

## Hymnals of the Black Church

The first hymnal compiled expressly for the use of a black congregation was published in 1801. Entitled *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns, Selected from Various Authors*, it was printed for Richard Allen, who is identified on the titlepage as "African Minister." Now Richard Allen is justly celebrated as the founder of the world's first black Christian denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which he served as the first bishop, and for his civil-rights activities in Philadelphia, but little attention has been given to his pioneering role in laying the foundation for black-American hymnody.

The story of the origin of Bethel A.M.E. Church of Philadelphia, which moved into its own building in July 1794, is so well known that it does not require retelling here. Without any doubt, Bethel was a singing congregation from the beginning, and by 1801 would have developed a basic repertory of its favorite hymns. Allen himself would have introduced many hymns to his fledgling flock, hymns that he had picked up during his several years as an itinerant Methodist exhorter before settling in Philadelphia. On the road he came into contact not only with Methodist preachers but also those belonging to Baptist and other sects, and he tucked away in his memory things that later would prove to be useful to him as an "African minister."

We know from contemporary sources that the black Methodists were noted for their singing and exuberance in worship.<sup>1</sup> The novelty of the 1801 publication arises from the fact of the enterprising young minister's publishing his own hymnal instead of using the official Methodist hymnal. After all, Bethel was still under the governance of the Society in 1801. Allen's hymnal must have been well received, for within the same year a second edition appeared, entitled *A Collection of Hymns & Spiritual Songs, from Various Authors*, this time identifying the compiler as "The Rev. Richard Allen, Minister of the African Methodist Episcopal

---

\* Dr. Southern is Professor of Music and of Afro-American Studies at Harvard University and the editor of the Journal, *The Black Perspective in Music*.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, quotations from William Colbert, John Fanning Watson, and William Faux, published in Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2d. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), pp. 77-79.

Church." The titlepage indicates that the hymnal could be purchased either at the printer's or at 150 Spruce Street, Allen's home address. Fortunately, there is extant a copy of each edition, thus making it possible for scholars to examine this landmark in the history of American hymnody and to assess its value.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the hymnal ran into two editions within a year suggests not only its popularity among Allen's people but also that more copies might have been published to accommodate the needs of Zoar, the other black Methodist congregation in Philadelphia at that time. It is certain that some white clergymen knew the hymnal, for the extant copy of the first edition belonged to Ezekiel Cooper, book steward of the Philadelphia Methodist Church with authority for approving all books published by members of the Society. We do not know whether Allen consulted Cooper before publishing his hymnal; it is doubtful that he did so. Cooper may have attempted to exert his authority, however, before the second edition was published, for in his copy, some words in the first hymn, "The Voice of Free Grace," have been scratched out and replaced with other, presumably correct, words. But none of the other hymns presents such emendations, so it appears that Cooper's authority carried little weight with Allen.

The first edition of Allen's hymnal contains fifty-four hymns; the second adds ten more texts, making a total of sixty-four. Some of the hymns most certainly were written by Allen himself, judging from their similarity to hymns he published in other places; others that have all the earmarks of folk hymns may have been penned by Allen's church associates.<sup>3</sup>

Like many other hymnals of the time, Allen's hymnal belongs to the genre of the "pocket hymnal," measuring slightly larger than 5 x 3 inches in size. Also like many other contemporaneous hymnals, Allen's collection contains only texts, without author attributions or references to melodies that would be appropriate for use in singing the hymns. (Later editions of the AME hymnal would include such references.) I have traced twenty-six hymns to authors by locating concordances in eighteenth-century sources.<sup>4</sup> The following Table of Contents taken from

---

<sup>2</sup> The extant copy of the first edition is deposited in the Garrett Seabury Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois; the copy of the second edition is at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Microprint copies are available in the Shaw-Shoemaker *Early American Imprints*, Series No. 2 [1801-1820], Nos. 38 and 39.

<sup>3</sup> Allen's autobiography, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labours of the Right Reverend Richard Allen, Written by Himself and Published by His Request*, includes two hymns--"The God of Bethel Heard Her Cries" and "Ye Ministers That Are Called to Preaching"--and a third, entitled "Spiritual Song," is published in Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 559.

<sup>4</sup> See Table 1. My author identifications are bracketed; those marked by an asterisk

Allen's *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1801)*, indicates these authors.

