Cook, James Weldon Johnson, J. Rosamond Johnson, Clarence Cameron White, R. Nathaniel Dett, William L. Dawson, William Grant Still, John W. Work II, Frederick J. Work, John W. Work III, Hall Johnson, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (born in England of African and British parentage), Undine Smith Moore, and Margaret Jacob Bond.

The global explosion of the spirituals also affected liturgical music in African-American congregations. This story begins with African-American Episcopalians who introduced the use of "trained choirs" and pipe organs in worship in the 1820s. By 1830, many progressive urban congregations had introduced choral singing in worship services. Some congregations found it difficult to accept the idea of allowing a trained choir to assume the major responsibility for music, especially with the desire for unified expressions involving the congregation. In many instances the use of spirituals and "encroaching Africanisms" in worship led to denominational resolutions forbidding the singing of spirituals in worship.[22] Nevertheless, spirituals were sung in worship, and a large number of African-American Christians continued to improvise songs that were included in the spiritual repertoire of touring choirs.

By the end of the nineteenth century, African-American touring choir members who had experienced the reception of spirituals across America and around the world returned to local congregations. They brought with them a universal acceptance of spirituals and appropriate ways to make choral singing a viable part of worship. This new generation of col-

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[22]For a detailed account of the response of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, see Ibid., 128-130.

lege-educated church leaders and congregants also brought a significant repertoire of anthems by non-African-American musicians whose music could be taught from music notation to an evolving cadre of music readers. Thus choral singing by trained choirs was firmly established in numerous congregations, due in part to global exposure of African-Americans spirituals to an appreciative global audience.

By the mid 1940s there were over five hundred collections of original spirituals, with about six thousand independent spirituals already catalogued, and an accurate reminder from Lovell that the list is not complete.[23] With the "hymnal explosion" of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the inclusion of spirituals, it is fair to say that spirituals continue to be one of the most significant musical genres used liturgically throughout the world.

There is hardly a continent where African-American spirituals have not been sung, talked about, researched, and written about since the "Fisk Jubilee Singers" initially introduced them to the Western world. They have been translated into numerous languages and are frequently sung in the original language of the people who created them as this writer has observed in travels around the world. Quite often there are questions, not about the theology of the spirituals, but about the language (the dialect) in some of the anthem arrangements. The answer always leads to an appreciative discussion of the social environment out of which these songs emerged.[24]

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[23]Lovell, *Forge and Flame*, 19. This entire chapter is extremely helpful in clarifying and invalidating previous publications by several white researchers who attempted to negate the existence of authentic African-American Spirituals as a unique genre.

[24]This happened during a sabbatical in 1991. A Presbyterian Church choir in Zimbabwe asked the writer's assistance in their preparation to sing Dawson's arrangement of "Soon-Ah-Will Be Done-a-Wid de Trouble's ob de World" for a national choral competition festival. They had learned the entire song quite accurately using Latin syllables, awaiting my arrival for help and an explanation of the "Negro dialect."

One of the earliest and most thorough examinations of the biblical and theological background of 273 spirituals is the work of Christa Dixon, a German woman, whose doctoral dissertation, *Wesen ünd Wandel Geistlicher Volksleider: Negro Spirituals*, has been subsequently published.[25] Her examination of the King James Version of biblical sources of the texts of spirituals are provided in English, thus facilitating comparisons by American scholars. Since this publication, Dixon has published numerous articles, plus a book translated into the English language, *Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song*.[26] This book is used globally to help singers of spirituals understand the meanings of difficult song text. Dixon contends that:

> An explanation of even a few of the spiritual texts opens up new and unexpected dimensions of understanding about how God's Word can become incarnate, take on flesh, in human- and inhuman-situations, even today.... Spirituals are as faith engendering and life-affirming for us in our time as they were for the community of believers that originally created them.[27]

Of special interest are compilations of spirituals by Africans, most notably Alexander Sandilands, *A Hundred and Twenty Negro Spirituals*,[28] who indicates that these songs were

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[25]Christa Dixon,*Wesen ünd Wandel Gestlicher Volkslieder: Negro Spirituals* (Wuppertal: Jugenddienst-Verlag, 1967).

[26]Christa K. Dixon, *Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

[27]Ibid., x.

[28]Alexander Sandilands, ed., *A Hundred and Twenty Negro Spirituals* (Morija, Basutoland, South Africa: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1951).

selected with a view toward their being used by Africans in Africa, especially African teachers, pupils, ministers, and congregations. Ballanta Taylor of Sierra Leone helped to provide an interpretation of Spirituals in America and in his homeland (Sierra Leone). Fela Sowande (Lagos, Nigeria) arranged and published numerous spirituals both in a collection and in individual arrangements.[29] Interpretations of spirituals were prepared by Léopold Sédar Senghor, president of Senegal, in an essay: "La Poésie Négro-Américaine."[30] Spirituals were sung in the festival competition in Nairobi, Kenya, and were taught and sung by choirs led by Jester Hairston in Mali, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, The Cameroun, and Senegal.

The numerous publications from other countries that provide further evidence of the spirituals as a global phenomena are too numerous to cite. The most definitive work on the history and total effect of the spirituals in a global perspective to date is the work by John Lovell, previously cited. Global publications included in his chapter, "Development of the Spiritual as a World Phenomenon," need not be repeated here.[31] It is quite clear that whether one is singing: "Descens Moise" (French); "Geh hin, Moses" (German); "Baja, Moises" (Spanish); "At ide Moj-zis" (Czechoslovakian); "Musa Teremka" (Swahili); "Joijj el Mozes" (Hungarian); or "Musa Teremka" (Kikuyu), one will recognize the noble yearning for freedom in "Go Down Moses" that transcends race and religion!

