

taught, African American "ecumenical" styles of worship allowed students to experience a variety of practices.

There were entire communities and at least one township whose total population consisted of African Americans. One significant historical instance is Mound Bayou, Mississippi, an all-Black town, founded in 1887, where all Christians initially worshiped together outdoors in the town church, which was actually called the "Brush Arbor." Reminiscent of the Invisible Institution, services were literally held in the brush arbor, utilizing the elements of worship cited above.¹⁸

For Discussion

1. What are the basic reasons for the establishing of African American denominations?
2. Can any comparison be made between the sixteenth-century European Reformation led by Martin Luther and the need for African Americans to seek worship alternatives?
3. What are some unique features of African American worship?
4. What factors determine the differences in African American worship forms and styles?

*African American
Christian Worship*

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CHAPTER 7



How Music, Preaching, and Prayer Shape Contemporary African American Worship

African American congregations generally agree that corporate Christian worship is acknowledgment of and response to the presence and power of God as revealed in Jesus the Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Descriptive words often heard in response to the question of one's understanding of worship include *praise, adoration, reverence, thanksgiving, gratitude, celebration, penitence, submission, and commitment*. There are some who would include the Greek word *leitourgia* and explain that it is derived from *leitōn* (pertaining to the people) and *ergon* (meaning "work" or "service"). Both corporate (or public) and personal (or private) worship are vital to the ongoing life of the church in general and the worshiping community in particular. Worship is basically person-centered—a creative encounter between God and persons. Nevertheless, personal worship is understood to be a necessary extension and continuation of corporate worship, rather than as an isolated effort of an individual. God takes the initiative and calls the whole person to worship rather than a mere portion of one's personhood.

God's call in Jesus Christ for corporate gatherings lends itself to a time when the community can claim and affirm kinship and mutual interdependence in a space where both social and spiritual hospitality are evident.¹ A common love bonding happens most effectively when verbal and nonverbal action can take place freely in a hospitable environment. It is the name of Jesus, spoken as an

embodiment of love, that sets the hospitable climate for worship. In such a climate, worshipers can sing: "I'm so glad I'm here in Jesus' name!" Perhaps implied in the use of the personal pronoun I is the African understanding that I am (here) because we are, and we are here by the grace of God. Our presence in God's space frees us to be hospitable and open to welcome others. After all, the kindred of Jesus transcends natural (blood) ties of any human family, or those relationships that are already familiar (see Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21). Worshipers are to reach out hospitably to those who may have "wandered" in, and to those who have come in obedience to God's will.

Traditionally, worship has not been a subject for discussion or theological discourse for African Americans. It is a divine experience, a dynamic happening, which in itself is a form of communion of obedience to God. As far as the records indicate, the first officially organized liturgical discussion among African Americans took place in 1986 at the Interdenominational Theological Center.² During the planning phase, and subsequently during the Consultations, a common, basic pattern of worship was noted, which transcends denominations and connects in many ways with worship in the Invisible Institution and Praise Houses. The pattern evolves out of certain psychological attitudes, emotions, and moods of worshipers. While the order that follows is not necessarily exact, an apparent dynamism and flow alternates between God's divine initiative and human responses.

God's Divine Initiative (Call)
 Fellowship (Gathering)
 Adoration and Praise to God (Personal Testimonies)
 Penitence (Prayer)
 Hearing and Receiving the Word (Illumination)
 Renewal, Self-offering, and Dedication
 Service in the World (Mission)

While the pattern is in some ways similar to historic Euro-American worship patterns, the manner and style of the elements (acts) of worship that facilitate the flow are unique to the particular community of faith. A study of worship patterns among African peoples (in Africa and in diaspora) who are not thoroughly familiar with predetermined patterns of worship in other

traditions has revealed the natural tendency of this flow to evolve. Confession of sin is more personal than corporate, except in denominations where this act of worship is included in ritual forms inherited (or continued) from Euro-American forms. Confessions are intricately bound in testimonies of personal conversion experiences.

Common Stylistic Elements (Acts) of Worship

Some of the elements of worship that evolved in the Invisible Institution and Praise House worship continue in dynamic forms in contemporary worship practices. There is also a trend toward recapturing traditional elements of African and African American spirituality in current practices. Thus the following common stylistic elements are identifiable as uniquely African American: music (vocal and instrumental), preaching, and praying.

Vocal Music: An Overview

The musical propensity of African Americans continues as perhaps the most visible conveyor of spirituality. Beginning with the original American folk music, the African American Spiritual, the religious music genre has included Black Gospel music (in its many forms and styles), Black meter hymns, as well as compositions by Black composers. The obvious African continuation of the inseparability of human life and nature, and the tendency toward total involvement of one's whole being in spiritual endeavors, necessitates a combining of forms and performance styles in a discussion of music.

The dialogical nature of worship, both vertical and horizontal, makes communication through music a major element of worship. Through the texts, singers can respond to God, comment on problems and joys, voice hope in the midst of despair, and assert their humanity. Because music is also rooted in the emotions, music can express the inexpressible and serve as a mask for realities of life. Even without extant records we know that Africans in diaspora made use of the musical gifts, which could not be chained by human bondage. They even continued the variety of uses of music, effectively blending sacred with

secular, as they bonded and created new songs in a strange and alien land.

