

**AESTHETICS AND UTILITARIAN VALUES OF  
SELECTED AFRICAN AMERICAN NEGRO  
SPIRITUALS AND GOSPEL SONGS**

**BY**

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M.A./ARTS/06851/2010-2011**

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**JUNE, 2015**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “Aesthetics and Utilitarian Values of Selected African American Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs” is written by me and it is the account of my own research in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this thesis was previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other institution.

SHIRU, VICTOR BABATETE  
M.A./ARTS/06851/2010-2011

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Signature

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Date

## **CERTIFICATION**

This thesis entitled “AESTHETICS AND UTILITARIAN VALUES OF SELECTED AFRICAN AMERICAN NEGRO SPIRITUALS AND GOSPEL SONGS” by Victor Babatete SHIRU, meets the regulations governing the Award of Master of Arts Degree in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and it is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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**Chairman, Supervisory Committee**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

To God – the owner and preserver of all life, and the loftiest idea in Literature.

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My heart replete with joy and adoration to God Almighty for His ineffable love, boundless grace, unending mercies, measureless provision, unfailing protection and unparalleled faithfulness at all times. His presence and help brought me to this point and made this thesis a reality. LORD! I love you, and thank you.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines African American songs as an embodiment of black American identity, experience, socio-economic realities, and African Americans' perception of the world located as they are within the American society. Although, the subject of African American Music has produced a large and varied literature, the inattention to questions of beauty and functions of the songs seem to neglect the contribution and distinctiveness of the genre in addressing the African American crisis and predicament. In an attempt to fill this gap, the study focuses on selected songs of two song types belonging to the black tradition - Spirituals and early Gospel Songs of Charles Albert Tindley and Thomas Dorsey - as forms which widely explain the circumstances of black life in white dominated America. In particular, the study attempts to establish the aesthetic and utilitarian values of the aforesaid song types. In order to achieve the goals of the study, twelve songs are analysed: six songs from each song style. They include "De Winter'll Soon be Ober," "I Got Shoes," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "We are Clim'in' Jacob's Ladder," "Crucifixion," and "Soon I Will Be Done." Others include: "I'll Overcome Someday," "We'll Understand It Better By and By," "Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me)," "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," "Peace in the Valley" and "I'm Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song." A close scrutiny of the songs reveals two important issues. The first illustrates that the two vernacular styles, developed at different times and environments, provide and at times share a definitive set of aesthetic and stylistic features. Some of them include: allegory, allusion, rhyme, repetition, verse and chorus structure, call-and-response pattern, improvisation, amongst others. Second, the artistic forms – Negro Spiritual and Gospel Songs, - beyond their religious functions, serve as expressive outlets of social, cultural and political circumstances of African American life within the United States. To drive the point home, Postcolonial theory is employed as a theoretical tool. This framework facilitates the examination of the colonial experience of African Americans in terms of the oppressive form of slavery and its effects on their social and cultural spheres. It also examines the way the two musical styles under study serve as African Americans' creative, artistic responses and subtle forms of resistance to the oppressions and race-based discrimination in the mainland of America. This approach in the study stretches backwards from the colonial past of American slavery to the dynamics of neo-colonialism in the early decades of the twentieth century.*



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## Chapter One

### 1.0 Background to the Study

Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs are part of the vernacular traditions of the African American people. The vernacular traditions point to black oral forms, creatively created through each phase of the African American culture and presence in the United States. It is a dynamic and continuous process of expressions that chiefly rely on the medium of language in mirroring and evaluating black experience within the American society. Ralph Ellison cited in Gates and Mckay (1997:02) argues that the “vernacular art accounts, to a large degree, for the black American’s legacy of self-awareness and endurance.” In other words, the constant contact between black and white in the United States produced in African Americans a profound anxiety with regards to their status and quest for equality and justice. In the light of this, the varied expressions of vernacular art portray the long struggle for freedom, better life and dignity over the centuries, and the African Americans’ attempt to humanize an often harsh world through expressive modes. Therefore, the African American vernacular:

*consists of forms sacred – songs, prayers, and sermons – as well as secular – work songs, secular rhymes and songs, blues jazz, and stories of many kinds. It also consists of dances... (Gates and Mckay 1997:03).*

Although the aforementioned forms vary in their aesthetic qualities, the vernacular forms share traits that reflect African background. Some of the traits include call/response patterns, dance beats (both in musical form and in the rhythm of a tale or rhyme), group creation, and most importantly, improvisation (Mckay 1997:04). This is in addition to features which portray the blend of European, Euro-American and American Indian forms, reshaped to fit and reflect the

African American experience with strong sensibilities. Examples of such elements include: lack of delineation between two contrasts, for example good and evil in black folktales; confrontational attitude with earthly troubles, and proffering of solutions in blues music, amongst others.

The beginning of the vernacular tradition is closely linked to the days of slavery that spanned between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Given the cruelty and inhumanity of the slave system, it is amazing that the dehumanizing institution of American slavery did not ‘destroy’ the slaves, but equipped them with a rich culture. It is a culture born out of a completely different social, spiritual, economic, political environment, and the remnants of their old lives carried to the New World. It was an environment where the enslaved was not allowed to practice any facets of his culture explicitly (Abdullah 2009:10). Equally, it is a culture created out of “the spirit of resistance ... in the collective psyches of the newly formulated Negro population” (Abdullah 2009:10). The enslaved Africans translated and embedded this mentality of resistance into their newly created culture, and venting it virtually in all aspects of their lives. Music, especially what became known as the “Negro Spiritual,” was an important part of slave culture.

Negro Spirituals, as a body of songs, is a form of music that is indigenous, oral and resonates deeply with the experiences of enslaved African Americans. Although there are many Biblical references used in the lyrics, the songs were not always sung for religious purposes, but as outlet for a range of group experiences. Through the lyrics of the Spirituals, African American slaves ‘stealthily’ wove within the music their experience of coping with human servitude and their strong desire for freedom. It further offered the African slave “a much needed psychic escape from the workaday world of slavery’s restrictions and cruelties,” as figured by Gates and Mckay (1997:5). They maintain that the usage of Spirituals by the slaves was not restricted to a

particular time of the day, but could be sung at work time, leisure moments and rest time, and this offered them a shield against the caprices of slaveholders. As African American slaves made use of spirituals, perhaps they unconsciously, laid a foundation for subsequent African American sacred and secular musical styles, like Blues, Jazz, Gospel Music, Hip-Hop, etc. Although, the different styles vary widely in their tone, theme and instrumentation, the styles have enriched the musical tradition in the American society and by extension have spread their influence all over the world.

The abolishment of slavery in 1865 meant several things to the music culture and orientation of blacks in America. As the newly freed slaves began seeking a new life away from the rural setting of the southern plantation, they formed churches affiliated with established white denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc). Although, the structure of liturgies was modeled after their white counterparts, the freed slaves rejected the original form of Negro Spirituals, possibly not to serve as reminder of their former conditions (Jones, Randy et al 2007). This was replaced by a body of songs known as Gospel Songs, which developed overtime, with the musical style reaching its height in the 1920s and 1930s. The consideration of Gospel Songs in this study covers the early 20<sup>th</sup> century songs of the genre's pioneers, such as Charles A. Tindley, whose compositions are in the form of Gospel hymns, and Thomas Dorsey, who is credited for infusing his songs with blues and jazz performance practices. However, some of the traits of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs, previously not noticed or considered obvious, deserve a close scrutiny. In this regard, the research investigates the figurative devices, stylistic attributes, techniques, such as repetition, rhyme, allusions, imagery, call-and-response structure, improvisation, and other features that make the two musical forms pleasing, beautiful and didactic. This also entails examining the roles or usefulness of the musical genres to African

Americans in white dominated America. It is in the light of the above concerns that the study establishes the aesthetic and utilitarian values of selected African American Negro Spirituals (during slavery) and Gospel Songs (in the post slavery era) respectively.

### **1.1 Historical and Musical Backgrounds of African Americans**

Any attempt to appreciate the beauty and usefulness of Negro spirituals will undoubtedly point to the history of African Americans. It is a history of servitude, resistance and survival on the American soil for nearly two-hundred and fifty years (1619-1865). The history brings to mind the transporting, selling and incarcerating of captured Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. Such a rude transplant brings to bare the story life in chains, and what that meant for the victims caught within the web of slave trade and the American institution of slavery. What this forceful transplant implies is that the ancestors of African Americans came to America as a result of slave trade.