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[29]See especially Fela Sowande, *Six Negro Spirituals* (New York: Chappell, 1950).

[30]See Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté, vol. 1, Négritude et Humanisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), 104-[121].

[31]Lovell, *Forge and Flame*, 402-508.

## African-American Gospel Music

Amidst an era where various styles of African-American gospel music are so prominent, it is not always believable that this genre has deep roots in the liturgical music and preaching of slaves. This twentieth-century genre was born of a formerly enslaved people moving from rural to urban communities where new situations and new environments fostered and nurtured new musical sounds and religious expressions. The new environment of African Americans was broadened to embrace the economic and spiritual realities of recently freed and uprooted African Americans seeking refuge in an "imagined promised land." Religious and musical traditions from the past found fertile ground in urban settings for developing new sounds to embrace existential realities. As they continued the process of re-shaping concepts of Christianity to meet their faith and survival needs, African Americans created a musical genre and a style of expressing the "Good News" out of the "stuff of their environment." The African roots of jubilees, field hollers, moans, groans, spirituals, blues, jazz and ragtime found their "free" home in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Holiness, Pentecostal, and Sanctified churches. In these environments the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and the intensity of human responses found expression in music that would later transcend its liturgical birth.

Black Gospel music as a *genre* is a sacred African-American freely expressed perception of the good news of Jesus Christ as experienced or envisioned initially by an individual and offered as a shared experience for the community. Although rooted in the African-American spiritual tradition and other oral forms of African-American music, gospel music differs

in that individual authors of gospel texts can be identified. Black Gospel music is also a *style*—a manner of musical expression and performance. Any form of music (song, hymn, anthem, aria, oratorio, cantata or instrumental work) can be "gospelized" i.e., recast by utilizing the improvisatory skills and techniques according to the needs and desires of the leader or community. A "gospelized" song might be expressed slowly and soulfully with deep meaning, or joyfully with great vibrancy. In both instances, the presentation is enhanced and intensified by increased emphasis on vocal rhythms, a calculated use of vocal textures with percussive, bodily accompaniment. The musical structures and style of gospel music are a continuum of early African-American liturgical singing, which is truly *leitourgia*, the "work of the people." The call-and-response structure is evidenced as well as an intentional re-working or re-creation of existing melodies, harmonies, and rhythms, with all or a majority of the worshipers participating fully.

Historically, gospel music is an aesthetic form that can be appropriated from a hymn or spiritual, or it can be composed as a new song performed in a variety of gospel styles. The late Pearl Williams-Jones, an extremely talented musician, and specialist in the performance of the gospel style noted:

> The performing process is so intuitive as to be almost unteachable...there are two basic sources from which gospel singing has derived its aesthetic ideals: the free-style 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 expression, bodily movement, charismatic energy, cadence, tonal range and timbre.[32]

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[32]Pearl Williams-Jones, "Performance Style in Black Gospel Music," in *Black People and Their Culture: Selected Writings from the African Diaspora* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 115-116.

As to the origin of the term "gospel music," we must turn to nineteenth-century American urban revival campaigns, conducted by two Euro-Americans: evangelist, Dwight L. Moody; and campaign music director, Ira D. Sankey. A slogan used to advertise the arrival of the evangelist and musician highlighted the centrality of the gospel: Dr. Moody will preach the gospel and Mr. Sankey will sing the gospel! According to Ira Sankey, the phrase, "to sing the gospel" was coined in Sunderland, England in 1873,[33] yet it was the American environment in which gospel hymnody had its initial impact. Precursor Christian music with similar gospel hymn elements were songs intended for America's rapidly growing (Euro-American) Sunday Schools, and the hymns of Lowell Mason and Thomas Hasting. Other Euro-American hymnists of this era are noted here with one or two of their hymns that remain popular in African-American worship:

| | |
|---|---|
| William B. Bradley: | Sweet Hour of Prayer |
| | Just As I Am |
| Robert Lowrey: | Shall We Gather at the River |
| Fanny Crosby: | Blessed Assurance |
| | Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior |
| Fannie S. Hawks: | I Need Thee Every Hour |
| Joseph Scriven: | What A Friend We Have in Jesus |
| Elizabeth Prentiss: | More Love to Thee |

The first published collection incorporating "gospel" in the title was *Gospel Songs: A Choice Collection of Hymns and Tunes, New and Old for Gospel Meetings, and Sunday School*,

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

(1874) by Philip P. Bliss. A second collection followed the next year with Sankey and Bliss as co-editors: *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs* (1875). The texts of the gospel songs of the revival meetings that popularized them were simple and to the point. Needless to say, African Americans frequented these revivals and contributed greatly to the fervent sound and spiritual depth of the singing!

The publication of songs by an African American decidedly cast in the African-American spiritual, pre-gospel is the 1893 collection, *Harp of Zion* by William Henry Sherwood.[34] Sherwood appears to have been the first composer to take advantage of the return to the roots of the freed slaves that eventually flocked to Azusa Street.[35] One of Sherwood's compositions, "The Church Is Moving On," was included in *Spirituals Triumphant, Old and New*, published by the National Baptist Convention Publishing Board in 1927, provides some evidence of the popularity of this song.