The importance of vocal music in worship is evidenced by the fact that one of the first published liturgical documents by and for African American worshippers was a hymnal. Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), prepared an assortment of books for his parishioners, one of which was a collection of hymns, which was published in two editions in 1801. The first, entitled *A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs from Various Authors by Richard Allen, Minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, contained fifty-four hymns.³ Ten additional hymns were added in the second edition, and a few changes were made in some texts of the original collection. Like other hymnal compilers of his day, Allen did not provide names of authors, appropriate tunes, or the source of hymns, so it is necessary to make a few speculative assumptions. Undoubtedly, some of the hymns were among his favorites which he had learned as an itinerant preacher on the Pennsylvania-Delaware circuit, or in his service as an assistant preacher at Old George's Methodist Episcopal Church (Philadelphia). Some may have been taken from the commonly popular "oral" repertoire of African American worshippers. And others were apparently authored by Richard Allen.⁴ Among the familiar hymnists are Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and John Newton.

In addition to its historic significance as the first "folk-selected" anthology of songs for African American worshippers, Allen's hymnal is the earliest source in history that attaches "wandering choruses" or "wandering refrains" to hymns.⁵ This means that a short chorus or refrain is freely added to any standard hymn (at random). This improvisatory practice may have been in general use by African Americans as an extension of their oral folk method of contextualizing songs. It was also a means of retaining the informal environment of ritual action. Some of Allen's song texts were in the conventional "spiritual song" style of the Euro-American folk tradition. Others reflected his admonitions to improve the flock, and were directed toward the personal as well as group behavior of his congregation. His concern for emotional restraint and the "offensiveness" of unbridled emotions during worship is revealed in this song:

MUSIC, PREACHING, AND PRAYER

Such groaning and shouting, it set me doubting,
I fear such religion is only a dream;
The preachers are stamping, the people are jumping,
And screaming so loud that I neither could hear,
Either praying or preaching, such horrible screaming,
'Twas truly offensive to all that were there.⁶

Two other early African American publishers of vocal music for worship were the Reverend Thomas Cooper (ca. 1775-ca. 1823) and William Wells Brown (1816-1864). Cooper, a former slave who preached in the Northern United States, in England, and in Africa, was intentionally militant in his compositions. His 1820 hymnal, *The African Pilgrim's Hymns*, included 372 hymns, some of which he composed. Others were from hymnals in circulation at that time. His original compositions are often reminiscent of the more radical Spirituals that underscore the need to fight on.⁷

William Brown included texts of Spirituals composed and sung by slaves in his autobiography, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*, published in 1847. Some of the texts provide a historical description of the plight of Africans transported to America. These and similar songs that related historical events and lived experiences of their day were open to improvisation and re-creation, and provided impetus for emotional outlet for a people walking freely in God's story. Vocal expressions that began initially outside the worship setting continued in worship, providing the essential ingredients for the evolution of authentic worship music forms and styles. The historical progression of music for worship began with African utterances, chants, moans, and cries for deliverance as an enslaved people gradually accommodated the Christian faith. An approximate progressive time line reveals the overlapping of music traditions as new forms were shaped:

1619 ----- 1750 ----- 1800 ----- 1919 ----- 1950 ----- 1960 ----- 1980 ----- 1990s

African chants, etc.

Spirituals -----

Metered Music -----

Improvised Hymns -----

Traditional Gospel -----

Modern Gospel -----

Contemporary -----

Spirituals

It is difficult to establish an exact date for the origin of Spirituals as a musical genre. The earliest Spirituals emerged during the antebellum slave period and have been identified as the first authentic American folk song form. Spirituals were created both in and outside of the Christian worship environment. Some among the creators were, therefore, not oriented toward Christianity, whether in the hypocritical form taught or what was being re-formed. Like other folk songs, Spirituals express the peculiar context, nature, experiences, values, and longings of the specific folk who created them. Inherent in the artistic outpouring of a people are linguistic complexities such as usage, purpose, and symbols. The preponderance of the use of personal pronouns in Spirituals can be attributed to a number of factors. The African understanding of one's personal interrelationship with others as all of the community experiences struggle is one factor. The "I" technically communicates that "we" — "all of us" — share in the struggle. There is also the possible intent of the singer to seek affirmation as a person of importance in an oppressive arena. Lovell wisely observes that "a community of millions of people, each one recognized as important, produces a powerful folk effect."⁸

Whether in worship or at work, the earliest creators of Spirituals were part of a slave system. The persistent theme permeating the Spirituals is the need for radical change in the current social situation, which would mean freedom for the slave. For this reason, Spirituals can be classified generally as songs of protest. The appeal for deliverance is made to God, who delivers. The use of biblical stories and images, while not always expressive of orthodox Christian doctrine, provided a newly acquired religious referent to which African descendants skillfully fused their inherent primal world views. Texts of Spirituals reveal the slaves' confidence in the power of God in Jesus to render justice "on time."

The broad range of poetic literature gives evidence that religion and life are inextricably bound. A clear line of distinction can hardly be drawn between work songs, field hollers, blues, and songs about nature. To refer to the plethora of slave songs as *either* spiritual songs or secular songs is to misunderstand the

community context and religious nature of the creators of the songs. Questions about the appropriateness of improvised Spirituals for worship beyond the Invisible Institution and the Praise House was a matter of controversy for both Euro-Americans and African Americans. Even Spirituals shaped during emotionally charged worship ("preaching Spirituals") could assume a different character in a work environment. New stanzas and the substitution of biblical words for words from the work-a-day world might have raised questions as to their appropriateness for continued use in worship. Questions of theology and the particular folk source of origin prevented Spirituals from finding a place in denominational hymnals until recently.