The slave trade was a sort of triangular trade of three stages, each of which offered the possibility of a full cargo and a profit. Rather than trade in its real sense, slave trade was more of exchange of goods for captured and enslaved Africans or vice-versa, as illustrated in the diagram below:

## The Triangular Trade Route

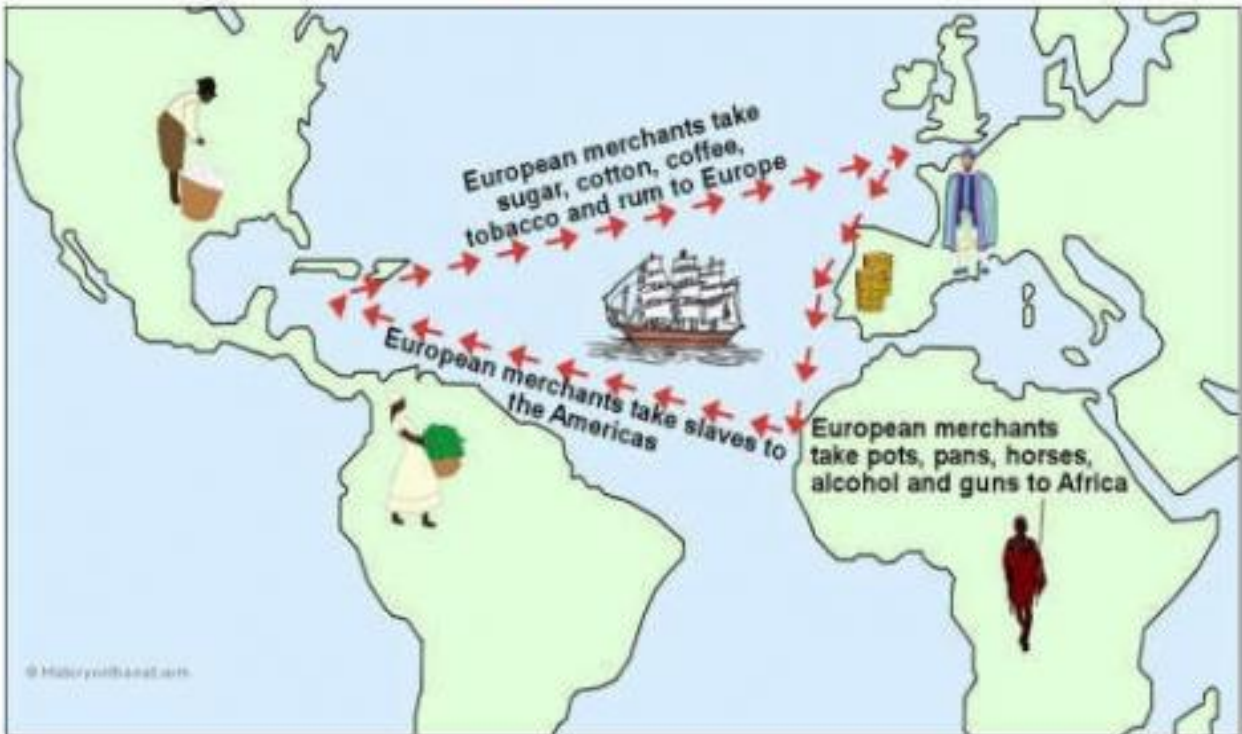


Figure 1 - Source: [www.honresourcesshop.com/history](http://www.honresourcesshop.com/history)

From the diagram above, the triangular voyage, which could in some way affirm slave trade as a despicable crime had its starting point from England. The first leg of the voyage carried cargo - iron, clothes, fire arms, etc. - to Africa's 'slave coast' in exchange for captured Africans. Meanwhile, on the second leg, known as the middle passage, slaves from Africa were transported in specially built ships to the North and South Americas and the Caribbean, where they worked on plantations. A plantation, according to Champion (1990:156) "... was a large tract of farm land for growing cotton, sugar, tobacco, and other farm products." It also consisted slave quarters and the 'big house' where the slave master and his family lived (Champion



1990:156). For the final leg, the slave traders used some of the profits to buy some products – sugar, cotton, coffee, tobacco, cocoa and rum, which they took back to England. Stamp (1956) holds that such a trade in human flesh was facilitated by the existence of slavery among the African tribes prior the advent of the European traders. He argues that the native dealers were often willing participants in such a trade with the Europeans. This shift which spanned from the 16<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was first pioneered by Portugal, purposely for agricultural advances. This later attracted other Europeans like the Dutch, French and English to do same in their colonies.

In the English colonies, enslavement of Africans in British North America marked a new and peculiar twist to the institution of slavery in human history. One distinguishing feature that seems to dent America's institution of slavery as 'peculiar' is its racial attitude and badge of degradation placed on its African victims. With American slavery, these victims were considered less human and their worth equated to mere 'property' (Friedman 2010; Stamp 1956). This is in addition to the fact slaves were not allowed to speak their indigenous languages or practice the culture and religion of the Old World explicitly (Costen 1993:31-32). Among the practices outlawed were the use of drums and dancing or excessive physical movement, which were considered by the enslaved community as integral elements of their traditional African cultures (Costen 1993:32). The series of prohibitions meted on the slaves meant that there were concerted efforts by the slave owners to sever any link that gave individual slave a sense of 'Africaness,' and perhaps to force the enslaved into a state of dependency. However, unknown to the slaveholders was the cultural retention of what Jenks Okwori (2002:147) dubs "echoes of Africanisms" in the bones of the slaves. He asserts that "the body of the enslaved was a storehouse of knowledge, a library of performative information" (p.147), which overtime became

obvious when the slaves were exposed to European influences, especially the Christian religion; an influence that facilitated the birth of a distinct form of art - Spirituals.

### **1.1.1. From Slaves' Christianization to Spirituals**

The Christianization of slaves, which eventually became a pathway to the creation of Negro Spirituals, was no simple process. Aside the fact that earlier slaves were unwilling to relinquish their religious tradition – Islam, alongside a plethora of religious beliefs – the slave captors on the other hand opposed the conversion of their slaves. This was because the early 17<sup>th</sup> century slaveholders considered their slaves as ‘heathen’ and unfit for the Christians’ rite of baptism, lest it gave them a claim to freedom (Stampp 1956:156; Costen 1993:32). However, with the lessening of such fear by colonial legislatures, slave masters could look upon organized religion as a tool for enhancing the ‘servanthood’ of their slaves.

Okwori (2002:151) holds that the exposure of African American slaves to Christianity was intended to make them subservient and obedient. He hinges this on the growing number of runaways, slave revolts and other acts of slaves’ ‘misbehavior,’ hence compelling the slave masters to take measures against such occurrences, especially through religious instruction. Slave owners saw Christianity, when properly taught, as a means of social control (Mapherson 1971). It is not surprising therefore that the content of religious instruction was more on submissive theology. Stampp (1956:158) attests that slaves received:

*... biblical command that servants should obey their masters, and they heard of punishments awaiting the disobedient slave in the hereafter. They heard too, that eternal salvation would be their reward for faithful service, and that on the Day of Judgment, God would deal impartially with the poor and rich, the black man and the white.*

Even though the above was meant to improve the servant hood of enslaved Africans, the recipients of such sermons were expected to demonstrate their new Christian state by being ‘good’ slaves. Ironically, in such a pious environment, “the liberating Word of God freed the slaves to respond in new and creative ways in the midst of their human bondage” (Costen 1993:28). Their exposure to Christianity appears to have imbued them with substances needful for the creative creation of what later became “Negro Spirituals.” This includes their exposure to Euro-American style of Psalms and hymn singing, biblical stories that paralleled their slave experience, and hope.

Hope for the enslaved community became an indispensable tool for consolation and endurance against the American slave system that was brutal, oppressive and dehumanizing. This became more experiential for the slaves during the religious revivalism known as “Awakenings.” These special religious meetings led by Presbyterian and Methodist preachers, were attended by the whites and blacks alike. Occurring in the form of camp meetings, the teachings at the Great Awakening (1720’s-1740) and Second Great Awakening (early 1800-1840s) “promoted the idea that all Christians were equal in the sight of God, a message that provided hope and sustenance to the slaves” (Moore M., and Perkins K. 2005). Equality which is one of the tenets and fundamental precepts upon which Christianity is built, seemed to have stirred in the enslaved the sense of self worth, as against the low status accorded them by their owners, and hope for better future. Reiterating on the importance of hope, Moltmann (2000:21) attests that:

*Hope finds in Christ not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering... it does calm the unquiet heart, but itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope*

*in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is,  
but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it.*

To align African American slaves with the hope stated above is to consider perhaps, the dual role hope played in the lives of the slaves. First as consolation to the suffering African American slaves that slavery with its attendant toil and pain will soon be over. Second is the yearning for freedom by the slaves - a longing which in itself became the “unquiet heart” in the enslaved.