Am I a Soldier of the Cross [Isaac Watts]	18
Awake my heart, arise my tongue [Watts]	45
A solemn march we make	50
Almighty love inspire	59
And are we yet alive [Charles Wesley]	72
As near to Calvary I pass'd	82
Behold that great and awful day	11
Behold the awful trumpet sounds	16
Brethren farewell, I do you tell	26
Burst ye em'rald gates and bring [Kempfenfelt]*	60
Come and taste, along with me	10
Come, Christian friends, and hear me tell	32
Come let us lift our voices high [Watts]	35
Come ye that know the Lord indeed	37
Curst be the man, forever curst [Watts]	38
Come all ye weary travellers	86
Come all ye poor sinners	46
Drest uniform the soldiers are	51
Dear friends farewell, I now must go	85
Earth has detain'd me pris'ner long [Watts]	27
Early my God, without delay [Watts]*	64
From regions of Love	66
How lost was my condition [John Newton]*	6
How long shall Death the tyrant reign [Watts]	40
How happy every child of grace [Wesley]	73
Hail the Gospel jubilee	75
In thee we now together come	18
In evil, long I took delight [Newton]	83
Jerusalem my happy home	13
Jesus at Thy command [Lady Huntingdon]	80
Lord! when together here we meet [Samuel Occom]	30
Lifted into the cause of sin	57
Lord what a wretched land is this [Watts]	69
Lo! we see the sign appearing	71
My thoughts on awful subjects roll [Watts]	63
Now begins the Heav'nly theme [Martin Madan]	39
Now the Saviour stands a-pleading	61
O Jesus my Saviour, to thee I submit	4
O God my heart with love inflame	7
O that I had a bosom friend	14
O give me, Lord, my sins to mourn	22
O blessed estate of the dead	31
O how I have long'd for the coming of God	48
O when shall I see Jesus [John Leland]	52
O don't you hear the alarm	34
O, if my soul were form'd for woe [Watts]*	62

---

were kindly communicated to me by Roland J. Braithwaite, professor of music at Talladega College, who presently is engaged in an intensive investigation of the Allen hymnals.

Saviour, I do feel Thy merit	21
See the Eternal Judge descending	34
See! how the nations rage together [Richard Allen]*	78
The voice of Free Grace [Thursby?]*	3
The glorious day is drawing nigh	8
The time draws nigh when you and I	22
Think worldling, think, alas! how vain!	28
The trumpet of God is sounding abroad	30
There is a land of pure delight [Watts]	34
The great tremendous day's approaching	42
Vital spark of Heavenly flame [Alexander Pope]	84
What poor despised company	17
We've found the rock, the trav'ler cries	20
When I can read my title clear [Watts]	33
Wake up my muse, condole the loss	56
Why should we start and fear to die? [Watts]	65
Ye virgin souls arise [Wesley]*	67
Zaccheus climb'd the tree [Newton]	77

While we may assume that Allen's congregation used the same tunes as did other congregations in singing the well-known hymns--such as those written by Isaac Watts, for example, or Charles Wesley--it seems obvious that in some instances the Bethelites must have composed their own melodies or adapted popular street tunes for their purposes.

This landmark hymnal is of historic importance for reasons other than its primacy among black-church hymnals, which in itself is enough to insure the hymnbook a secure place in history. In the first place, it serves as a folk-selected anthology, indicating the hymns that were popular among black Christians at the beginning of the nineteenth century, for Allen selected hymns freely from the hymnbooks of Baptists and other denominations for his hymnal. His main criterion apparently was whether or not the hymns had appeal for his congregation. In his writings he expresses concern about the "emotional natures" of his people, many of them ex-slaves, being swallowed up in cold, intellectual rituals. Certainly the hymns in his collection have vivid imagery and highly personalized texts--the kind that would have attraction for the newly converted ex-slaves who comprised his congregation.