Spirituals have been used in African American worship continuously in some congregations, and more sporadically in others. There was a brief period of demise immediately following emancipation as African Americans assumed a new status as freed people. A recovery of interest occurred following the popularization of Spirituals by the Fisk Jubilee choir in the late nineteenth century. Anthemized arrangements flourished at the turn of the century with the touring of Black college and university choirs. Congregations with college trained pastors and choir directors perpetuated this genre as a choir form, often neglecting the folk style of congregational singing. Brief periods of decline in the use of the Spirituals in the twentieth century were caused by the rise of other more popular forms, such as Gospel music, quartets, soloists, and the use of Euro-American hymns in worship. The civil rights movement allowed an opportunity for renewed emphasis on the use of Spirituals as an important form of congregational music. The choice of Spirituals, the folk songs of a people whose freedom was not yet assured, was natural for Martin Luther King, Jr., in whose denominational tradition the "songs of Zion" had continued to be sung. The protest songs of antebellum slaves became protest songs, recalled, and re-created for the twentieth-century freedom movement. The artistic gift of an African people proved to be a "timeless mirror" of the realities of society, and open to a continuing process of "becoming." Its origin in the folk community means that the creation of the Spiritual is never complete, and remains a means of community bonding.

A large number of Spirituals have been theologically indexed

by topics and season of the Christian Year for use in worship. African Americans find these songs a source of inspiration and a natural means of responding to and communicating with the Almighty. Spirituals are a pastoral liturgical resource for any community of worshippers. Properly understood, Spirituals are the ageless psalms of a people in exile who poured out their praise, prayers, thanksgiving, and lament to God, in the midst of harsh struggles. They are analogous to theological documents, carefully and thoughtfully presented in simple and often symbolic language of a particular people.

Improvised Hymnic Forms

Extant texts and compilations authored by African Americans who lived during this period affirm the sacred/secular unity and the possible inclusion of popular texts and tunes that originated outside the church. In addition to religious songs composed in worship and at work and individually authored hymns, African Americans also incorporated Euro-American hymns into their worship. Rather than retaining the Euro-American structure, hymns were reshaped or improvised in a folklike manner or "blackened" as a means of contextualization. To sing hymns as they were heard in formalized settings did not lend itself to the social and spiritual bonding required of Africans in diaspora. The process of re-creating and improvising hymns was a way of making the music their own.

Black Metered Music

Antebellum slaves were introduced to the somber and serious "lined-note" method of psalm singing in religious and informal colonial gatherings. Religious instruction for the slaves included instruction in psalmody, which apparently appealed to the new converts. When African Americans were granted freedom to organize their own religious meetings, the singing of psalms was a requirement.⁹ During the Great Awakening religious movement of the 1730s, the singing of hymns was popularized in the religious poetry of Isaac Watts. Psalm singing declined in favor of Watts's lively tunes and fresh texts.

The hymns of Isaac Watts appeared to have been favored

perhaps because of the straightforwardness and simplicity of texts and music. A special style of "metered hymn singing," beginning with, but not limited to, hymns by Watts was influenced by the a cappella "call-and-response" technique employed both in Spirituals and in the "lining tradition" of early Euro-Americans. The procedure consists of the chanting or "tuning" of one or two lines of text in "singsong" or recitative (*Sprechgesang*) fashion by a percentor, deacon, preacher, or song leader, ending on a definite pitch. The congregation "surges in," often before the line is completed, and sings the same line with some elaboration of the tune. It is the song leader's task not only to set the pitch, but also to project loudly, clearly, and enthusiastically enough so as to encourage full participation by the congregation. Melodies are inevitably altered and shaped according to the needs of the community. The semblance of an "exact" melody preserved in the memories of song leaders and transmitted by the oral tradition often defies exact musical scoring. Supporting harmonies of parallel thirds, fourths, fifths and sixths are added according to artistic "ears" and musical preferences of the gathered community.

The printed score with meter signatures and structured rhythms of the original hymn is meaningless in this unaccompanied vocal art form. Additionally, the technical designations of common meter (6.8.6.8.), long meter (8.8.8.8.), and short meter (6.6.8.6.) have nothing to do with the description of Black metered music. The term *meter* is merely borrowed from the music vocabulary to describe a newly shaped folk-form originating with hymns by Isaac Watts, which are referred to as "Dr. Watts."

The spiritual and emotional impact of this style of singing in African American worship is indescribable. Although this style of singing in Euro-American churches was discouraged and supplanted by the "proper way of singing" taught in singing schools, the tradition of lining hymns continued with fervor among Black worshippers. It is not unusual to find the integration of metered music and Spirituals. Metered hymn singing in African American worship, dating from the early nineteenth century (ca. 1807 or 1810), continues today. It is employed most often by Black Baptists in Southern rural communities, along

with other forms that reflect the constantly expanding repertoire of music forms and styles in worship.

Other Improvised Hymns

As the growth of African American denominations and congregations accelerated, and literacy increased, worshipers borrowed hymns freely from other traditions. In the socialization process, hymns were adapted in a variety of ways, and remain open to further shaping as congregational situations dictate. Original texts are often retained, but the musical performance style of the "anti-structured" worshipping context provides the unique "blackened" identity. In reference to improvised hymns, Wyatt Tee Walker observes that

the oral tradition introduces itself again; the "standard," or well known, Euro-American hymns require no special instruction for Black rendition. The Black religious community instinctively knows how to sing them. The mode of singing is common to the Black religious experience and is passed from one generation to another via an oral tradition in Black sacred music.¹⁰

Current improvisational performance styles often include stylized instrumental accompaniment that enhances the emotional import. Improvisations may express the community's exuberant joy, contemplation, or a combination of both simultaneously. The pastor, song leader, and other worshipers are free to inject "lead-in" phrases or brief lines of testimony to personalize certain stanzas. Congregational affirmations of personal "additions" also indicate social identity with individual needs.

Hymnals Compiled by African Americans

Hymnals published by African Americans for use as an important liturgical resource in worship began in 1801 through the efforts of Richard Allen, founder of the AME Church.