In an effort to find ‘freedom’ and to eke out an existence, slaves developed a unique African American Christian faith in secrecy. They sought privacy when worshipping because some slave owners forbade them to manifest “extravagant worship style” (Jenks 2002:152). In other words, the expression of slaves’ religious fervour involved enthusiastic singing, clapping, dancing and shouting, which slave owners viewed as elements of heathenism. However, the restriction on the slaves’ performative and expressive forms only appeared to have framed the context for them to respond in a creative way. That creativity expressed itself in the “Invisible Institution,” which was the slaves’ secret gathering for worship.

The “Invisible Institution” provided a platform for the enslaved to merge Christian beliefs and practices and the reality of their existence. Secluded in slave quarters or in the “hush harbors” in the woods, African slaves in America transformed the Americanized version of Christianity into a form with which they could identify and express freely. Costen (1993:39) in the following lines offers an insight into the activities of African American slaves in such secret gatherings:

*Here in the Invisible Institution, away from the questioning  
eyes of the slaveholders, slaves could freely express themselves  
in the presence of One who cared about their humanity. In  
secrecy, the songs heard and sung in camp meeting settings*

*would be remembered and reworked. A sermon would be preached in “storytelling fashion,”... that were appealing and that met the needs of the slaves. The response of the people could then be commensurate with the timbre and style of a people who, although oppressed, could participate wholeheartedly.*

Even though the private gathering was sought to experience ‘freedom’ and Christian belief system they could call their own, slaves creatively came up with a body of songs known as ‘folk’ or ‘Negro’ Spirituals. The songs were created or adapted forms of psalm and hymn singing of camp meetings, but performed in an African style (Jenks 2002:152). This implies that Spirituals as a body of songs is a synthesis or amalgam of forms and styles of African and European influences. Although couched in religious language, the body of songs became an outlet for the varied experiences of African American slaves. Barnwell and Brandon (1984:14) contend that the expansiveness of spirituals “deal with basic human problems nakedly faced. They deal with life and death; with the transcendence of or the acceptance of death.” They further assert that Spirituals “deal with hope, suffering, injustice and disease. They deal with the themes of abandonment and self-worth, and faith versus sin.” But despite the wide range of the themes, Buseck (2011) holds that Spirituals as a body of songs brought the slaves the vital flow of hope and determination to live-on.

It is difficult to establish or pinpoint an exact date for the origin of Spirituals as a musical genre. Scholars hold that the prolific period of composition was likely in the half of the eighteenth century, and extending until the end of legalized slavery in the mid-nineteenth century (Jones 2000). But a major significant implication of Negro Spirituals after slavery is the established roots for subsequent African American secular and sacred genres: Jazz, Blues, Gospel, Rock, etc which amongst other oral forms, constitute outlets of expression for black life

in America. For the purpose of this study, close attention will be paid on Gospel music to ascertain its context, content and usefulness to African Americans.

### **1.1.2 The Birth of Gospel Songs**

The context out of which African American early Gospel Songs were developed is linked to one of the pivotal events in the African American history – Great Migration. As the name implies, Great Migration refers to the mass movement of a group of people, and in this context, African Americans, who in their numbers moved from the rural South to the urban North. The ‘exodus’ which perhaps started as a trickle in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, turned out to be ‘great’ by World War I (1914-1918). In the words of Sherry Spector (2010:02), “the Great Migration was one of the largest internal movements of people in the history of the United States.” This shift was occasioned by a number of reasons embodied in two factors: the oppression of blacks in the South, and the increasing employment opportunities for blacks in the North. The combined effects of the aforesaid factors helped to set the stage for the growth of Gospel Music in the Northern cities.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1865, former slaves had to cope with the new forms of social and political oppression. In particular, with the collapse of Reconstruction – a period directly after the Civil War during which the South was ‘reconstructed’ by the North after its loss in the war – white supremacists fashioned new means of subjecting blacks in a position of inferiority (Norton et al 1984:256). Foremost among these measures was the racist practice of political disfranchisement. This was a measure enforced by the Southern States to deny the participation of Blacks in democratic process until the Fifteenth Amendment of the United States’ Constitution in 1870 (Norton et al 1984:256). The amendment prohibited states from

denying the vote of people “on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude” (Friedman 2008:20). However, embittered by the ratification, Southern States (amidst other measures) levied taxes on all citizens wishing to vote; or required a proof of the voter’s literacy. Though seemingly trivial, Norton et al (1984:256) hold that most African Americans fell short of the aforementioned standards. This is hinged on the fact that most African Americans at that point were a people mostly accustomed to poverty, with little or no education.

Similarly, racial discrimination was extended to social affairs. Akin to the inequality and denigration that characterized race relations in the antebellum South, White legislators in the post- slavery era codified into law local segregation and discrimination. Known as Jim Crow, the codified laws separated blacks and whites through segregationist legislation, enforced between 1876 and as late as 1975 (Friedman 2008:20; Norton et al 1984:256). During this period, there were segregated parks, hospitals, public transport, restaurants, theaters and other venues that provided whites with safety and protection from contact with blacks. “This attitude,” notes Hana Markova (2008:12), “openly expressed the opinion of whites concerning their supremacy over blacks and galvanized their efforts in maintaining their racial purity.” This implies that the racial caste system (Jim Crow) elevated Whites over Blacks by regulating social, economic and political relationships between the races. The enforcement of such discriminatory rules favoured the dominant Whites, but relegated the Blacks to second-rate status.

Furthermore, Whites reinforced disfranchisement and segregation with violence. Violence in forms of lynching and humiliation on the streets were meted on Blacks, especially those attempting to exercise the franchise. Darden (2004:131) contends that “...between 1870 and 1910 virtually every Southern state took away the right of African Americans to vote.” He furthers that this was done “either through legislation, the Poll Tax, the grandfather clause, or

outright terrorism.” These measures are pointers to both subtle and direct attacks on Southern Blacks. Subtle attacks on African Americans were chiefly discriminatory legislation (Black Codes, Jim Crow, for example) that were “piled up throughout the South, confronting black people with countless daily reminders of their inferior status” (Norton et al 1984:256). The direct attack on the other hand, took the form of terrorism: the violent campaigns of the Ku Klux Klan, and lynching of Blacks. The Ku Klux Klan was a campaign to frustrate Reconstruction and keep the freedmen in subjection. Its attacks on Blacks were mainly night visits, whippings, beatings and murder (Norton et al 1984:238.). Also, lynching of Blacks became common in the South after the Civil War. Spector (2010) notes that between 1865 and 1968, lynching statistic reveals that as many as 3,500 Blacks were lynched in the South before the federal laws were passed to prevent it. Hard pressed by varying forms of confrontations in the South, African Americans responded by migrating gradually to the North, where there were increased industrialization and apparently good prospects.

The tensions caused by blacks’ migration appear to have brought to limelight what blacks had known in the South: racism. The racial problem, fueled by increase in competition among Blacks and Whites for jobs and housing, prompted social conflicts between the two races. To ‘regulate’ such unhealthy competition, Sherry (2010:2) attests that “African Americans... suffered the additional indignities of racism and fallout from the prevailing corrupted interpretations of Darwin’s theory of evolution.” The corrupted interpretations of Darwin’s theory of Evolution that were prominent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of the United States were “Social Darwinism” and “Eugenics” (Roger 2009). Expounded by Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton respectively, the two ‘perverted’ interpretations attempted to justify discrimination based on race and ethnicity. The theories derive their substance from the



application of Darwinian ideas such as ‘adaptation’ and ‘natural selection.’ Galton, for instance, introduced the theory of Eugenics in 1883 to describe selective breeding in humans to improve the fitness of the human race. However, when his ethical theory was united with Spencer’s socially inclined concept of survival, the result was Social Darwinism – a theory that endorsed racism and blatant acts of discrimination (Roger 2009). In effect, viewing the expanding migrant populations as threatening to life in the North:

*Discriminatory real estate practices forced blacks into ill-maintained and segregated housing, contributing to the rise of the urban black ghetto. Blacks were routinely excluded from labour unions, and many migrants were forced into menial jobs as butlers, waiters, and the like, or served as replacement workers (“scabs”) during strikes by white unions (Anthony Appia and Henry Lois Gates 2005:51).*

From the above passage, it is obvious that as African Americans began their lives as urban industrial workers in the North, their living conditions and status were barely elevated. The persistent racism and segregation did not only encourage the rise of ‘racialized’ residential concentration, such as black ghettos, but relegated the African Americans to lower jobs. Even though African Americans considered themselves as fortunate urban workers, their counterpart whites perceived them as threat to their livelihood and as strikebreakers during strike (The Microsoft Encarta Africana, 1999). It is not surprising that such racial tension inflamed race riots in Northern cities, such as East St. Louis in 1917 and Chicago in 1919 amongst others.