Another reason for the historic importance of Allen's hymnal is that it seems to have been the earliest one to include hymns to which "wandering" refrains and choruses are attached; that is, refrains freely used with any hymn rather than affixed permanently to specific hymns. Thus, Allen's hymnal is a primary source for the worship song later to be called the "camp-meeting hymn" and the progenitor of the nineteenth-century gospel hymn. While the first decade of the century is notable for its publication of camp-meeting-hymn collections, none is dated earlier than 1803--two years after Allen's hymnal was published. Whether or not black Methodists should be credited with inventing this form, as some

contemporary sources imply, certainly Allen must be credited with being the first to publish examples of the form.<sup>5</sup>

It should be observed that the term "spiritual song" in the titles of Allen's collections does not have the meaning it would later have as applying to the folk-composed Negro spiritual. Fine distinctions cannot be drawn between the hymn and the spiritual song in this period. Hymn compilers commonly used such titles as Allen used, as far back as 1651 with the edition of the Bay Psalm Book entitled *The Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs of the Old and New Testaments*, and Isaac Watts uses the term in the title of his landmark publication of 1707, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, which was given an American edition in 1739. The three terms of course point back to the Scriptures, Col. 3:16, wherein Christians are instructed to teach and admonish one another in "Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs."

Although Allen's collection contains no Negro spirituals, it does indicate the kinds of source materials used by black Christians in composing Negro spirituals, and thus throws light on the origin of the spiritual. Obviously the black folk composers culled lines and phrases from their favorite hymns and Scriptural passages, and adapted motifs, images, and themes from such sources to compose the texts of their spirituals, to which they then added verses of their own invention. Such a process is revealed by analysis of the text structures and documented in contemporary reports. One disapproving church father complained: "the coloured people get together, and sing for hours together, short scraps of disjointed affirmations, pledges, or prayers, lengthened with long repetition choruses."<sup>6</sup>

A hymn beloved by a black congregation--say, for example, "Behold the Awful Trumpet Sounds" (No. 10 in Allen's hymnal)--might furnish the poetic tinder for any number of spirituals with its theme of Christians preparing for Judgment Day and its vividly drawn motifs: of the trumpet sounding to raise "the sleeping dead" and call "the nations underground"; of the "world in flames," "the burning mountains," and rocks running "down in streams"; of the "falling stars" and "moon turn'd into blood"; and of the wicked turn'd "unto hell," while the Saints sit "at God's right hand." A list of spirituals using this material would be long indeed, beginning with the ancient "In Dat Day" and including such well-known examples as "My Lord, What a Morning," "Steal Away," and "Rocks and Mountains, Don't Fall On Me," among many others.

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the excerpt from John Fanning Watson, *Methodist Error* (1819) reprinted in Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Now for a word about the tunes used for singing the hymns in the Allen hymnal. Clearly, it would have been necessary to invent tunes for singing the unorthodox items--that is, the hymns written by Allen and the camp-meeting hymns--since newly invented texts were involved. In addition there is ample evidence that the black Christians were not averse to drawing upon "merry airs, adapted from old songs" for their specially composed hymns.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, a few statistics: twenty-six Allen hymns have concordances in hymnals published by white compilers before 1801; thirty, in collections published after 1801; and eight hymns apparently are unique. Allen's collection undoubtedly includes songs that circulated in oral tradition, which he would have picked up while preaching on circuit. Was he the first to publish these songs, which did not begin to appear in other collections until 1803? What contacts did he have with the Great Revival movement that swept over the nation, particularly in Kentucky, beginning in 1800? Was he the first to publish the Revival movement's camp-meeting songs? These are intriguing questions, for which the present stage of research will not permit immediate answers. But certainly when answers are forthcoming, light will be thrown on the extent to which black-hymnody practices influenced the development of white folk hymnody at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

By the time the AME Church had won its independence in 1816, its membership numbered in the thousands, and it is highly probable that the Allen-hymnal repertory had been adopted by black Methodist congregations both north and south. Thus, the hymns would have been disseminated throughout the nation, with blacks sharing in a common oral tradition of hymnody, whether enslaved or free.

In 1818 the Church published a new hymnal, "designed to supersede those heretofore used among us," which had been compiled by a committee consisting of Daniel Coker, James Champion, and Richard Allen (chairman). It is an impressive collection! Consisting of 314 hymns, it is beautifully organized into appropriate sections according to the "various states of Christian experience," and shares some 244 concordances with the official Methodist hymnal of the period.