The title of the first published songbook of the African American National Baptist Convention termed "gospel" was *Gospel Pearls*, which indicates that leaders in the Black Baptist Church accepted the practice of conveying the gospel through song. Prior to this publication are the works of Charles Albert Tindley, who incorporated Black-folk imagery, which interpreted the oppression African Americans faced as they settled in the cities of the North. Tindley is considered the first gospel hymn writer who had considerable influence on Black Gospel songwriters in particular (notably Thomas A. Dorsey) and Black Gospel songs in general. Tindley began to copyright his music in the early 1900s, and in 1901 sponsored periodic concerts of church songs many of which he composed himself. In 1916 he

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

[35]Ibid.

published a collection, *New Songs of Paradise*,[36] which, due to its popularity, led to a seventh edition in 1941.

The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., founded in 1880, established a music department in 1900, and singers were permitted and encouraged to introduce religious music at annual meetings. The publication of *Gospel Pearls* in 1921 by the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention marks a significant event in the history of African-American church music. In the Preface of this edition, the Music Committee expressed concern that by its name ("Gospel Pearls") "tells the story, coming as it does to supply the present day needs of the Sunday Schools, churches, conventions, and other religious gatherings with pearls of songs suitable for worship, devotion, evangelistic services, funeral, patriotic, and other special occasions."[37]

The musical streams that have joined in the creation of gospel music include: the call-and-response traditions of Africans and African Americans; the slow, meter-hymns of Black congregations; the driving rhythms and percussive instrumental accompaniment of African-American Pentecostal storefront churches, as well as blues, ragtime, jazz. Additionally, the gospel music tradition has been enhanced by efforts of such composers and publishers such as William Henry Sherwood, Charles Albert Tindley, Lucie Campbell, Thomas A. Dorsey, and Roberta Martin.[38] Charles Tindley, preacher, songwriter, publisher of songs and sermons, is considered the pivotal force in the development of composed and published

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[36]Charles A. Tindley, *New Songs of Paradise* (Philadelphia: Paradise Publishing Company, 1916).

[37]Willa A. Townsend, Director, *Gospel Pearls* (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, National Baptist Convention, USA, 1921), Preface.

[38]See especially Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound,* 5-47 and Bernice Johnson Reagon, ed., *We'll Understand It Better By and By* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 3-19.

African-American gospel songs. His compositions formed the foundation upon which genre is developed. Lucie Campbell is credited with creating and nurturing a rich musical environment within the African-American Baptist denomination. As a major songwriter and organizer, Lucie Campbell served as a crucial link among a network of new composers.[39]

Chicago is often regarded as the central place of the perpetuation of Gospel music because by the 1920s its churches had produced many celebrated writers and singers. It was during this decade that Thomas A. Dorsey, who is acknowledged as the "Father of Gospel Music," moved from blues to the style of religious music, which he called the "gospel blues." Building upon his exposure to the music of Tindley and the singing delivery style of W. M. Nix, Dorsey contended that the meaning of the message is enhanced by altering the rhythmic values of notes in order to emphasize parts of the texts, much like the musical aesthetics employed in the singing and playing of blues.[40] By the spring of 1932, two apparent forms of gospel blues had emerged and were becoming acceptable modes of music in old-line Black churches: solo and choral. Dorsey led the way in shaping, notating, and printing solo music. His composition, "Take My Hand Precious Lord," prompted by the death of his wife and son, also led to a recasting of his spiritual journey. He was tempted first to return to the blues, but instead he found a resolution to his religious conflict by turning the use of blues

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[39]Ibid., 15. Also Horace C. Boyer, "Lucie E. Campbell," in *We'll Understand It Better*, 81-119 and Charles Walker, "Lucie E. Campbell Williams," in *We'll Understand It Better*, 121-138.

[40]For a detailed account of this style see Michael W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 47-90.

idioms into music for worship. A prolific composer, Dorsey wrote nearly one thousand songs, and published more that one half of them. In acknowledging his contribution to the music of Black America, Eileen Southern notes:

> Although Tindley's songs inspired him [Dorsey], he wrote in a different style. To the religious intensity of the Tindley songs he added the melodic and harmonic patterns of the blues, and his experience as a blues-jazz pianist was reflected in the musical density and improvisatory nature of his accompaniments.[41]

## African-American Gospel Music As a Distinctive Genre and Style

During the decade of the 1920s-1930s, certain traditions of gospel music were established that served to define it as a distinctive *genre* that embodies a distinctive style of musical performance. As a genre African-American gospel music—Black gospel music—is a twentieth-century, freely improvised musical expression of the good news in song, according to the intensity and Black music aesthetics of contemporary African-American culture. Inherent to the shaping of Black Gospel music is the concept of African-American folk rhetoric, folk expression, bodily movement, charismatic energy, cadence, tonal range, and timbre.

As a distinctive *style* of performance, gospel music reflects the holistic understanding of the importance of the body *and* soul in spiritual expressions. Performance practices will vary according to the manner of interpretation by the song leader and the freedom of worshiping community. Mellonee

[41]Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 461.

Burnim notes that "at the heart of the Black aesthetic are the acceptance of, and more importantly, the expectation of individual interpretation. Therefore, within the boundaries of control there is still freedom."[42] Nevertheless, this is a distinctive "gospel music vocabulary" and characteristic aesthetics that help determine the manner of delivery.