Ironically, in the face of the aforementioned difficulties, a “new Negro” movement developed. Popularly known as Harlem Renaissance (predominantly in New York City during the 1920s), the era did see a marked increase in output by African Americans in literature, visual arts and music. In music, for instance, the impact of the Great migration can be seen in the rise and development of urban Blues, Jazz and Gospel Music. There is a recurring agreement

between critics and scholars alike that Gospel music derives its name and theology from the gospel of Jesus Christ. But for African Americans who in the aftermath of Civil War migrated and experienced oppression and debasement in the Southern and Northern cities, songs of the Gospel tradition have been, according to Wyatt T. Walker's assertion (as cited in Spencer 1990:199) that "... of faith which rallies the hope and aspiration of the faithful in the face of devastating social conditions." Therefore, Gospel Songs provided hope that the conditions of poverty, poor housing, segregation, and so on, could be overcome. This positive outlook is inseparably bound to the early Gospel songs composed by African American migrants who found themselves in urban South and North of the United States.

The consideration of Gospel Songs in this study covers the early 20<sup>th</sup> century songs of Southern transplants as Charles A. Tindley (in Philadelphia) and Thomas Dorsey (in Chicago) – leading figures of early Gospel Music. While the former is crucial within the context of the foundational and transitional development of African American Gospel Songs and Music, the latter's contribution is hinged on shaping and popularizing the solo gospel blues idiom, merging blues performances with existing Afro-vernacular vocal practices (Stewart 1998:68).

## **1.2 Definition of Concepts**

### **1.2.1 Aesthetics**

People think of aesthetics when they are appreciative of, responsive to, or zealous about the beautiful. Aesthetics owes its name to Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762), who derived it from the Greek "a isthanomai," which means perception of the senses (Budd 1998). It is the study of what is immediately pleasing to one's visual and auditory perception or to one's imagination. Baumgarten in his analysis of aesthetics places importance on an element of feeling

or sensation as the ultimate ground of judgment in questions pertaining to beauty. But beyond the aforementioned definition, Mautner provides a broader view of what aesthetics entails. According to Mautner (as cited in Hall 2010), aesthetics is “the study of the nature of beauty, the theory of taste and criticism in the creative and performing arts.” This implies critical reflection on the nature of arts, be it painting, poems, music, etc. by means of interpretation, analysis and critique of the beautiful. Such criticism takes into account the form, content, value and purpose of the art under study, in order to judge it intelligently. Based on the two working definitions provided above, aesthetics in this study entails appreciating the stylistic features, techniques and figurative devices common to African American styles of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Music. Here, form and content are taken into consideration as intricate parts of the musical genres in eliciting aesthetic pleasure. It is on this premise that this study grounds its understanding of aesthetics.

### **1.2.2 Utilitarian Value**

It is generally believed that ‘utilitarianism’ is a moral theory that what is useful is good. It holds that the ethical value of conduct is determined by the utility of its results (Sidney Hook, 2008:1). Put differently, the core idea of utilitarianism, amidst its many varieties, is that whether actions are morally right or wrong depends on their effects. Such effects of moral action are understood entirely in terms of consequences produced on an individual or community. A key point of ‘utilitarianism’ in this thesis concerns the ‘overall good’ of an act (in this context music creation, more specifically applied to songs), which consequently became an expressive channel for the African American people in different epochs. Therefore, the term “utilitarian value” is basically implied in this study to mean the utility, usefulness, importance or essence of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs to the African American community, stretching back to black life

during slave trade period that spanned between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the years following the end of legalized slavery, particularly in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Under varied circumstances of political, social and economic oppressions that bedeviled African Americans in the United States, music, arguably has been deployed by African Americans beyond its entertainment value. George Champion (1990:152-153) notes that “singing” has served as “expressive outlet” for individual and communal experiences of black life in white dominated America. By implication, music creation by African American community (from their slave ancestors to their descent) has afforded them the possibility to ‘defend’ themselves from the restrictions of American environment, understand their identity, inspire and encourage themselves, at least in an attempt to humanize an often harsh world. But aside these functions are there still other values the musical genre provides for African Americans? It is to this effect that this study attempts to investigate some of them.

### **1.2.3 Negro**

The term *Negro* is a historically racist term used by white Europeans to describe a person of African ancestry or appearance. It was a shortened form of reference to the racial classification Negroid to describe people of sub-Saharan African heritage (Agyemang et al 2005:1016). Tracing the root of the term – Negro, Schneir (as cited in Ferguson 2008:2) asserts that:

*The word Negro is Spanish for BLACK. The Spanish Language comes from Latin, which has its origin in Classical Greek. The word Negro in Greek is derived from the root word ‘necro,’ meaning dead.*

It is clear from the above quotation that Negro in Spanish simply means colour black. Though it has a negative connotation in Greek, its earliest usage in Spanish appears to have a descriptive

function only. As cited in *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, “Negro as a term did not originate as a slur, but took on derogatory connotation overtime.” Until the mid - 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term Negro was widely used for African Americans, but fell into disuse in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In recent times, it is considered generally inappropriate and derogatory, but it is occasionally used in some research reports, especially when considering the term in its historical context (Agyemang et al 2005:1016).

Most African Americans have used five terms to refer to themselves. The terms ‘Negro’ and ‘Coloured’ were commonly used until the mid-1960s. Other terms used to express deep pride in their colour or origin include: ‘Blacks,’ ‘Afro-Americans,’ and ‘African Americans.’ Agyemang et al (2008) hold that ‘African American’ has been the preferred term in the United States of America since the 1970s.

#### **1.2.4 Spirituals**

From Biblical standpoint, the word *Spiritual* refers to one of the three kinds of sacred songs sanctioned in the New Testament church:

*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord .... (Ephesians 5:19, New International Version of The Holy Bible)*

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16, New International Version of The Holy Bible).*

The New Testament epistles, Ephesians and Colossians were written by the Apostle Paul to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse. Written at about the same time (precisely about A.D.60), Paul

implored the Christian faithful to jointly and joyfully offer praises to God by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. While Psalms are passages of scripture (especially the book of Psalms) that are set to simple melodies; Hymns on the other hand are as Blackmon (1998:183) puts it: “praises to God for His character, love, greatness, majesty, might, power and glory.” Blackmon furthers that Spiritual songs are “musical testimonies of the interaction of the Deity upon the heart and life of the believer” (p.183). Accordingly, the term *spiritual* was given to religious folk songs from both the white and the African American traditions from the middle-eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. However, other terms like psalm or hymn were commonly used by white composers, while spirituals became accepted by African American composers to denote sacred folk songs, especially sung by African Americans.

True folk music, as defined by Wright (1997:392) “is created by the local community. It is never written down, and exists only when sung or played from memory.” Typical of true folk music, the earliest Negro Spirituals were not written down, but relied on oral transmission from one singer to another and from one generation of singer to another. However, this body of songs was first gathered in a book in 1801 by the black church leader, Richard Allen (Gates and McKay 1997:5). Considering Allen as one of the prominent Black preachers who advocated the need for enslaved Africans to worship autonomously, collection of spirituals could have been part of his efforts to ensure the preservation of spirituals, and perhaps to be tools in the congregational worship of future African Americans.

Close examinations of Negro Spirituals reveal that they are not merely songs, but consist of lyrical poems. Common to a lyrical poem that expresses the poet’s intense personal emotions of love, joy, sorrow, etc Spirituals taken as a whole contain records of the deeper thoughts and experiences of enslaved Africans (Johnson 2009:12). Generated spontaneously out

of reactions to life experience of slavery, Spirituals were composed using language that is laden with symbols, rhythm, and melody, often in elaborate verse forms. This probably explains why Tyler (1980:15) describes spirituals as:

*Musical poems, not attributable to any specific poet or composer, of the early Afro-American's view of life which, through the evolution of their fame and usage acquired set arrangement of melody, form, harmonic treatment and text.*

It can be gleaned from the above quotation that Spirituals lack the stamp of individual ownership. This is anchored on the spontaneous outburst and expression of the group or chiefly the work of talented individuals amongst the slaves. James and Rosamund Johnson (2009:21) hold that the greater part of Spirituals is the “work of talented individuals usually influenced by the pressure and reaction of the group.” Known as Bards, the makers of the songs (though few in number) were expected by the slave community to “possess certain qualifications: a gift of melody, a talent for poetry, a strong voice, and a good memory” (James and Rosamund Johnson 2009:22). This implies that it was demanded for a bard to have the ability to weave a (biblical) story with an appealing tune skillfully, and to remember all the lines. Good memory was needful in leading others in singing the newly composed Spiritual without difficulty. Therefore, the product is not that of an individual but that of a whole community, since it involves a call-and-response structure, melodious voices, with back -and -forth exchanges between the leader and the group.