Richard Allen obviously was concerned about meeting the high standards of the Methodist hymnal in this new publication, although he had no intention of abandoning his independent stance. In the hymnal's preface he notes, "Having become a distinct and separate body of people, there is no collection of hymns we could with propriety adopt," but at the same time, he was careful to select hymns that were held in high "estimation" by others. He concludes, "We flatter ourselves, the present

---

<sup>7</sup> Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, pp. 77-78.

edition will not suffer by a comparison with any collection of equal magnitude."<sup>8</sup>

Gone are many of the vibrant and personalized hymns of the 1801 corpus; only fifteen hymns were carried over into this new edition. Were the other hymns too humble for the proud, new, AME denomination, which was determined to "exhibit to the Christian world [that its] rules of government and articles of faith" would measure up to the highest standards? The discarded hymns were not forgotten, however, by black worshippers; some lived on in oral tradition, and others were absorbed into the Negro spiritual, if not wholly, then in selected phrases and motifs.

AME hymnals were published periodically thereafter. In the 1837 edition, each hymn refers to a relevant Scriptural verse, identifies its meter (that is, as short, long, common, etc.), and indicates a melody appropriate for use in singing the hymn. In 1898 the AME Hymnal included music for the hymns for the first time. In modern editions, hymnals have included didactic materials along with the hymns, responsive readings, etc. The 1954 edition, for example, carries a lengthy article on the history of Methodist hymnody. Ever so often the Church appointed a committee to update its hymnal and improve the quality of its music--most recently in 1972 when the General Conference appointed a Committee on Worship and Liturgy to carry out its directives in preparation for the edition of 1985.

Through all the years, AME hymn compilers included, along with the standard Protestant hymns, a small number of hymns written by black hymnists and composers as well as a few spirituals, but they were careful to weed out songs they regarded as trashy. Again and again, congregations were warned not to sing "hymns of their own composing."<sup>9</sup> In 1883, for example, Minister H. M. Turner (later Bishop) wrote in the preface of the AME hymnal, which he had compiled, "We have a wide spread custom of singing on revival occasions, especially, what is commonly called spiritual songs, most of which are devoid of both sense and reason; and some are absolutely false and vulgar." Despite the fine work of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the Hampton Singers, and other similar groups, it would be a long time before Negro spirituals were admitted to the ranks of acceptable church music. The battles fought in the nineteenth century over the "respectability" of the spiritual foreshadow simi-

---

<sup>8</sup> The preface of the 1818 hymnal is reprinted in Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Daniel Payne, *The Semi-Centenary and the Retrospection of the A.M.E. Church in the United States of America* (Baltimore: Published by the Author, ca. 1866) and the excerpt from Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (1888) reprinted in Southern, *Readings*, pp. 65-70.

lar confrontations today between those who approve of contemporary gospel music and those who regard it as unacceptable in the formal worship service.

Predictably, other black denominations followed the lead of the AME Church in publishing their own hymnals. In 1822 Peter Spence published the *Union African Hymn Book* for his Union African Church in Delaware, Maryland, and 1838 the AME Zion Church began publishing its own hymnals, entitled *Hymns for the Use of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*. The "Improved Edition" of 1869 consists of 582 hymns compiled under the direction of Christopher Rush, Samuel M. Giles, and Joseph P. Thompson. Each hymn carries an indication of its meter and the name of an appropriate tune for singing it.

To my knowledge only the three black denominations discussed above published their own hymnals during the antebellum period. Presumably, other black churches used hymnals published by the white mother churches. Except for Allen's landmark hymnal of 1801, the hymnals published by the black church were hardly distinguishable from those of the white church in regard to repertory items, except for their inclusion of a relatively small number of black-authored hymns. Over the years, they increased markedly in size: an AMEZ hymnal of 1872, for example, contained 1129 hymns, while an AME hymnal of 1880 had 1089 hymns. Such huge volumes of course proved to be too unwieldy, and later editions appeared in more convenient sizes.