By the end of the 1930s, two categories of gospel performing groups had emerged: first, all-male gospel quartets who sang a cappella in "barbershop" style, adding percussive rhythmical accompaniment by slapping their thighs and snapping their fingers; and second, all-female gospel choruses dressed in choir robes or evening attire, and singing to the accompaniment of the piano. Both groups attracted large audiences, and despite the emphasis in either style of performance or attire, the fervor and seriousness of the singing transformed the audience into a congregation or community of faith.[43]

The concept of gospel music as entertainment beyond the liturgical environment reached its peek in 1936 with Thomas Dorsey's initiating one of the first "battle of songs" between two highly respected female groups: the "Roberta Martin Singers" and "Sallie Martin Singers." With a charge for admission fee, a new tradition of paying for African-American sacred songs was firmly established. The success of paid concerts and the production of paid professional gospel singers' music created a performance mode, which continues into the new millennium.

As a stylistic form, African-American Gospel music in the decades from the1920s through the 1940s is characterized by the following:

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[42]Mellonee Victoria Burnim, "The Black Gospel Music Tradition: Symbol of Ethnicity" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1982).

[43]See Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 49-109 passim.

1. Earliest texts are quite often subjective and filled with hope, thanksgiving, and lamentation, with acknowledgement of the blessings received or promised; some texts speak objectively of the Triune God, with a strong focus on Jesus, the second person of the Trinity.
2. Improvised manner of the style of delivery is as important as what is sung. Melodies are freely improvised at the will of singers, often with spoken vocal injections and chanted testimonies.
3. Melodies often utilize flatted thirds and sevenths, demonstrating a close affinity with the blues.
4. The use of marked syncopation and highly improvised, instrumental accompaniment that serves as a driving force of its production and as an integral part of the performance.
5. Basically strophic in form, tending to be sixteen and thirty-two measures in length.
6. A careful utilization of techniques to "fill in" measures of rests, such as arpeggios, passing tones, runs, chromatics, or glissandi.

Horace Boyer adds to these observations his own experience as a gospel pianist and theorist *par excellence*:

> A gospel piano style had been developed based on the 'rhythm section concept' in which the middle of the piano is ordered to support the singers by doubling the vocal line in harmony; the left bottom position of the keyboard serves as the bass fiddle, and the right upper portion acts as a solo trumpet or flute, playing countermelodies and 'fill' material at rhythmic breaks.[44]

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[44]Ibid., 50.

Various keyboard techniques have evolved over the years, making the role of gospel instrumentalists—especially pianists—more technically demanding. With a few exceptions gospel pianists (now keyboardists) have tended to have the gift to play "by ear." It is of interest that gospel music keyboard techniques are now being taught as part of music degree programs and in nationally acclaimed gospel music workshops, thereby enhancing the skills of music readers and those who structure chords and melodic lines according to the sound that they hear.

Gospel concerts, whether in the sanctuary, hall, or public auditorium often involves the inclusion of a brief sermon encompassing a scriptural text or a personal witness prior to the singing. A repeating of a portion of the song, commonly called a "reprise," after congregational or audience applause is also a common occurrence during concerts.

## Gospel Music As a Global Phenomenon

Although many performing gospel groups were known primarily among African-American audiences, the availability of recordings facilitated the recognition of this form of gospel music. It is clear by the early 1930s that gospel music had moved outside the sacred walls of store-front African-American worship and sacred concerts in African religious gatherings. In addition to gospel quartets and larger choral groups, this sacred music migrated with African Americans to the West coast, and around the world. Migration from the church into secular settings is attributed to Sister Rosetta Tharpe (Rosetta Nubin) who sang on a Cab Calloway show at the Cotton Club (in New York) in 1938, and signed a recording contract with Decca Records, thus, becoming the

first gospel singer to record for a major commercial company.[45] In December 1938, African-American gospel music was part of a secular concert entitled "From Spirituals to Swing at Carnegie Hall," which was a presentation of the Black tradition from African tribal music to Kansas City Jazz, and was produced by John Hammond, a Euro-American jazz enthusiast and record producer. This portion of the concert was labeled "Spirituals and Holy Roller Hymns," with performers Sister Rosetta Tharpe and "Mitchell's Christian Singers," a male quartet from Kinston, N.C.[46]

John Hammond also encouraged singers of gospel music to perform in nightclubs, a practice which the African-American Church considered inappropriate and blasphemous. However, with gospel music continually surfacing in nightclubs and theatres, some African-American worshiping congregations often looked upon this music with suspicion. In responding to this criticism, Clara Ward, leader of the famous "Ward (Gospel) Singers," maintained that her mission was to evangelize rather than entertain. As the earliest proponent of the "pop-gospel" style that emphasized showmanship, elaborate dresses and hairstyles, Ward wrote:

> Although perhaps there are many people who would not share my opinion on the subject, I now feel that God intended for his *[sic]* message not solely by those who attend churches, but also by the outsiders who in many cases never attend a house of worship.[47]

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[45]Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 464.
[46]Ibid., 465.
[47]Clara Ward, "How a Visit to the Holy Land Changed My Life," *Color* (May 1956): 15-17.