## 1.2.5 Gospel Songs

African American Gospel Songs are expressions of a people, who sought to celebrate Christian experience of salvation and hope, as well declare Black identity through “the very personal medium of music” (Bernice Reagon, Pearl William Jones and Lisa Brevard 1994:1). Black Gospel Music is a style of music that emerged from black worshippers in the early decades of the twentieth century of the United States of America. It is a type of music that has its roots in Black Spirituals and the Blues. Like Spirituals, it has scale structure and the call-and-response tradition common to parts of West Africa. ‘Scale structure’ and ‘call-and-response’ are both musical terms. While the former entails “an arrangement of pitches that ascends in a fixed and unvarying pattern” (Wright 1992); the latter points to a pattern of singing in which a leader sings a line and the entire group answers. Like Blues, Gospel Music originated with influences from both African and European musical traditions. However, unlike the Blues, which is more of personal ‘earthly’ expressions of an individual singer to “relieve a melancholy soul,” Gospel Music is religious and often used to share the belief that unified the worshippers (Costen 1993). It evolved from a uniquely African American perspective and interpretation of teachings around human suffering of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> – century America.

The development of Gospel Songs is linked to the manner by which African Americans were introduced to Christianity. During slavery, African American slaves were disallowed from worshipping independently for fear of planning rebellion against their white masters. However, slaves were allowed to attend white dominated churches, where segregated sitting arrangement was encouraged. Although both groups sang the same hymns and listened to the same sermon, yet the blacks were designated to galleries and balconies, while the whites sat in the sanctuary below (Southern 1997:38). Spirited by their newly found freedom after the



abolishment of slavery in 1865, African Americans built their own churches (like the black Baptist and Methodist churches) and developed their own ‘gospel hymns’ and songs overtime. The development of black gospel hymns is traced to the songs of Charles Albert Tindley, a Methodist Reverend. His lyrics, as Darden (2004:161) asserts “focused instead on specific concerns of African American Christians, including worldly sorrows, blessings, and woes, as well as the joys of the afterlife.” As a church leader, he was known to often break into song during preaching, allowing the congregation to join him on the chorus” (Terry 2005:98). It is not surprising therefore for Jones et al. (2007:7) to consider Gospel songs as texts which:

*...addressed the desires of African Americans, who wanted songs that more profoundly expressed their belief in the “Good News” found in the four Gospels of the New Testament.*

A key term in the above extract is the word *Gospel*, derived from the Greek, ‘evangelion,’ meaning, the ‘good news’ (Grasso 1977). The term ‘good news’ as found in the New Testament, mean the proclamation of the Messiah and his Messianic kingdom, as recorded in Matthew 4:23; and Mark 1:14 of *The Holy Bible*. The good news is therefore contained in the first-four books of the New Testament: Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. The four Gospels record the life and teachings of Jesus. To the African American, this good news is worth expressing through the vehicle of Gospel Music, which was pioneered by Charles Albert Tindley in the early 1900’s in Philadelphia and popularized by Thomas Andrew Dorsey in Chicago in the mid 1920s.

At inception of the musical style, the term’s acceptance was not immediate. This was because many churches considered the new emerging ‘Gospel Music’, specifically Dorsey’s musical innovation, as a mix of both sacred and secular musical elements. Although inspired by Tindley’s songs, Dorsey as an erstwhile blues-jazz pianist wrote religious songs with jazzy

rhythms mixed with blues. To the black church in his days, Dorsey's solo gospel blues' songs were described as "devil's music that had no place in a house of worship" (Russick and Inhat 1999:22). But in the late 1930s, the term 'Gospel' eventually came to identify contemporary religious music of the sort Thomas Dorsey and his contemporaries were performing in Chicago (Darden 2004:182). Amidst other terms ('Dorseys' or 'Evangelistic'), 'Gospel Music' or 'Black Gospel Music' became the defining words of choice. Throughout this current study, the use of the term Gospel Songs will specifically refer to early Gospel Songs of Tindley and Dorsey respectively.

### **1.3 Notable Characteristics of African American Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs**

Despite the span of several decades that separate Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs, the two musical styles share a definite set of aesthetic and stylistic features. Some of the most important of these features include:

- ❖ **Repetition:** In simple terms, repetition is the technique of repeating a thing; say a word or phrase, especially in poetry. Such repetition recurring at intervals in a poem is what Hirsch (2000) dubs 'refrain.' Common both in music and poetry, a refrain could appear either as a partial or complete repetition of words and phrases. A refrain therefore, could be as short as a single word, phrase or even as an entire stanza. Amongst several examples of Spirituals and Gospel Songs, "*I Got Shoes*," "*I'm A Rollin*," "*We'll Understand It Better By and By*," and "*Peace in the Valley*" are characterized by the element of repetition.

- ❖ **Verse and Chorus Structure:** Most Spirituals and Gospel Songs are designed with alternating solo verses (also known as stanzas) and chorus. Typically, the lines of stanzas in the two musical styles range from four to seven or more, which could be of even or uneven length with refrains (Southern 1997:190). The verse / chorus structure frequently used in the two musical styles sometimes reflects the call-and-response pattern.
- ❖ **Call-and-Response Pattern:** This is a style of singing considered to have African origins. “It consists of a musical statement given by a song leader that is immediately followed by a response from chorus” (Stewart 1998:3-4). In practice, call-and-response pattern always implies a binary idea: the leader’s part and the responsive part known as chorus. Its influence and use in African American music tradition perhaps shows their attachment and ‘celebration’ of African culture, as opposed to the “lining out” of European and American practice. Spirituals such as “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*” and “*Shout for Joy*” use this structure. This is also evident in the Gospel Songs “*It’s a Highway to heaven.*”
- ❖ **Imagery:** The song texts of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs are marked by vivid imagery, often Bible based. Common imagery found in the Spirituals includes the deliverance of a chosen people as evident in the lyrics of “*Joshua Fit De Battle ob Jerico;*” the depiction of Jesus’ crucifixion in “*Crucifixion,*” and the emotional attachment to baby Jesus in “*Mary Had a Little Baby.*” While in Gospel songs, the imagery employed is more of portraying a living God in “*Precious Lord, Take My Hand;*” the pictorial depiction of life trials in “*Stand By Me,*” and “*The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow.*”

- ❖ **Rhyme:** Rhyme in Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs consists of chiming or matching sounds within or at the end of lines of verses, which create a clearly audible sense of patterning. Though not all songs of the two musical styles feature rhyme scheme, but the notable formats include “aaab,” “aaba,” “abab” and “abac” (Southern 1997:190). Sometimes, song texts, particularly Gospel songs reflect an unusual arrangement of words into patterns like “aabccde,” “aabccb,” “abcdcc,” etc.
- ❖ **Rhythm:** Intrinsic in all African derived music, rhythm entails the organization of time in music. Basic to rhythm is the even pulse or the principle of the beat. In Spirituals, Southern (1997:195) holds that the basic pulse was supplied by “clapping and / or stomping in the United States because the use of drums was prohibited [by the slaveholders].” Rhythm in Gospel Songs is more encompassing. It is an art that depends upon a highly percussive style, the employment of the full expressive resources of the human voice, polyrhythmic accompaniments of hand clap, stamping and ecstatic dance (Gates and McKay 1997:16).

Jones (1963:26) identifies that rhythm in African American music is not only limited to the organization of time, but the creative arrangement of words which this study finds applicable to the musical types understudy.

- ❖ **Lyrical Improvisation:** This refers to the spontaneous creation or development of the text or lyric. Although more pronounced in Gospel Music as a style, the section of improvisation is colloquially known as the ‘vamp.’ As a stylistic attribute, lyrical improvisation provides the singer a platform to freely add to the emotional intensity of the song (Stewart 1998:8).

❖ **Vocal Rhythmization:** In performance, vocal rhythmization entails the production of vocal sounds and used mainly for rhythmic purposes. In this sense, the vocal sounds or words could be sung or spoken (as obtainable in Rap music). It may manifest as a short or isolated passage in a piece of music, either vocal or instrumental; or it may consist of an intoned melody that essentially has no lyric (Stewart 1998:8). In “*Precious Lord, Take my Hand,*” vocal rhythmization manifests in the recitation of the first verse, which follows the brief story of experience (narrated by Dorsey) that led to the composition of the music piece.

## 1.4 Statement of Problem

Spirituals and Gospel Songs are two of several kinds of vernacular styles that originated in the course of the experiences of African American people. The cultural productions of African American music are today considered a keystone proof of black contribution to the cultural richness of the United States. But from studies, discourses on African American studies have dwelt so much on its poetry, fictional and dramatic texts, little of which has been devoted to African American musical genre, particularly Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs. The oversight or inattention to the aforementioned musical styles neglects the distinctiveness of African American music, which Gates and McKay (1997) delineate as part of the varied expressions of Vernacular Tradition that “make up a rich storehouse of materials wherein the values, styles and character types of black American life are reflected in language” (p.01). To comprehend the importance of this record, this research contends that the very structure of the two bodies of songs understudy provide sufficient aesthetic features – figurative devices, stylistic attributes and techniques – and serve as mediums of expressions, which in many important ways get at their roles, functions or essence to the African American community.