The first official AMEC denominational hymnal was the 1818 (words only) edition, published two years after the 1816 AMEC Inaugural Conference. Few changes were made in subsequent editions of the 314 hymns and Spirituals published between 1818

and 1872. The first revised hymnal, containing 1,115 hymns, chants, and doxologies, published in 1876, was the authorized hymnal until 1892. Two more editions with words only were published before the 1898 hymnal, the first published with words and music. Hymnals published in 1941 and 1954 did not include as many Spirituals and hymns by Black composers as does the 1984, Bicentennial Hymnal.

First editions of hymnals by other Black denominations include the Union African Church in 1822; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1839 (the 1957 hymnal is acknowledged as the first "original" hymnal produced by the AMEZ Church); Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, 1891; the Church of Christ (Holiness) in 1899; National Baptist, 1903; National Baptist, USA, 1924; Progressive Baptist in 1976; and the Church of God in Christ (Pentecostal) in 1982.¹¹

While it was not an official denominational hymnal, Marshall V. Taylor compiled and published a hymnal for use by Black congregations of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1883. Charles A. Tindley, a Black Methodist Episcopal pastor, began to publish collections of his songs in 1905. Other significant hymnal compilations by African Americans that have influenced the music of worship include *National Jubilee Melodies*, circa 1916 (Baptist); *The Gospel Pearls* (Baptist), 1921; *The New National Baptist Hymnal*, 1977; *Lift Every Voice* (Episcopal), 1981; *Songs of Zion* (United Methodist), 1981; and *Lead Me, Guide Me* (Catholic), 1987.

In acknowledgment of the contributions of racial ethnics to music for worship, the official hymnals published by The Christian Reformed Church in 1988, The United Methodist Church in 1989, and The Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1990 include a significant amount of music from the African American experience. In this way cultural offerings are shared with entire denominations, and represent a composite of ecumenical hymnody.

Black Gospel Music

Traditional Gospel

Black Gospel music refers to both a genre (song form) of musical composition and a vocal or instrumental performance style.

Both represent a composite of a variety of musical expressions: Spirituals, metered hymns, improvised hymns, blues, ragtime, jazz, and nineteenth-century Euro-American gospel hymns. The folksy earthiness that distinguishes Black Gospel from other musical genres recalls primal empathetic features that are different from Euro-American aesthetics. For the African American, the aesthetic is integrally bound with feelings and emotions that allow the "beautiful" to emerge from the soul.

Gospel music as a performance style makes it possible to "gospelize" any form of music. In the tradition of improvised hymns, congregations are prone to alter a hymn, song, Spiritual, or anthem to suit the musical tastes of the particular community. In Gospel music, however, the attention is usually focused on individual performers. A choir or the congregation is expected to support and participate with the soloist, and the community can be unified by the leadership of a skilled, spirit-filled singer.

Thomas A. Dorsey, an African American musician, was first to apply the name "Gospel" to this twentieth-century urban-Spiritual form and style. In a personal interview, Dorsey indicates that Gospel music (as opposed to white gospel hymns) is best expounded "by one who has walked the path of trouble and hard times."¹² Dorsey, a talented blues and jazz musician, was influenced by the style of the religious compositions of Charles A. Tindley, a Black Methodist pastor. Dorsey's texts, as well as those of subsequent Gospel musicians, are commentaries on personal religious experiences in a society that is most often hostile. Tony Heilbut writes of the language of Black Gospel songs:

Lyrics may sound banal, but they talk about the things that matter most to poor people. . . . A poor [person's] concerns are . . . staying alive. . . . healthy . . . and financially solvent. Combine these pressing demands with a diction made up of the most vivid idioms and some of the most old-fashioned imagery, and the gospel language begins to make sense.¹³

Dorsey is a pioneer in fusing instrumental accompaniments clearly associated with forms created outside the church. Keyboard accompaniments are most often quite rhythmic, "bluesy," highly syncopated, and intricately necessary as a *vehicle* of support for properly communicating the message of the text.

Because the Black Gospel music style is so similar to music characterized as "secular," there is a constant interaction and mutual feeding of styles. Gospel music has also found a home on performance stages and in night clubs, and thrives to some extent on the impetus and momentum gained from applause and accolades of the "audience." Back home in worship, Gospel music evokes heightened expectations of secular/sacred fervor, which permeates the congregation. In both "worlds" the community is bonded as it participates with musicians without constraints.

General vocal characteristics that give Gospel music its distinct flavor are vocal agility, tone color, and an extensive vocal range. Vocal timbres of the best Gospel singers range from well modulated "straight tones" to strained, full throated growls and shrills, with lots of controllable vibrato. Melodies are "best" executed if the leader can improvise with spontaneous interpolations, ornamentations, bends, and portamentos (scoops and slides). The use of the falsetto voice has enhanced Gospel music since the 1960s, adding a new dimension to other features that have popularized this genre. The tempo is left most often to the discretion of the leader. Slower tempos are subject to elaborate vocal embellishments. Faster tempos lend themselves to rhythms that are more syncopated. The repetition of words and phrases, in combination with other musical devices, helps to create an emotional impact on both the singers (leader and choir) and the congregation.

Modern and Contemporary Gospel Music

Societal conditions of worshippers, along with technological advancements and new musical inventions, have created new possibilities for the evolution of Gospel forms and styles. The civil rights movement deepened the awareness of societal inequities, and attention was focused again on the "beloved community," which could be brought together through music. The electric organ, with its vibrato capabilities, and microphones that had invaded the worship space expanded the quality of sound, style, and mechanics of delivery.