Mahalia Jackson, having experienced both the sacred setting of worship and the "worldly" setting of the nightclub, the latter of which was to supplement her income, acknowledged an important distinction between secular and sacred music in her comparison of gospel music and the blues:

> ...Blues are songs of despair; gospel songs are the songs of hope. When you are singing gospel you have a feeling there's a cure for what's wrong. When you're through with the blues you've got nothing to rest on.[48]

A voicing of an opposing position is heard from the Pop singer, Della Reese, who acknowledged the entertainment dimension and financial profit from her performances:

> We are not presented as holy singers; we are here to show that gospel is interesting music. We don't perform in nightclubs to save souls....I like a comfortable apartment, a healthy bank account and some good solid real estate.[49]

Any number of gospel music soloists shared the opinion of many African Americans that nightclubs were not appropriate for the singing of gospel music. However, some nightclub owners began to explore alternative strategies to encourage gospel singers to accept contracts with the club owner, basically geared toward financial remuneration. Thus, "gospel nightclubs" were established to attract the mounting interest of Euro-American teenagers who had little interest in the liturgical origin of the African-American style of gospel

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[48]Viv Broughton, *Black Gospel: An Illustrated History of the Gospel Sound* (New York: Poole, 1985), 37.

[49]"Gospel to Pop to Gospel" *Ebony* (July 1962), 107-112.

music. Clear evidence of the exposure and exploitation of African-American gospel music was a redefinition of the sound, rhythm, and ultimately the style of popular music in America and around the world, a matter discussed later.

By the 1920s two technological phenomena had expanded the sanctuary of this genre of African-American liturgical music: the radio and the record industry. Recordings of African-American gospel singers and preachers were available in the early 1920s. Major record companies recorded live performances in churches. Sunday morning radio broadcasts during the decades of the 1920s to the 1930s included the gospel singing recorded in Pentecostal and Baptist storefront churches, thereby ushering into the community, authentic African-American liturgy. By the late 1930s popular African-American groups such as the "Southernaires" and the "Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet" regularly appeared live on radio in fifteen-minutes segments. Thus, gospel music was made available outside of the church into the world, with the assistance of Black-owned record producers. In addition to gospel music, these companies recorded the new "secular" music—rhythm and blues—and billed both genres in a manner that positioned gospel music as a secular form.[50] A radio program called "Hootenanny" successfully introduced gospel music around the nation during the decade of the 1950s and 1960s.

Radio and record publicity continued as a means for the global spreading of gospel music until the advent and growing popularity of television. The one-hour national television program, "T.V. Gospel Time," not only broadened the non-liturgical venue of gospel music, but also provided an improvised "stage" upon which a "provisional" African-American

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[50]See Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

worshiping community could be viewed. The leader of a gospel group or a gospel soloist (featured for the day) who functioned more or less as preacher for the congregation (literally the "audience" functioning in that capacity.) During the "service" the guest host stirred the congregation with three to four songs. This Sunday morning series could be viewed in most locations before twelve noon, a time when African Americans are in their own churches, thus, viewing ratings were low and after two seasons, the program folded.[51]

## Gospel Music As Important Foundation for Popular Music

From its initial foundation as a liturgical music, gospel music developed into a complex form that embodies the totality of African-American culture, life, and history. Due to the popularity of the diverse forms of gospel music, African-American Christians and non-Christians recognized the power and magnetic effect of this style of music beyond worship. Thus, various marketing strategies were explored, and gospel music became a "big business" venture, even for some of the liturgical settings in which it started. One business strategy was to "showcase" gospel music in places where entertainment music was traditionally performed. In this context gospel music began to change, subtly at first, but overwhelmingly in the long run. As an "attraction," to be enjoyed by an audience, and the "message" that lies at the heart of gospel gave way to the "medium" of performance. According to the style of performance, many texts are hard to distinguish from texts of pop-singers. This form of commercialization has

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[51]Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 190.

led to a devaluation of gospel as a liturgical form. This is reflected in its usage in many places of the world.

Along with its rise in popularity, gospel music was exploited by the music industry to spawn new and emerging consumer markets. Portia Maultsby, ethnomusicologist/gospel music scholar observes:

> Repackaged and promoted as entertainment to a cross-cultural and non-Christian audience in nontraditional arenas, the spiritual message and cultural aesthetic of gospel were subordinated to the money-making interest of the music industry.[52]

The media contributed to this venture as a major arena for promotion and publicity. With the plethora of available recordings and support of the media, "the gospel sound and its beat led to appropriation of this music by purveyors of popular styles.[53] The major consumers were African-American teenagers who determined the performance of popular music as a quick and easy way to earn money. Maultsby identifies 1949 as the year that the term "rhythm and blues" was applied to all (post-World War II) forms of Black popular music, a term that was changed to "soul" in 1969. Through the 1970s, soul music was transformed into "funk" and "disco."[54]

Popular songs that incorporate the gospel sound, beat, feeling, and style have a "religious sound" based on aesthetic principles essential to African-American musical performance. Gospel singers who "cross-over" into popular song per-

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[52]Portia K. Maultsby, "The Impact of Gospel Music on the Secular Music Industry," in *We'll Understand It Better By and By*, 20.

[53]Ibid., 27.

[54]Ibid., 28.

formance, and are imitated by the popular music culture have facilitated this process. In addition to vocal techniques, timbres and delivery style, popular music idioms such as rhythm and blues, soul, and funk, have borrowed (and feasted upon) rhythms, improvisatory instrumental and vocal styles, emotional spirit and energy that are characteristic of gospel music. Each of these characteristics functioning simultaneously, or alone, continues to influence the music of America and the world. As these attributes combine and form new techniques and expressions, they are then "recycled" back into gospel music, and ultimately back into the African-American liturgical setting, reworked and returned to the secular environment. It could be said that the African unity of sacred and secular has returned for "testing" as a liturgical music form and style, was thrust into the world, and became the seed for the formation of new forms outside of the church. Artists who cross over from sacred to secular and secular to sacred are simply reminded that the world of the artificial dichotomy established by a culture has probably changed its mind about dichotomizing life!