After Emancipation, hymnbooks began to appear that obviously were not intended for use in the formal worship service, but rather for revival meetings, Sunday Schools, and informal gatherings. In 1883, the minister Marshall W. Taylor published a collection, *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies*, intended primarily for use by black congregations of the white Methodist Episcopal Church. Consisting of 170 songs, of which twenty have only texts, the collection includes traditional hymns, camp-meeting hymns, spirituals, and religious songs apparently written especially for publication in the hymnal. Some of the hymns were turned into gospel hymns through the addition of choruses to time-honored texts of Watts, Wesley, and others. Few of the songs seem appropriate for use in the formal worship services.<sup>10</sup>

Charles A. Tindley, celebrated for his pioneering black gospel hymns, undoubtedly originally intended his music for performance in the Bainbridge Street Methodist Episcopal Church of Philadelphia, where he was pastor from 1902 until his death in 1933. But his music proved to have universal appeal, and in 1905 he began to publish collections of his songs. The first, entitled *Soul Echoes*, appeared in two editions (1905,

---

<sup>10</sup> See further in Irene Jackson-Brown, "Afro-American Song in the Nineteenth Century: A Neglected Source," *The Black Perspective in Music* 4 (Spring 1976): 22-38.

1909); the second, *New Songs of Paradise*, appeared in six editions during the years 1916-1941. Tindley clearly states his songs were intended for singing in "Sunday Schools, Prayer Meetings, Epworth League Meetings, and Social Gatherings."<sup>11</sup>

A Baptist publication of the early twentieth century, entitled *National Jubilee Melodies* (ca. 1916), also belongs to the informal category of black-church music. The copy I examined carried no date, but the titlepage identifies the book as the "twenty-third" edition. Now that's evidence of genuine popularity! Published by the National Baptist Publishing Board, the collection consists of old plantation songs, which, the preface informs us, have been kept alive by tradition and should be preserved in "book form." K. D. Reddick of Americus, Georgia, and Phil V. S. Lindsley of Nashville, Tennessee, are credited with having collected the songs "from the various rice, cane, and cotton plantations of the South."

The collection of 142 songs includes a wide variety of types--mostly spirituals, both arranged and traditional, but also standard Protestant hymns and gospel hymns. None of the hymns carries the name of author or composer, and some have new titles, but the well-known hymns, such as those of Watts or Wesley, can be identified. As in the Taylor collection, some of the gospel hymns were "made" simply by adding choruses to standard hymns.

Although the Baptists and Methodists pioneered in publishing hymnals for their congregations after Emancipation, it was the Holiness (or Pentecostal) church that was the direct heir of the plantation-church spirituals, jubilees, and shouts. Charles Price Jones, founder of the Church of Christ (Holiness) in 1895, gave music high priority in the Church and was himself a prolific hymnwriter, having written over a thousand sacred songs during his long life. His first songs date from his pre-Holiness days, when he was still a Baptist minister. He is credited with having published two songbooks, *His Fulness* and *Sweet Selections*, and two editions of the official hymnal of the Church, *Jesus Only Standard Hymnal*.<sup>12</sup> None of these publications was available to me, but I did examine the ten hymns published in the Church's *History*, which indicate Jones's style to be similar to that of other gospel hymnwriters of

---

<sup>11</sup> See further in Horace C. Boyer, "Charles Albert Tindley: Progenitor of Black-American Gospel Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 11 (Fall 1983): 103-132.

<sup>12</sup> I am deeply indebted to gospel scholar Horace Boyer, professor of music at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and currently at the Smithsonian Institution, for making available to me a copy of the Holiness Church history, *History of [the] Church of Christ (Holiness) U. S. A., 1895-1965*, ed. by Otho B. Cobbins (New York: Vantage Press, 1966). I also am grateful to D. Antoinette Handy, at the National Endowment for the Arts, for sharing information with me about the hymnals. Her grandfather, the Rev. Walter S. Pleasants, was one of the founders of the Church of Christ (Holiness) U. S. A.

his time.

The year 1921 brought a milestone in the history of black-church hymnody. In my opinion, *Gospel Pearls*, published that year by the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., ranks with Richard Allen's hymnal of 1801 in terms of its historic importance. Like the Allen hymnal, it is an anthology of the most popular black-church music of its time. The Music Committee that compiled the hymnal, under the direction of Willa Townsend, included some of the nation's outstanding composers and performers of religious music--among them, John W. Work, Frederick J. Work, Lucie Campbell, and W. M. Nix--and the resulting product was truly a "soul-stirring, message-bearing song-book."

The publisher notes that the hymnal was born "out of an urgent demand for real inspiring and adaptable music in all of our Sunday Schools, Churches, Conventions, and other religious gatherings." Were black church people becoming increasingly bored with the staid, standard Protestant hymns that filled their denominational hymnals? At any rate, the diminutive hymnal--it contains only 164 songs--found a welcome place in the sanctuaries of many churches other than those of the Baptists.