The term *modern* is generally applied to Gospel songs that emerged in the 1960s and continue to overlap with newly evolving forms. Occurring on the heels of the 1957 Newport Jazz Festi-

val, where traditional Gospel music was featured, the sacred Gospel sound became an acceptable worldly sound. Gospel music soon "hit the charts" as a popular sound, and there was little if any distinction between Gospel music for worship or for entertainment.

Black worship was affected by this new phenomenon, not only because of the "show dimension," but because of the societal context. Racial tensions were eased as people resorted to achieving freedom and bonding through music. The latest Gospel "hit" often became the special music for worship, if it could be learned from the record fast enough. Large, elaborately robed "stage" choirs, popularized by the Edwin Hawkins singers, became the models for church choirs. A new "rock" permeated worship, with lots of hand clapping, keyboard accompaniment, and trap drum sets to help make a joyful noise unto the Lord!

Contemporary Gospel music (which emerged during the 1980s) supplements other sounds heard in some Black worship services. The religious texts are often supported by chordal harmonies that have not been the traditional musical support for religious texts. Youth are finding worship more meaningful because they can identify with sounds from their own context. The contention is that the work of God's people in worship (*leitourgia*) should not be limited to ritual action that is not contextualized.

Preaching

"Is there a word from the Lord?" This question, which was imbedded in the souls of the slaves, continues with African American worshippers. For some, all of the other elements are preliminary to the preached word. This confirms the importance and centrality of preaching in Black worship from the Invisible Institution to the present. Worshippers come prepared to hear the good news delivered by inspired preachers whose reputations often encourage attendance at worship. Those who worship with openness find the divine activity of God in the sermon of a female or male messenger of God, who has accepted his or her call and claimed the authority to preach with power.

The preached word, presented so that it is heard and experienced, allows one to know that "there is a way out of no way," and frees worshippers to celebrate this fact with the preacher. The

word from the Lord is heard with the ears of one's total being, and it is experienced in the poetic flow of the preacher. The word elicits holistic responses that may begin in the gathered community, and will continue with worshippers as they move into the world.¹⁴

While currently a variety of preaching styles is utilized in Black worship, the traditional perception is that the preacher is able to "tell the story" (literally communicate) in language, symbols, and symbolic mannerisms that speak directly to the needs of worshippers. The messenger brings to the task a variety of gifts: knowledge of the Word, a divine listening ear, and a "feel" for the gathered community. With these gifts, the preacher serves as a divine conduit through which the fresh Word of God can flow without encumbrance.

With a basic acknowledgment that the cultural context of worshippers is a determining factor in modes of ritual action, preaching in the Black church can also be viewed as a poetic cultural art form.¹⁵ While authentically biblically based, the messages live and breathe with the community. Through the use of descriptive imagery and tonal and word paintings, stories come to life in the imagination of worshippers, so that hope is portrayed in the bleakest of circumstances. Dialogical communication skillfully takes place between preacher and the community, thus both must listen ardently to the other. This verbal call-and-response African form can easily evolve into a musical dialogue, sometimes with the aid of a skilled organist or pianist.

Some preachers continue the tradition of a symphonically orchestrated form of sermonizing. One can wait in anticipation of an adagio movement, which could gradually build up to a scherzo celebration, or a sonata allegro form with numerous recapitulations and a lengthy coda. An artistic form of occasional pauses during the sermon, especially during the time of celebration, helps to capture the experiencing attention of worshippers. Along with the participatory dialogue, which often heightens emotions, worshippers are listening for and receive a fresh word from the Lord. Even amid more emotional styles, the preaching may be didactic or proclamatory. In all instances, the preacher is aware of the urgent need of the community to deepen its faith and spiritual life.

Just as with other elements of worship, so also one can expect

that preaching in the Black church is not the same in every service of worship. Some worshiping contexts may dictate a less emotionally involved form of communication because of varying needs rather than as an attempt to imitate any other worshiping community. With the increasing acceptance of the ordination of women as clergy, the community can anxiously anticipate new forms of Black preaching. "New occasions teach new duties," and may demand new and different styles, which will in no way negate the traditional preaching heritage. As a folk art form, divinely inspired by God in Jesus Christ, Black preaching, too, is always in "process of becoming."

Prayer

"Here I stand, Lord, like an empty pitcher before a full fountain, just waiting to be filled. . . . Thank you for allowing me to wake up with the blood still running warm in my veins."¹⁶

The prayer tradition of contemporary Black worship, like music and preaching, rooted in Africa, has been nurtured in meeting houses and personal prayer lives of slaves and remains a means of vital force for spiritual release and fulfillment. It has continued in some current African American worship services without interruption. The familiar metaphoric prayer language, shaped by the common suffering of African Americans and transmitted by the oral tradition, continues in many services of worship. The attitude of reverence that pray-ers mysteriously assume makes one aware of the depth of faith and the dynamics of a personal relationship with the divine. One can "have a little talk with Jesus" and know that everything will be all right. Prayers still claim to be "empty pitchers," open for divine empowerment, not only to enter the space of the divine prayer altar, but to be able to say what really needs to be said.

A spontaneous offering of prayers is understood to be evidence that God initiates and carries the prayer forth. With this observation, however, one finds similar phrases and metaphors that are common in every denomination, which speaks to the powerful gift of memory. Even the sequential ordering of elements in prayers (from thanksgiving to submission), and the unlimited amount of time that one can take to pray will be the same or quite

similar. Although spontaneously offered, there is evidence of a memorized body of materials from traditional Black prayers. Common expressions reveal a strong sense of spiritual oneness and comfort in the gathered community where strength and security can be found. The ability to recall biblical passages and concepts, carried over from traditional Black prayer, is one of the measures of the depth of spirituality of prayer leaders.