The *Pop and Gospel* connection has reached out to and embraced a young African-American generation whose existential situation in a technological age differs greatly from any of the previous African-American liturgical periods. Numerous fears abound. There is a danger of an elusive faith grounding that is often unclear in texts composed by persons for whom monetary gain might be uppermost. Where texts are theologically well-grounded, the rhythm, beat, and melodic sound might overshadow the words. And there is concern that one day (soon and very soon) that gospel music will no longer belong to the church but to an increasingly large business corporation.

## Praise Music

A cultural practice of African Americans is to gather for worship and engage in a devotional period of song, scripture reading, and prayer. According to the oral tradition, this practice originated during clandestine gatherings of slaves in what was later called "Invisible Institutions." When "two or three" gathered and waited for others to assemble, an individual would assume the responsibility of leading a period of "devotions" involving those present in singing, praying, reading of scripture. Many of the songs were part of the communities' repertoire of spirituals, meter hymns or Euro-American hymns shaped in the unsupervised "post-camp meetings" of slaves during the "Second Awakening" (from 1780-1830). Their songs were freely composed by "stringing together" isolated lines from prayers, scriptures and Euro-American hymns, made longer by the addition of familiar choruses or the injecting of refrains between verses. This was later instituted as a normal practice in visible church gatherings as a prelude to the testimony service that followed.

The "devotional" tradition continues in rural communities particularly among Baptists and provides a deeply emotional African-American liturgical model that is best experienced rather than discussed! Ordinarily, devotional leaders, most often a deacon, begin this period of time with a lined-hymn, followed by alternating scripture readings, prayers, and a capella singing. As worshipers enter quietly, they assume an attitude of deep reverence, acknowledging the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Although this liturgical form has NOT been acknowledged by Euro-Americans as precursor to the twentieth-century

phenomenon identified as "Praise and Worship," many African Americans recognize the possibility of African-American roots. Of course, this liturgical period differed from the format and procedure of jubilant "praise services" today. This is not an attempt to force a historical foundation underneath a liturgical process that has similar features. However, such information would help African Americans avoid buying into a liturgical process from another culture simply because it is in vogue.

The Euro-American church music scholar, Donald Hustad, states that "Praise and Worship" originated with the Charismatic Renewal Movement.[55] In discussing the origin and nature of praise and worship music, Hustad acknowledges that "many of the best early examples were labeled 'author unknown'...and like the early American spirituals, many of them simply 'happened' in the fervor of public worship."[56] While this is only a "passing" acknowledgement of liturgical similarity, some African Americans admit a continuation of a form that facilitates a time of gathering. Others have simply adopted "praise choruses" as a NEW trend which helps set the momentum for worship.

Another more closely aligned liturgical "praise" form was nurtured in the spiritual womb of Pentecostalism, which burst forth under the leadership of African Americans during the Azusa Street Revival Movement in 1906. Unlike other American revivals, African Americans initiated this one with a major concern for persons becoming saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost), which depended upon one's personal experience of speaking in tongues. Although

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[55]Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 285.

[56]Ibid.

the singing of the congregation was central to other revivals, the spontaneous creation of songs "under the power of the Spirit," and the sincere singing styles were unusual for the early twentieth century. From this early period into the twenty-first century, "spirit filled" music has continually enhanced entire worship services. Perhaps the authentic in-dwelling and empowering Spirit which inspires the spontaneous creation of songs in Church of God in Christ services provides a distinguishing factor which separates the "stir-up-the-fire" efforts of some contemporary "praise and worship" teams from praise that is evoked in response to spiritual empowerment!

One basic element of "praise teams" that is similar to early forms of praise music in the Church of God in Christ is the use of the African gift of "call-and-response" (utilized in the shaping of spirituals and Dr. Watts's hymns). Characteristically, call-and-response songs shaped during worship do not have a contrasting stanza, but use of a refrain "in which the lead line would change with each call, while the congregation remained constant with the Litany in its response."[57] Quite often the leader reiterates the "call" as if to be assured that the congregation clearly heard it. Two examples are provided:

| | |
|---|---|
| Leader: Power! | L: Just like fi-re, |
| **Congregation: Power, Lord!** | **C: Shut up in my bones.** |
| Leader: Power! | L: Just like fi-re |
| **Congregation: Power, Lord!** | **C: Shut up in my bones** |
| Leader: We need your power! | L: Holy Ghost fi-re |
| **Congregation: Power, Lord!** | **C: Shut up in my bones** |
| Leader: We need your power! | L: Can't you feel the fi-re |
| **Congregation: Power, Lord!** | **C: Shut up in my bones** |
| Leader: Holy Ghost Power…! | L: Holy Ghost fi-re…! |

[57]Boyer, *How Sweet the Sound*, 17.

These and other songs of the Church of God in Christ, including the two well-known compositions by the founder, Charles H. Mason ("Yes, Lord!" and "I'm a Soldier in the Army of the Lord") are now an integral part of the liturgical music across many African-American denominations. This "sharing" began as part of the oral tradition as words and music were disseminated—by word of mouth, and continues in the Church of God in Christ Hymnal, *Yes, Lord!* published in 1982.[58]

Praise songs or praise choruses are basically brief settings of repetitive scriptural phrases led by a small group of song leaders or a "worship team" who facilitate congregational singing, often with the use of microphones (to amplify the voices of the leaders). Instrumentalists accompany the singing on keyboard(s), guitars, and drums. Texts are often projected on a screen so that the congregation's attention is centered in one place, and their hands are free for personal expressions (such as rhythmical clapping or raised in embodied prayer).