Despite its size, *Gospel Pearls* was capable of meeting the needs of the black church of its time. It contains the old, revered Protestant hymns, including those associated by tradition with lining-out practice; the gospel hymns of such white writers as Moody and Sankey, Charles Gabriel, Philip P. Bliss, and Homer Rodeheaver, among others; the gospel hymns of the black writers Charles Tindley, Lucie Campbell, Thomas Dorsey, and others; jubilee songs and arranged spirituals; and the essential service music. The popularity of the "Pearls" took them into "every phase of public worship," as the compilers had hoped for, and as well into thousands of private homes. It would be more than fifty years before the black church would produce a hymnal of equal power, musical worth, and emotional appeal to black Christians.

Although the hymnals used by Four-Shape Note Singers have had negligible impact upon the development of mainstream, black-church music, their existence should be noted. The basic book is W. M. Cooper's *The Sacred Harp*, but often black communities have their own hymnals, generally entitled *The Colored Sacred Harp*. A copy in my possession was compiled and published by J. Jackson (Ozark, Alabama, 1934), under the auspices of the Dale County Colored Musical Institute and the Alabama and Florida Union State Convention on Composition.<sup>13</sup> It contains the old, familiar, Protestant-hymn texts (but set to unfamiliar mel-

---

<sup>13</sup> Here I express appreciation to Jack Ralston, professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, for presenting me with a copy of the Jackson *Colored Sacred Harp*.

odies) and hymns written by laymen of the community. Conspicuously absent are spirituals and gospel songs. It should be observed that Seven-Note Shape Singing belongs to the gospel-song tradition, and thus differs from Four-Note Shape singing.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the largely black denominations seem to have awakened to the necessity for publishing hymnals that would confront the demands of the radically changing lifestyles of black Christians in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The Baptists were the first, in 1977, with their denominational hymnal, *The New National Baptist Hymnal*. Then followed in 1981 the *Songs of Zion*, published by the United Methodist Church, and *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, by the Episcopal Church. In 1982 came *Yes, Lord!*, the first hymnal ever to be published by the Church of God in Christ, and in 1985 there appeared a new edition of the AME hymnal, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church Bicentennial Hymnal*.

In my opinion, *Songs of Zion*, along with the Richard Allen hymnal of 1801 and *Gospel Pearls* of 1921, must be counted among the great monuments of black-church music. Like its two predecessors, it is an anthology of church music popular among black Christians of its time, but even more, it is a history of black-church music presented through the music itself. Published under the auspices of the National Advisory Task Force on the Hymnbook Project of the United Methodist Church, the hymnal's genesis was in a conference held at Atlanta, Georgia, in 1973, when it was discovered that the official Methodist Hymnal included only one hymn by a black composer and only five Negro spirituals.

The thirteen-member committee, chaired by William B. McClain with J. Jefferson Cleveland and Verolga Nix as editors, affirming that the black religious experience in the United States is unique and, moreover, has made a great impact on the development of the Christian church in general, aimed "to offer the whole church [i.e., not only black congregations] a volume of songs that can enrich the worship of the whole church." The hymnal is successful even beyond the compilers' lofty ambitions, particularly in making available to the public a repertory of gospel music that hitherto has been generally accessible only through oral dissemination — that is, the live performance or recordings.

Divided into three main sections, each of which begins with a historical introduction, the hymnbook deals with, respectively, hymns, spirituals, and gospel songs. In addition, there is an extremely useful introduction that offers suggestions on how to perform the music to the director, accompanist, and congregation. A fourth section gathers together thirty-three liturgical pieces, most of them written by contemporary black composers, but also including some standard texts, such as the Doxology and hymns of Watts and Wesley, fitted with new melodies and arranged to serve as offertories, responsories, and the like.

Few of the standard hymns are included among the seventy-two hymns in the first section; most are gospel hymns. The tradition of adding choruses to standard hymns to produce gospel hymns is well observed, and there are also contemporary hymns, which employ the standard four-line form but have gospel-style texts. A novel inclusion is a lined version of the Charles Wesley hymn (using the Martyrdom tune) "Father, I Stretch My Hands to Thee." This may well be the first time anyone has attempted to present a notated lined hymn in a hymnbook, and the fact of its inclusion reflects the importance given by the compilers to the validity of oral traditions.