Prayers printed in the bulletin to be prayed (or read) together by the congregation have little appeal to many Black worshippers. This limits the possibility of spontaneity and for some lacks the natural approach to God under the power of the Spirit. Operative here is the understanding that one called upon to pray must yield to the power of God, who speaks with the folks directly when they close their eyes, open their mouths, and rely on the enabling power of the Spirit to fill them. To read or pray words that are written, no matter how carefully they reflect another's spiritual direction, is to interfere with the natural form of communication between the divine and humanity.

It is not unusual in worship for prayer leaders to "tune" their prayers in the same manner as preachers, as the Spirit leads. This, too, is a continuation of the oral tradition in which natural vocal inflections are "ornamented" with bends, twists, and quavers, providing a musical flow. This style frees the community for an in-dwelling of the Spirit and invites similar musical responses from the congregation, so that the entire church is "singing the prayer." Where congregations are free and uninhibited, someone will "raise a song" that picks up themes from the prayer, thereby reshaping the ordering of elements.

One of the most difficult assignments for theological students is to prepare various forms of prayers in writing. One student insisted the entire semester that he could not write prayer language on paper. It was necessary for him to tape record his prayers for class submission, so that we were able to verbally discuss matters of concern. After calling to his attention his tendency to alternately punctuate every sentence with "thank you, Jesus," and "O Lord God," he was able to determine the need to listen to himself pray aloud and on paper.

Prayer continues to be a basic form through which African American worshippers express their faith as they seek wholeness and affirmation for personhood. As a communal form, it pro-

vides affirmation, hope, and healing for all gathered, and the opportunity for intercession for those who are not in attendance. Even with printed bulletins, prayers in the order of service may not be limited to the form assigned. Invocations might include self-dedication and pastoral concerns. Most, if not all, prayers include words of thanksgiving, pleas for help and remembrance, and willingness to submit to the will of God. Prayers, especially of the laity, may be addressed interchangeably to either person of the God Head. The close affinity with the divine and earthly Jesus is also apparent in prayers. The name of Jesus punctuates much of the prayer language.

Special "prayer and praise" times that establish the momentum for worship have continued without interruption from the Invisible Institution and Praise Houses in some congregations, particularly Baptists. Special times for prayer have been reinstated recently as part of the recovery of the Black tradition. Common prayer time during the time of gathering for worship includes Sunday morning and revival devotional services. Leadership is historically provided by deacons, which in some denominations is an office held only by men. Women have historically assumed this role in Pentecostal churches, with a recent trend toward the inclusion of women as leaders in other denominations. A time for prayer and praise during worship in some Black denominations preceded the current trend popularized by television. The period designated as the "altar call" meets the needs of worshipers who are seeking special prayers, healings, or blessings. Some come to the "altar" to offer themselves in renewal for Christian discipleship. Even congregations that may not theologically claim a special, ongoing altar space might extend a call for those with needs listed above. The historic "mourners' bench," where persons seeking an encounter with God are aided by the community to come to that point, or "come through," is not as prevalent as in previous years. One might find such a point of prayer as an element of worship in Southern, rural areas, especially during revivals. Other special times for prayer common among many Black worshipers include weekly prayer meetings, prayer bands, and prayer time during civil rights rallies.

Inherent in the ongoing discovery and recovery of the Black prayer tradition is a natural, childlike, holy boldness to approach

the throne of grace. This boldness is founded on an unwavering trust in the promises of God, which allows the community to unashamedly express its faith. One approaches God boldly, and yet stands as an empty pitcher before a full fountain. Open and vulnerable before the divine, one is free to accept the in-filling power from a God who, in the words of a traditional African American prayer, "sits high and looks low . . . snatched our soul from the gates of hell, and put a new song and prayer in our hearts."

Diversity of Responses

African Americans are not all alike! Nor are all worship practices the same. There are individual histories, just as there are denominational histories, that share similarities and yet affirm the right to be unique. While there are numerous ways to determine differing worship gifts, the approach used here is the basic matter of theology and doctrine that helped to shape current worship patterns. The assumption here is that in some ways what is believed in doctrine helps determine how a congregation will worship.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the lack of documentation of theologies and practices of worship by African American churches will limit a detailed discussion from a denominational perspective.

Methodist Traditions

African American Methodists claim in varying degrees the theological heritage of John Wesley with the American shaping by Bishop Francis Asbury. The uninhibited enthusiasm in the worship of early Methodists appealed to people of African descent in America. Equally appealing was the Methodist piety, which was supported and encouraged in worship and through spiritual discipline. Small class meetings were helpful in shaping spiritual directions and discipline, and in promoting corporate prayer. Rituals were not complicated by the use of service books by a community of faith that was just beginning to read.

Forms of worship are similar to the parent Methodist body, but styles of action are culturally and contextually determined.

Two sacraments, the Lord's Supper and baptism, are observed in each of the Black Methodist denominations, with rituals adapted from The (Euro-American) Methodist Church.

African Methodist Episcopal Church

Richard Allen initially modified the Methodist form of worship to accommodate the culture and aesthetics of the new African American congregation. The services naturally assumed the character of worship in the slave community. With the exposure of some of the leaders to other worship modes, conflicts arose as to what forms and styles of music were appropriate for worship. AME Bishop Daniel A. Payne made the first change toward what he said would be "improvement" by replacing the practice of lining-out hymns with choral music sung by choirs between 1841-1842.¹⁸ Payne further opposed the notion of an African American ideology and encouraged churches to pattern worship after the Euro-American Methodist counterpart. In spite of his efforts, most AME churches, especially in the South, adapted the basic worship structure inherited from the Methodists to include styles from the slave heritage.