Many spirituals and such choruses as "He Is Lord" (identified in hymnals as "traditional"), "Alleluia" by Jerry Sinclair, popularized by Andraé Crouch, "I Love You Lord," "For He Alone Is Worthy," "I'm So Glad, Jesus Lifted Me," and "Thank You Lord" were part of African-American liturgical music before "Praise and Worship Music" became a popular identity for such songs. There are some who question the use of a plethora of short-phrase choruses because of the preoccupation with subjective materials, their limited theological expression of the faith and their potential limiting of doctrinal hymns for future generations. However, this form of music, whether considered a continuation of a previous

[58]See *Yes, Lord!* (Memphis, TN: The Church of God in Christ, 1982).

Africa-American liturgical style, might help engender joyful congregational involvement, if it is only a part of the total liturgical offerings for congregations. To adopt the name, "Praise and Worship," raises questions as to a congregation's perception of the totality of worship as the people's offering of praise, glory, and honor to the triune God. There is an urgency to remind worshipers that their response to God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ is not limited to momentary exuberance, but extends in mission, ministry, and service in the world.

## Liturgical Music: Looking Forward into the Future

The global landscape of praise in which African-American liturgical music is a vital part affirms a cross-cultural usage that continually broadens an awareness of the whole people of God. The uniqueness of African-American liturgical music and the major contributions it has made to music of the United States and the world, has been confirmed by Black scholars. Non-Blacks are slowly accepting this fact as part of total history as well. Western liturgical publications are gradually including more frequent acknowledgements of the existence of African American and other non-European liturgical music, but with uppermost caution.

The global exposure of spirituals brings joy and appreciation to the "unknown bards" who created, nurtured and transmitted them for the future. Wherever they are sung, they are offered to God as gifts from an oppressed people who never lost hope despite the many forms of injustice heaped upon them. To hear spirituals rendered with integrity in liturgies of the world-church provides hope for the future of these songs, especially when they are often avoided in local African-

American congregations and will need the nurturing of others. To participate in church-music conferences sponsored by African Americans and non-African Americans and recognize a large number of spirituals included in the repertoire (and adequately taught) provide hope for the survival of this music as a liturgical form. Perhaps the most significant observation is to hear young children in America and around the world sing so many of the spirituals that are within their theological understanding, and to hear them speak of the Spirit-filled slave communities that created them. The life of many spirituals appears to be endless. It is a joy to realize that where spirituals are incorporated into communal songs they maintain their liturgical connections.

The problem with any artistic creation of a people is that the original artists/creators have NO control over its usage nor its future. It is a historical fact that spirituals were often degraded by Euro-Americans who used them, nevertheless as "mere campfire songs" shaped by poor (ignorant) Black folks. Perhaps the opinion of these voices outside the context of Black worship helped shape the attitude of some African Americans who referred to spirituals as "cornfield ditties." This kind of music for many of the early Black church founders was the result of encroaching "Africanisms" in worship, and were to be avoided.[59] The era of historical recall and acceptance of the African heritage, which peaked during the Civil Rights Movement brought a new vibrancy to the acceptance of artistic forms of the past!

The global explosion of gospel songs, however, cannot share this same compliment. Since its introduction to the pop-

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[59]See Daniel Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Church, 1891) for a detailed documentation of liturgical practices in the A.M.E. Church.

ular culture, this liturgical genre has been subjected to numerous adjustments and opinions. In addition to its use as a form of entertainment, the gospel sound, clothed in liturgical garments (church choir robes), is being used to advertise products such as chicken, toothpaste, and soft drinks (to name a few).

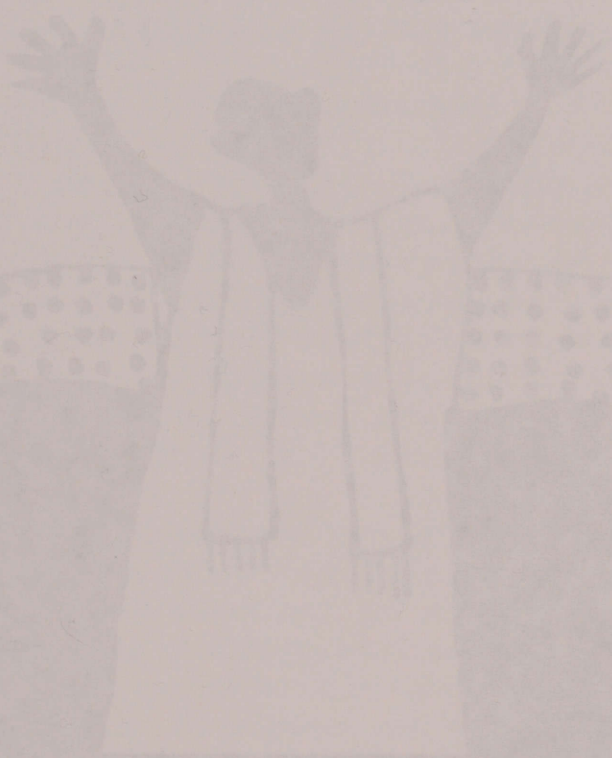
In ecumenical worship services, some of the traditional gospel songs by such composers as Thomas Dorsey, Charles A. Tindley, and Lucie E. Campbell, are used liturgically. Modern and contemporary gospel songs are more difficult to incorporate as congregational songs, with the exception of songs by Richard Smallwood, James E. Moore Jr. and Isaiah Jones, and eucharistic settings by Leon C. Roberts, Grayson Warren Brown, Clarence Joseph Rivers, and Lena McLin. It is a joy to observe many gospel settings in denominational hymnals, which will enhance their liturgical usage. Gospel choirs are occasionally invited to help lead congregational singing, thus providing authentic use of gospel songs in worship. As indicated earlier, control over the use of African-American liturgical music cannot be controlled out of the African-American worship context. This enhances the need for African Americans to contextualize musical offerings with authentic care. In keeping with its circuitous route from worship into the world and back again to worship settings, African Americans are beginning to recast musical offerings into traditional worship usage so that the songs are slowly losing their entertainment mode.