Another premise of this study is to investigate the differences that exist between Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs. This will consequently address the erroneous notion in some quarters that the two African American cultural expressions are to a large extent the same. Therefore, through critical examination of the artistic forms, this study attempts to fill critical gaps that exist in the study of African American Literature by focusing on the aesthetic features of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs. The aesthetic dimension also extends to the utility or contextual function(s) of the song texts in reflecting the African American identity and experience within the United States of America.

There is also the gap that needs to be addressed about the contribution of African American musical forms to understanding the African American predicament, and how the musical forms have performed similar roles as literary forms in addressing the crisis of the African American.

## **1.5 Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the study is to examine the aesthetics and utilitarian values of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs, as important artistic expressions within the African American community. In view of this, the following are the specific objectives of the study:

- To illustrate that there is an affinity between art and the society that produced it. In this context, the artistic expressions of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs will be examined in the light of the experiences of African Americans in the American society.

- To demonstrate that the times and environment in which the Spiritual was nurtured is starkly different from that of the Gospel Songs. This will buttress the roles the musical styles performed in the African American experience.
- To illustrate that beyond melody and rhythm, the two musical styles comment on the social, cultural, as well as political circumstances of black life in white dominated America.
- To demonstrate that the two song types, in terms of the constituent properties, are imbued with certain traits and features peculiar to the vernacular tradition of the African Americans.

## **1.6 Justification of Study**

Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs are two genres of music that are part of the cultural and artistic expressions of African Americans. Though the advent of these two forms was separated by the span of several decades, objective researches tend to have dwelt extensively on their religious function; hence paid minimal attention to their aesthetic value. Viewed from this background, the justification of this study lies in the notion that the aesthetic and utilitarian values of African American Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs have been appreciated insufficiently. Therefore, this study enters that dialogue, with the view of contributing to the existing knowledge in the field and pave way for further research in terms of the vernacular tradition of African Americans.

The study also augments literary works on the African American experience both in terms of the thematic issues that the musical forms raise, as well as the aesthetic features which characterize them.

## 1.7 Scope and Delimitation

Within the African American context, there has been a diverse range of musical genres largely developed by African Americans – Spirituals, Ragtime, Jazz, Blues, Gospel Songs, Rock’n Roll, R and B or Pop, and Rap or Hip-Hop. This study is however, limited to the study of two vernacular styles – Spirituals and Gospel Songs, sung or performed by singers such as Mahalia Jackson, Thomas Dorsey, Marion Williams, R.H. Haris amongst other singers. Here, focus is centered on issues of aesthetics, content and usefulness, and how these forms express the identity and experience of the African American within the larger context of American society. Although, the two musical forms are related to each other, their differences will be examined in the study.

The limitation of this study to these two musical forms is also informed largely by the belief that they sufficiently provide requisite materials and knowledge about African American life and music within the context of black experience in the United States of America.

## 1.8 Methodology

This study examines the aesthetic and utilitarian values of selected African American Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs. To achieve this, the study depends on two sources of material: primary and secondary. The primary has to do with listening to audio CDs and the use of books on African American Spirituals and Gospel Songs. The audio material includes The Norton Anthology of African American Literature “Audio Companion” (Gates Jr. and McKay 1997), and “*Precious Lord Recordings of the Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey* (1973).” The books on the song types include James and Rosamund Johnson’s *The Books of Negro Spirituals* (2009); Allen, W., Ware C., and Garrison, M. *Slave Songs of the United States* (2007);



Charles Albert Tindley's Songs (Hymns) @ mudcat.org. – mudcat Café Music Foundation, Inc. (1998); and Gates and McKay's *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997).

With a plethora of songs at hand, twelve songs are analysed: six songs from each musical style under study. The songs include: “*De Winter'll Soon be Ober,*” “*I Got Shoes,*” “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,*” “*We are Clim'in' Jacob's Ladder,*” “*Crucifixion,*” and “*Soon I Will Be Done.*” Others include: “*I'll Overcome Someday,*” “*We'll Understand It Better By and By,*” “*Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me),*” “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord,*” “*Peace in the Valley*” and “*I'm Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song.*” The choice of the twelve songs is predicated on the view that the songs are representational in terms of the issues raised in the texts, their social functions, and the portrayal of certain aesthetic features that are peculiar to African American vernacular styles, which previously have not been considered obvious in the song types under study.

Library and internet based materials, such as autobiographical slave narratives, novels, books, articles, magazines, journals and other unpublished works from a range of intellectual fields serve as secondary material. However, Postcolonial theory is employed to ascertain the nature of cultural domination and social relations, which served as impetus for the creation and emergence of Negro Spirituals during the American slavery and Gospel Songs in the early decades of the twentieth century respectively.

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## Chapter Two

### 2.0 Postcolonialism as Theoretical Framework

This research adopts Postcolonial Theory as theoretical framework with the ultimate goal of examining the nature of relationship and effects of colonialism on the social, political and cultural spheres of African American people. As a broad theoretical approach, Post colonialism borders on issues of racism, nationalism, difference, ethnicity, resistance, the continuing legacies of western colonial domination and the nature of society that was formerly colonized, and how it responds or has responded to this experience. Despite the expansive nature of its scope, one of Postcolonial's major concerns is as Bressler (2003:201) puts it: "highlighting the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another." This assertion incorporates virtually all world cultures affected by the imperial process regardless the duration or nature of interaction between the indigenous culture and the conquering culture.

It is in the light of the above that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:2) list the countries affected by European imperial domination, and termed the production of their literatures as 'post colonial literatures.' This includes "the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, new Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka." The literature of United States, from the standpoint of its current position of power and the neo-colonizing role it has played is equally placed in this category. However, it is worthy of note that the discursive strategy provided by Postcolonial theory for literatures of former colonies has stretched to incorporate African American studies (Oyeghe, 2011:30).

Though African Americans did not experience conventional colonialism like the colonial situation in Africa, but the racial subordination and discrimination of the blacks within the American context placed them in a situation akin to ‘colonial subjects.’ A critic, Robert Blauner (1969:393) submits that the oppression and subjugation of Black Americans is located within a societal context: a situation he dubs as “internal colonialism.” To Blauner, the internal colonialism in the United States identifies with enquiries into the experience of specific racial or ethnic minorities. Acknowledging the population of other racial groups, Blauner contends that “the distinctiveness of the Negro situation among the ethnic minorities was placed in terms of colour, and the systematic discrimination that follows from our deep-seated racial prejudices” (p. 394). Cyril Briggs (1918) concurs that the racial antipathy is based upon “hatred” between racial opposites: Black and White. He asserts that America’s racial problem, accentuated by the history of (slave conditions) the country:

*derives most of its virulence from the firm conviction in the white man’s mind of the inequality of races - the believe that there are superior and inferior races and that the former are marked with white skin and the latter with dark skin and that only the former are capable and virtuous and therefore alone to vote, rule and inherit the earth (p.1).*

This inherent idea of European superiority over non-European people and culture is a key feature of imperial colonization, which postcolonial theorists focus on as a platform to build their debate on ‘master-servant’ relationship. This sense of dominance agrees with the assertions of major Postcolonial theorists (Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha), particularly Edward Said’s notion of “Orientalism.”

Orientalism is an ideology through which European Powers justify their dominance over the non-European peoples (Sherry 2008:651-652). It justifies colonial acts of the West (which Said dubs ‘Occident’) over the ‘Orient,’ which refers to the colonized. The basic thought behind

Orientalism is the creation of non-European stereotypes that categorize “so-called Orientals as indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable and demented” (Bressler 2003:203). In effect, what the colonizers reveal through such notions are their ‘superior’ values and civilization. In other words, the Occident reveal “... their unconscious desire for power, wealth and domination,” and not necessarily “... the nature of the colonized subjects” (Bressler 2003:203). Although this perception eventually enables the colonial subject to mobilize cultural resources in order to challenge and resist such discourses, and assert its own distinctive history and identity; but this would have been preceded by several experiences. The experiences constitute the principal elements or tenets of postcolonial discourse, which are aptly captured by Oyegehe (2011:32-33):

- Transformation that is essentially centred on language, place and history;
- Postcolonial discourse identifies and recognizes the double identity of the colonized which arises as a result of his exposure to the purported values of “western civilization;”
- It is basically a way of reasserting oneself either as an individual, a group, a nation or race in the course of history; it is therefore an antagonistic school of thought;
- It involves a discovery of the nature and antics of the colonizer and a recovery of the self of the colonized; that is a scrutiny of colonialism and a struggle for self-determination;
- The essence of Postcolonialism entails a rejection of Western values and critique of imperial culture. The reversal of this implies a celebration or adoration of non-western culture in the mould of cultural nationalism;

- Postcolonialists advocate that the West or imperial world should not impose its will on non-Western countries or monopolise the power to define the world.