In time, an AMEC worship ethos developed that is best understood and appreciated from experience. There is a strong emphasis on preaching, prayer, fellowship, and a diversity of forms and styles of music. Unique elements in the order of service are the use of the doxology at the beginning and the end of the service, and the use of the Decalogue (long form or abridged). There are several ritual options for the Lord's Supper, one of which includes sung Amens, chants (including the Lord's Prayer), and one stanza of "Nearer My God to Thee." A Book of Services prepared for the Bicentennial not only makes available all rituals of the Church, but contains other liturgical information for laypersons and clergy.¹⁹

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

The AMEZ Church originated in New York and has its largest membership east of the Mississippi, with concentration in North Carolina. Out of Methodist Episcopal doctrinal roots, the Church

has shaped its own theology, acknowledging the Good News in Jesus Christ amid the realities of the marginal existence of its membership. Key terms of the Christian faith, such as *salvation*, *freedom*, *Kingdom of God*, *sin*, and *atonement* have different meanings from those of Euro-Americans. The Apostles' Creed is the only formal creed of the denomination. The discipline of the Church, articles of religion, and constitutional requirements are the same as those of the Methodist Episcopal heritage.²⁰

The order of worship, although similar to the Methodist Episcopal Church from which it separated in 1796, is different in terms of style and action. Preaching, prayer, fellowship, and music in worship show evidence of strongly family oriented worship.

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

The CME Church is the only Black Methodist denomination that was organized with the cooperation and support of its parent body, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The first bishops elected by the Church were ordained under the auspices of the MEC, South, and all separate properties used for slave members were authorized to be deeded to the newly organized CME Church. Its membership is nationwide and heavily concentrated in the Southeast. The doctrines are the same as those of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but practical application reflects special concern for social justice and inclusiveness. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed provide their creedal expression.

Foundations for CME worship, an explanation of each of the elements of worship, an outline of the Christian Year, and liturgical colors are included in the *Book of Rituals and Aids to Worship* (1987). In the introduction of this document is the claim that worship is an acknowledgment that God is not far from any one of us, and that God in Jesus Christ is worthy of worship whether in services of corporate worship or in acts of secular work. The emphasis in the Book of Rituals is on corporate worship, or what some Black Christians call "The Meeting"—the gathering of two or three in the name of Jesus. Elements specifically highlighted in the introduction are singing the songs of Zion, preaching the gospel, and the occasional celebra-

tion of the sacrament of Holy Communion. The pattern of worship is outlined in six steps: vision of God, adoration and praise, confession of sin, pardon, challenge (through the preached word), and decision.

Baptists

Black Baptist churches were initially related to Euro-American denominations. Emergence into independent bodies resulted from protest against restrictions and unequal treatment by parent bodies, rather than doctrinal differences. Many Black Baptists were connected to Euro-American organizational structures through the African Baptist Missionary Society, a division that devoted most of its work to mission efforts in Africa. Separation from these structures was facilitated by virtue of the autonomous Baptist polity. Unlike their Euro-American counterparts, the Church has been and remains a center for political activities for the community. The concerns are not only for Baptists, but for all who suffer injustice.

Baptists are united on the basic principle of theological individualism, a belief that the individual is able to interpret the will of God for himself or herself. The individual is responsible for determining biblical truths in communion with God and fellowship with Jesus the Christ. Authority over a local church is housed within the congregation itself. It is not unusual for factions to develop within congregations when there are disagreements on basic theological issues, and splits are likely to occur.

One of the most significant doctrines is the autonomy of the local church. Orders of worship among Black Baptists are diverse, reflecting their autonomous nature. The contents of worship range from a basically simple outline of elements (especially in rural areas), to a more detailed outline. Worship often begins with a "devotional period," followed by a prelude and call to "formal" worship. In most instances, there is an abundance of music and prayers, which builds to and culminates in preaching and an invitation to discipleship (opening of the doors of the church) at the end.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are understood to be ordinances rather than sacraments in the Baptist Church. At the heart of the doctrine is "believers' baptism" by immersion. This

restricts baptism to persons who are old enough to make a personal profession of faith after a decisive experience of faith and repentance. It also means that persons baptized by other modes, or as infants, generally must be re-baptized if they choose to hold membership in a Baptist church. However, with a doctrine of autonomy, some Baptists now accept previous baptisms, if they occurred upon a confession of faith.

The Lord's Supper is understood to be a memorial meal that lends itself to fresh encounters between Christ and his people. Various meanings are applied, but most Black Baptists understand that this is not a "mere" memorial pointing back to ancient history. It is a visible symbol that reinforces the gospel preached in words that remind worshipers of all the events in the life of Christ. The local congregation determines whether the Table will be "fenced" or open to other believers.

Pentecostal and Holiness

With so many varieties of Pentecostal and Holiness churches with local authority, it is difficult to generalize about worship in these traditions. The Holiness movement began first as a reform movement in Methodism in 1867 when a group of Methodists organized the "National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness" (later called National Holiness Association). Aspects of Wesley's theology with emphasis on the importance of sanctification or Christian perfection appealed especially to Methodists and Baptists. Initial leadership in the movement and the ultimate shaping of worship practices included African Americans and Euro-Americans, males and females.

With the evolution of the movement into formal structures of denominations and sects, some worshipers added features of Pentecostalism: baptism of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues and spiritual healing. The great Pentecostal explosion during the Azusa Street revivals in 1906, led by William J. Seymour, a Black preacher, marked the beginning of the worldwide spread of this movement. One of the significant characteristics of Pentecostal worship is its openness to the inclusion of a variety of racial groups at every level of society. People are valued and affirmed in worship for the gifts from God that they bring and offer for the good of the whole.