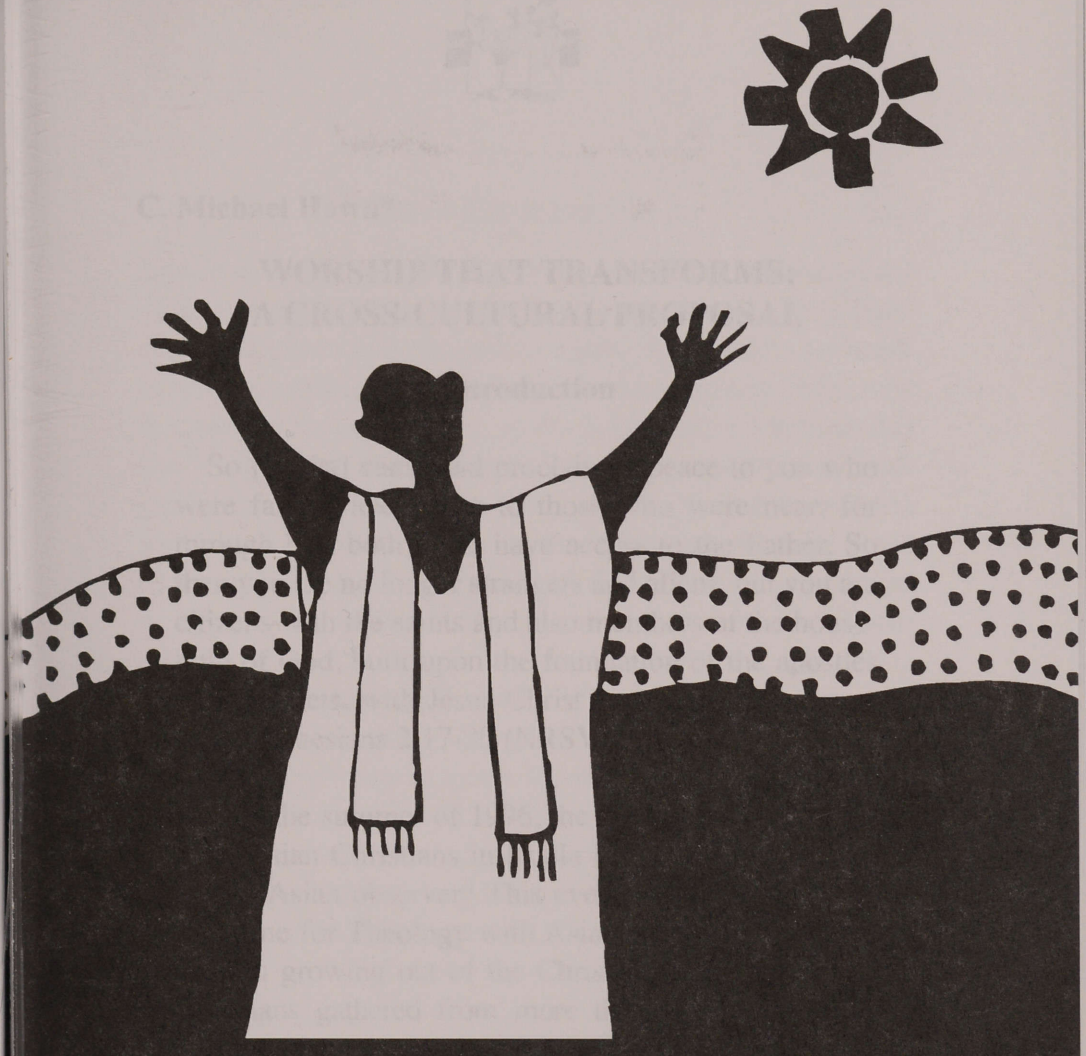
It is also left to African Americans to reclaim the origin of praise songs as an African-American liturgical phenomenon and continue to compose these songs through these liturgical lenses. It is not our concern that others may posit these roots in other places. However, it is a concern that the music of the

church continues to be offered in praise to the Almighty from whose love and nurture this music flowed as gifts to the world.

## Conclusion

African Americans join in the global praise for music of African peoples that is now part of liturgical offerings in global settings. Joy will continue when more African Americans incorporate songs from the struggles of African people into their liturgical offerings. With the reminder of the Pentecost experience recorded in the Book of Acts, where the people gathered understood each other, African and African-American music is part of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit! Together, all liturgical music traditions can be used to praise God, mend broken hearts, and provide hope as a means for justice in the world.





"THE GLOBAL LANDSCAPE OF PRAISE IN WHICH AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITURGICAL MUSIC IS A VITAL PART AFFIRMS A CROSS-CULTURAL USAGE THAT CONTINUALLY BROADENS AN AWARENESS OF THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD."

MELVA WILSON COSTEN