From the tenets stated above, it is deducible that Postcolonial theory entails examining the position of the colonial subjects during and after European domination, and how the colonized voice their concerns on the effects of colonialism. For the purpose of this study, close attention will be paid to African Americans experiences of ‘dialectic of place and displacement,’ language transformation, resistance and reassertion from the slave era generationally to the twentieth century.

The African American experience of ‘place and displacement’ was occasioned through dislocation. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998:73) hold that dislocation within the definition of Postcolonial discourse results from the experience of migration, transportation, voluntary removal for indentured labour, or enslavement. With regard to the African American experience, this aspect of dislocation manifested through forced migration: a fact that the majority of African peoples were shipped under conditions of slavery, which spanned the early seventeenth century until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Therefore, emphasizing the psychic effect of such colonial treatment in the colonized, Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Mask* (1991), asserts that what this experience creates in the colonial subjects is a divided sense of self and alienation, with its attendant problem of ‘self questioning.’ This situation comes very close to Homi Bhabha’s notion of “ambivalence,” wherein he describes the conflict over the identity of the colonial subject as “‘unhomeliness’ – a concept also referred to as ‘double consciousness.’” “Double consciousness” refers to a situation in which the colonial subject is ‘torn’ between two cultures, with neither of them providing a sense of belonging (Bressler 2003:203). The impact of this is that it leaves the subject without a sense of having a ‘home’ culture. Often times, this is

experienced in situations of slavery as was the experience of enslaved Africans on the American soil.

The concept of ‘double consciousness’ was developed by W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) – an American sociologist and black intellectual leader of the early twentieth century in a 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In the book, Du Bois used the term to describe the African American individual, who is caught up between two cultures. He uses the term to describe an individual sensation of feeling as though the individual’s identity is ‘divided’ into several paths, thus making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. Describing the dilemma of the African American, Du Bois asserts that:

*The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation this double-consciousness, this sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – An American and a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 7).*

This “twoness” of being African/black and as well as American according to Du Bois, leads to psycho – social tensions; or better still split consciousness in which individuals or groups are forced to identify themselves within conflicting social worlds. Faced with the dilemma of this ‘dual’ identity, Du Bois attributes this strife on the “history of American Negro,” who on account of slavery and racism is torn away from his homeland and struggles ceaselessly to now define himself/herself in a New World that refuses to assimilate him/her. This poses a challenge of acceptance for the black as American and the necessity to search relentlessly for self-defining identity and meaning within the context of the American experience. Africa, therefore, becomes



crucial to the African American's sense of self. For an African American to answer the question of identity, Du Bois (as cited in Huggins 1995:135) posits that "... he had to resolve for himself what Africa was, and what Africa meant to him." He furthers that "... resolution had to contend with a welter of myths, superstitions, prejudices promulgated by Europeans..." about the continent of Africa (Huggins 1995:135.).

Another aspect pertinent to Postcolonial discourse is the abrogation and appropriation of the language of the colonial power. As one of the main features of imperial oppression, language is among the powerful means through which the colonizer applies his authority. Although abrogation and appropriation are two distinct processes, yet there is the basic sense of relationship to the colonial language, which is central to both formulations. While abrogation is simply the rejection of the 'correct' usage of the colonial language, appropriation (which this study finds applicable to the African American experience) is the process by which the language of the imperial culture is deployed as a tool to express the differing cultural experiences of the colonized. Ashcroft, et al (1989:39) see this as achievable when the dominant language is infiltrated with elements of local and vernacular speech patterns, to enable the colonized describe the 'alien' native landscape effectively.

It is in the light of the above that scholars of post-coloniality hold the view that the colonized or once colonized subjects start by developing distinctive variant forms of the colonizer's language, which are eventually modified or appropriated in speech or writing to reflect their experiences. Relating this development to the African American slave experience, Mike Thewel (as cited in Stimpson, 1973:173) contends that the enslaved developed two languages: one for themselves and another for the white masters. He argues that the language for

the master class took the form of ‘Negro Dialect,’ of which its development is succinctly captured by James and Rosamund Johnson (2009:42):

*Negro dialect in America is the result of the effort of the slave to establish a medium of communication between himself and his master. This he did by dropping his original language, and formulating phonologically and grammatically simplified English: that is, an English in which the harsh and difficult sounds were elided, and the secondary moods and tenses were eliminated. This dialect served not only as a means of communication between slave and master, but also between slave and slave; so the original African languages become absolutely lost.*

In other words, the language established by enslaved African Americans was a blend of African syntactical features and English words. This language - the “Negro Dialect” - that resulted from the generation of slaves taught the barest necessities of spoken English and was deployed as a tool for communication chiefly between the enslaved and their owners. Arguing further, Thewel maintains that the “coded” language for the slaves is the Spirituals.

Before delving further into Thewel’s assertion on Spirituals, it is pertinent to state that the creation of Spirituals is reflective of a profound concept: ‘Hybridity.’ The term ‘hybridity’ in Postcolonial theory entails the creation of new “transcultural form(s)” at the site of colonial dominance (Ashcroft et al 1998:119). The term ‘hybridity,’ mostly associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha is often used to highlight the dominant influence of a foreign culture over its colonial subjects. This in effect initiates new identities on the part of the colonized, who is placed within certain economic, political and cultural restraints. A Historian, Lawrence W. Levine (1993) finds this concept applicable to the African American slave experience. To him, African American slaves formed a musical style by:

*...retaining a good deal of the integrity of their own musical heritage while fusing to it compatible elements of Anglo-American music. Slaves often took over entire white hymns and folk songs..., but altered them significantly in terms of words, musical structure, and especially performance before making them their own. The result was a hybrid with a strong African base (p.39).*

By implication, the hybrid musical form – Spiritual- is a blend of African artistic sensibility and the pervading influence of Anglo-American culture on the lives of African American slaves. Though formed primarily in the white man's moulds, Spirituals as a distinct cultural form were products of 'communal recreation' which when closely examined convey the nature and quality of slave life and personality.

Although intensely poetic and expressive, Thewel maintains that the "central impulse of Spirituals is that of survival and resistance" (p. 173). Here, resistance, which is a crucial concept of Postcolonialism, does not imply a direct or overt opposition to the dominant class. Instead, it points to a subtle and calculated response by African American slaves to the ideological claims or 'hegemonic' control that was promulgated through the enslavers' Christian religion. The term 'hegemony' is used to refer to domination by a more subtle and inclusive power which has the capacity to undergird the interest of the dominant class and influence the thought of the colonized (Ashcroft et al 1998:116). Within the African American slave experience, a religious scholar Theophus Smith (as cited in Hendricks Jr. 2011:11) views the Spirituals as "counter hegemonic process" that served as powerful shield against the world view and definitions promulgated by the master class. He hinges this on the creative ability of the slaves in "redefining" biblical events and characters to suit and mirror their enslavement. With concealed parody in their lyrics and dance, African American slaves developed meaningful undertones that served to communicate subversive message of escape in "*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*" without the detection by their owners. While some songs bemoaned the quest for self and freedom in lyrics

like those of “*The Motherless Child*,” others were outright outlets of ‘talking back’ at the ‘peculiar institution,’ as evidenced in the lyrics of “*I Got Shoes*.” In essence, the intent of Spirituals as a whole is aptly described by the great freedom fighter, Fredrick Douglass (1997:263), who contends that “every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from Chains.”

The resistance and assertive nature of Spirituals extend to the subsequent vernacular styles of African American music. In the aftermath of the Civil War, African Americans’ reaction against or to the dominant white ideology took on assorted forms as Blacks strove to advance their social and political positions in the American society. This became obvious when a section of the dominant white group instituted Jim-Crowism, segregation and the unleashing of violence in forms of lynching of blacks, amongst others. The plight of black people in the South and the ghettos of the North, and the quest to be more articulate in expressing their concerns became a platform for black “writers, poets, painters and musicians...to protest in their own way against the quality of life for black folk in the United States” (Southern 1997:405). What grew out of this was “the Harlem or Black Renaissance” – an era that manifested primarily in literature, visual arts and music. By innovating and adapting musical styles (Blues, Jazz and Gospel Music in the urban North), African Americans created a musical tradition distinctively their own. This development to Sullivan (2001:21) is indicative of black’s form of defiance and resistance to the dynamics of American racial discrimination. It is in the midst of the disagreeable circumstances that the pioneers of the Gospel music genre, Charles Tindley and Thomas Dorsey offered hope and affirmation of a better future in their gospel songs. Perhaps, this was to help African Americans find solace and strength to live-on as a way of resisting and

‘humanizing’ an often harsh world, even in the midst of post Civil War political and social struggles. Delois B. Campbell (as cited in Reich 1990:14) captures this succinctly:

*I suppose gospel music came into being because we black people, as a race, had been crushed so much, and so cruelly. So these gospel songs of ours were comforting to us. I believe that the people who wrote the first gospel songs were inspired by God to write, to give our people something feed on, or to live on.*

From the foregoing, it is explicit that music for African Americans has often served as a means of resistance and protest against the bleak conditions faced throughout their history in the American society, while simultaneously retaining their own musical heritage. The subtler forms of response by African Americans, accentuated by the white-black dichotomy in America, manifest in different styles of music, which are delineated as vernacular traditions - a category of African American literary studies. Taken as a whole therefore, the creative and dynamic expressions of the vernacular reflect black life in white dominated America, as well a clear image of the imperial process, its history and meanings as aptly conveyed in Spirituals and Gospel Songs. It is in view of this that Postcolonial Theory is adopted as a suitable theoretical tool for this research.