The Church of God in Christ

The origin of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) stems from these revivals. The initial movement that led to the formation of the Church began in and around Lexington, Mississippi, under the leadership of Charles Harrison Mason. The first general assembly and official founding date of the Church in 1907 distinguishes it as the sole incorporated Pentecostal body in existence from 1907 to 1914. As such, the COGIC denomination was the only ecclesiastical authority to which Euro-American Pentecostal churches could appeal for the ordination of ministers. Over a period of time a large number of Pentecostal churches evolved and shaped their own ecclesiastical structure and worship practices.

The *Official Manual* of the Church of God in Christ, published in 1973, includes Articles of Religion upon which worship is doctrinally based. Ordinances of the Church include baptism, the Lord's Supper, and foot washing. Baptism is the rite by which persons who profess faith are admitted to the Lord's Table. The Zwinglian, or memorial, view undergirds the Lord's Supper. As baptized believers partake of the meal, they enter by faith into a spiritual union with Christ in memory of the Lord's suffering and death on the cross. This act of faith also symbolizes the union of believers with one another as new life, strength, and joy are given to the soul. The regularity of the meal is left to the discretion of the pastor in charge of the congregation.

Foot washing, when observed, is held subsequent to the Lord's Supper, with women and men separated for the ordinance. The focus on humility and servanthood is powerfully expressed in the act itself, and in the joyous singing of the congregation, which accompanies the rite.

A detailed ordering of worship elements for each of the ordinances, burials, marriage, the renewal of marriage vows, and special services is included in the *Manual*, but there is no suggested order for regular Sunday worship.²¹ Distinguishing features are not so much in *what* is done, but *how* it is done. A deeply spiritual aura permeates the worship environment during periods of testimony, exuberant singing, praying, preaching, healing, shouting, conversions, and offertory. Each of the elements is accompanied by a variety of keyboard and percussion

instruments. The entire service is so musical that keyboard accompaniment of the preacher's tonal message does not appear out of the ordinary even to worshipers who are not familiar with this particular style. One is made aware of the importance of the keyboard for helping the preacher "stay on pitch" in the heightened moments of celebration. The length of time for worship is determined by the spiritual momentum engendered by each of the elements. A service may last two or three hours, and the fellowship afterward could prolong it another hour.

Mixing and Merging Elements

The unique gifts and contributions of African Americans to the American liturgical heritage often escape the pen of Euro-American writers. One reason for the neglect of positive references is perhaps embodied in John F. Watson's negative observation in 1819 at which time he chastised white Methodist worshipers for engaging in singing practices similar to the "illiterate blacks of the society."²² His opinion that African Americans were illiterate and, therefore, incapable of contributing to the enhancement of worship was no doubt the prevalent attitude among Euro-Americans.

A more positive note was struck by Daniel Mathews 158 years later. According to his account, white evangelicals were more receptive to the participation of African Americans in worship. Although this openness conveys a concern that surpassed the actual feelings of Euro-Americans, evangelical worship was emotionally more appealing to African Americans. The involvement of blacks in worship contributed significantly to American evangelical history. Mathews contends that "precisely because of that common public worship and because neither people could free itself of the other, the two religious modes . . . black and white—cannot be understood apart from each other."²³

Mathews is clear that Blacks and whites did not share identical religious experiences and ultimate hopes, but that worship and social involvement were mutually affected by the other. He affirms that "the religious ethos which [Southern] blacks projected into society was rich and powerful precisely because it was something which blacks had fashioned for themselves and in doing so revealed a new way of expressing Christianity."²⁴

There is not sufficient evidence nor agreement as to specific elements transferred from one racial group to another. Where there are similarities in styles of responses, origins can be traced both to Africa and to Europe. For Euro-Americans, various forms of emotional ecstasy, a joyous sense of release and celebration, and psychological transformations during conversion experiences were universal phenomena of revivals in England, Wales, Ireland, New England, and colonies in the South. These responses were also characteristic of the worship of African peoples. Contrary to the opinion of white observers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Blacks were not "merely imitating emotional white worshippers." Vitality and emotional fervor in preaching, conversion, congregational responses, and enthusiastic singing were perhaps more African than Euro-American. The incantational preaching style of white Baptists and Methodists was similar to the interaction between leader and worshippers in African traditional religions. The use of water in rites of passage (referred to as baptism by Euro-Americans) was also familiar to African converts.

While needs, images, symbols, and experiences differed, it is possible that the similar style of liturgical behavior provided a means of religious contact between the two races. This form of contact, where barriers of race are transcended in worship (often just for the worshipping moment) apparently facilitated the involvement of Blacks with whites in the founding of Pentecostal movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Current Pentecostal and nondenominational movements also involve interaction between the races, indicating that the trend continues. Common behavioral practices that continue in separate places of worship may indicate a fusion or adaptation of elements rather than an expropriation, in toto, by either group.

African American Congregations in Euro-American Churches

The theology and polity of each of the Euro-American denominations with an African American constituency basically undergirds the worship order. Local congregations have either continued the African American styles or have recovered this rich heritage in worship in recent years. Along with the inclusion of

Spirituals and songs reflective of the African American heritage in hymnody, some of the denominations are intentional in the inclusion of some of the liturgical heritage in denominational liturgical resources.

For Discussion

1. Is it important to you that the gathered community is a hospitable community? Why?
2. How often are songs from the African American tradition incorporated in your regular worship experiences?
3. Examine your denomination's hymnal to determine the number of Spirituals and other songs from the African American tradition that are included.
4. What are some ways that spontaneous prayers and responses might be included in services of worship that normally do not lend themselves to spontaneity?
5. Is it possible for worship to be so free-flowing that a call for things to be done "decently and in order" becomes necessary? How are spontaneity and planned responses carefully balanced in worship?