The second section of the hymnal, which comprises ninety-six songs, is given over to spirituals. Here are all the old favorites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most with simple accompaniments that do not overpower the melodies, and some consisting solely of melodies.

It is the third section of the hymnal that is unique: it contains fifty-one gospel songs of every conceivable variety. Included along with well-known contemporary gospel songs are other types arranged as gospel--for example, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Amazing Grace," "My Faith looks up to Thee," among others. The accompaniments are not elaborate, but enough of the style is caught so that a good church pianist with some knowledge of the gospel tradition can perform acceptably from the music.

All the major gospel composers are represented, from Charles Tindley to the young Andrae Crouch and Walter Hawkins, and all the classics of the genre are included, from Tindley's "I'll Overcome Some Day" and Dorsey's "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" to the Walter Hawkins perennially popular "Goin' Up Yonder." Finally, the collection is distinctive because songwriters of the Holiness churches are represented along with the Baptist and Methodist songwriters, and this gives proper recognition to one of the important sources of the gospel tradition.

For scholars of black-church music, perhaps the biggest event of the 1980s was the publication, for the first time, of an official COGIC hymnal. According to a brief introductory note, the title of the hymnal, *Yes, Lord!*, reflects a practice of Charles H. Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ, Inc., in 1896: when Bishop Mason wanted "to pull the congregation together in commitment and spiritual communion," he would begin the singing of a dynamic, tuneful chant, the text of which repeated the phrase "Yes, Lord" a number of times.<sup>14</sup>

Before discussing this amazing musical document, I should like to take a brief detour to comment on the congregational song. Traditionally, it has had simple melodies and uncomplicated rhythms, and was sung in

---

<sup>14</sup> Again I acknowledge my indebtedness to Horace Boyer, who kindly lent me his copy of *Yes, Lord!*.

unison, often without instrumental accompaniment. The unobtrusive four-part harmonizations given the songs in hymnals are for the benefit of the keyboard accompanist and are intended to support, not compete with, congregational singing. Texts may be dramatic or highly personalized, but they are memorable. If hymnals are not available, "lining out" helps the congregation recall the texts, as does also the inclusion of refrains and choruses in the texts.

*Yes, Lord!* makes a sharp break with the past. In its collection of 506 songs, the handling of the accompaniment, in particular, reflects the importance given to instruments and polyphonic textures in the pentecostal tradition. Except for the old standard hymns (which retain their conventional, four-part harmonizations) the accompaniments are lively and imaginative, promising an extra dimension of richness and excitement to the performance of the songs.

The major gospel composers of three generations are represented, from Tindley to the generation of Roberta Martin, Kenneth Morris, Dorsey, and others, to the generation of Andrae Crouch. In addition there are numerous songs written by pentecostal composers whose names are not familiar outside the Church, such as Mattie Moss Clark and Iris Stevenson, among others.

The collection includes a wide variety of texts: standard hymns are interspersed with gospel hymns, spirituals, patriotic songs, gospel songs, and religious songs in the classical European tradition--for example, St. Francis of Assisi's "All Creatures of Our God and King" and songs of Beethoven, Mozart, and Handel. Turning the pages, one comes across delightful surprises, such as a charming three-part round written by Terrye Coelho, and occasionally a shocker--such as the full, four-part arrangement of the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah* (covering six pages).

I became aware several years ago that the black folk-church had adopted this work, that members of the congregation sang along with the choir when it was performed as naturally as if they were singing a hymn or spiritual, taking whichever voice-part they preferred and missing not a single note. The inclusion of the "Hallelujah Chorus" in a hymnal legitimizes the establishing of yet another black-church-music tradition.

Finally, I call attention to the closing section, which consists of fifteen traditional pentecostal chants, each in the form of a call and response, and four "Amens." Three keyboard "Call and Response Accompaniments" are included, with instructions given for choosing the appropriate accompaniment for each chant.

It is significant, as the black-church hymnal approaches its 200th anniversary, that its publishers include white, mainstream denominations as well as black denominations, and that sects formerly regarded as outside the mainstream--particularly the pentecostal sects--have begun to pub-

lish hymnals, thereby making their congregational songs available to a wide public. The future of congregational singing in the black church looks bright, indeed, if the hymnals published in the last few years are predictors of things to come.