## **2.1 Literature Review**

There is a vast array of critical works on the tradition of African American music that focus on one aspect or another of this significant form. In an attempt to categorize African American music, Madu Mavina (2006:1) holds that African American musical expressions in their entirety fall under the theoretical analysis of “literature in music.” She hinges this argument on the fact that there are attempts on the part of music composers on the “literarization” of music in contrast to “absolute” or “abstract” music that poses no ‘extra-musical’ connotations.

Although her focus is on “Form, Content and Function of Early and Contemporary Black American Music,” with special interest on selected Slave Spirituals and Tupac Shakur’s Rap songs, no attention was devoted to questions of aesthetics and utilitarian value of Negro Spirituals and Gospel Music. Madu portrays African American Music in general as a type of music that falls into the category of “programme music:” a type of music intended to evoke images or remind the listener of events. This is typical of the African American musical expressions inspired by the need to express the hopes, aspirations and struggle of African Americans in the American society.

According to Alain Locke (1995:137) “music and poetry, and to an extent the dance, have been the predominant arts of the American Negro.” Music to the African American has been a highly expressive tool as far back as the days of slavery. Alain further posits that, regardless of the rude transplanting of slavery, the “American negro brought over as an emotional inheritance a deep-seated aesthetic endowment” (p.137). On the rhythmic gift of the Negro as part of the endowment, Alain argues that the Negro, while interacting with the American world, interpreted for his own use virtually everything he touched, the white man’s religion inclusive. This agrees with Darden’s (2004:01) view on African Rhythm to the effect that “Spirituals emerged from African rhythm... in a remarkably short time...after the first African slaves landed on the American shores.” This became a reality when the enslaved were not allowed to practice their own culture explicitly, but forced to embrace the ways of the New World. In essence, what slavery in the New World appeared to have provided for the enslaved was a sort of ‘cauldron’ for cross cultural contact. In other words, slavery provided a premise for the enslaved to adopt the white man’s religion (at least outwardly, since disallowed to practice the Old World religion) as a cover to continue to practice elements of his/her native faith.

Amazingly, this syncretizism enabled the enslaved not only to forge for himself /herself a new set of beliefs apt for his/her new problems and experiences, but a new kind of expression called Spirituals.

With the forceful transportation of African slaves to the New World, concerted efforts were made by the slave owners to sever the slaves' cultural ties to the motherland. This implies that American colonists brought slaves to their country who were not only physical and environmental aliens, but products of a completely alien philosophical system (Jones 1963:7). However, to further underscore their domination over African slaves, slaveholders prohibited the practice of the Negro's religion, which posed some level of challenge to the acceptance of Christianity by the enslaved. To this effect, Sambol-Tosco (2004:1) asserts "...even blacks who embraced Christianity in America did not abandon Old World religion. Instead, they engaged in syncretism, blending Christian influences with traditional African rites and beliefs." Amazingly, this blend enabled the enslaved to forge for himself /herself a new kind of religious expression and a new set of beliefs apt for his/her new problems and experiences. This is buttressed by Darden (2004:52), who critically puts it in this manner:

*This revolutionary new religion was not the result of African Americans becoming West European-styled Christians. It was the result of slaves refashioning the religion to make it applicable to their own peculiar institution – slavery. And, like every new revolutionary movement, it needed marching music – Spirituals.*

This implies that what emerged from the blending of Christianity with native African religious practices and artistic expression was the music form - Spiritual. Here, the needful ingredients for such a creation were the slaves' simple faith in Christianity, and their native religious elements as well as their musical instinct and talent, which to James and Rosamund Johnson (1925:17)

“was no small endowment to begin with.” The creation of such body of songs in a land where slaves were denied education perhaps indicates the slaves’ resilience, artistic endowment, imagination and creativity.

### **2.1.1 Performance of Spirituals**

In performance, folklorist Zora Neal Hurston (cited in Huggins 1995) holds that genuine African American Spirituals are not solo or quartette material. She argues that a presentation of genuine Spirituals are neither born on performance or concert stages, nor reproduced by trained singers of Spirituals. Instead, genuine Negro songs can only be heard when “sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not sound effects” (Huggins 1995:345). Hurston further describes genuine Spirituals as requiring spontaneous jagged harmony, filled with dissonances, usually marked by various parts breaking in at a time. In other words, different parts will enter, not by planned arrangement, but according to feeling. Hence, what makes up the Spiritual are the “harmony and disharmony, the shifting keys and broken time” (Huggins 1995:345). These to her are “absent” in neo-spirituals – a term that describes arranged performances by trained musicians of Spirituals.

Moreover, Hurston holds that original Spirituals at the point of craftsmanship, lack the quality of conscious art. This means that genuine Spirituals are inspired, spontaneously created and improvised with no artistic pretensions, as opposed to what is obtainable in neo-spirituals. She contends accordingly:

*I have noticed that whenever an untampered-with congregation attempts the renovated spirituals, the people grow self-conscious. They sing sheepishly in unison. None of the glorious individualistic flights that make up their own songs. Perhaps, they feel on strange ground.... The truth is that the religious*



*service is a conscious art expression. The artist is consciously creating – carefully choosing every syllable and every breath. The dialect breaks through only when the speaker has reached the emotional pitch where he loses self-consciousness* (cited in Huggins 1995: 345).

Here, Hurston considers true Spirituals as unpremeditated outburst of religious songs, which can only be produced when one “loses self-consciousness.” Here, the loss of consciousness does not imply death, but a singer being unmindful of the sound effects, or judgments passed by the congregation. In other words, the singer does not sing Spiritual to impress, but wholeheartedly vents his feelings through the song. However, the singer does not work alone; the audience collaborates by joining in the singing according to feeling. Hence, as the inspiration comes to the singer, it produces in the participating audience an immediate response.

In terms of content, W.E.B. Dubois holds a view which sees Spirituals within a narrow framework as “sorrow songs.” Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2005) asserts that the themes of Spirituals are more of:

*Mother and child... but seldom father; fugitive and weary wanderer call for pity and affection, but there is little of wooing and wedding; the rocks and the mountains are well known, but home is unknown* (p. 248).

In other words, to DuBois, Spirituals tended to have few love related but most times songs related to death and difficult situations. Death songs wherein “the Negro showed little fear, but talked of it familiarly and even fondly as simply a crossing of the waters” (DuBois 2005:250). However, he holds that through the Sorrow Songs, a ray of hope and faith in the ultimate justice of things is often reflected. Conversely, Hurston (as cited in Huggins 1995:344) considers W.E.B. DuBois characterization of Spirituals as sorrow songs as “ridiculous.” She categorically holds that the whole body of Spirituals “covers a wide range of subjects from a peeve at

gossipers to Death and Judgment.” Lawrence-McIntyre (2005) puts these opinions in perspective positing that while Hurston focused on the African reality of the Spirituals, DuBois considered them as originating from the discontentment of slaves.

Slaves used the Spiritual to convey not just religious truth but social and political commentaries. One of the earliest attempts made to explore the social meaning of the Spirituals was done by John Lovell in his article published in 1939 titled: “The Social Implication of Negro Spirituals”, wherein he states that “the social world of the slave is reflected in the Spiritual” (as cited in Madu 2006:3). The social world of the enslaved community was characterized by hardship. Buseck (2011) posits that the hardship of the enslaved stretches from violent denial of real education to long hours of toil in fields under the lash of the slave holders. This is in addition to the experience of family disruptions and separation; women at the mercy of their masters’ lust and men at the end of their masters whip. With the lash in frequent use, “their environment,” notes Craig Buseck (2011:2) “told them they were in no way significant as persons – that they were important only as property.” This is further illuminated by Cone (1991:14), who observes that slave songs:

*....reveal the social consciousness of blacks who refused to accept white limitations placed on their lives.... The Spirituals were the slaves’ description and criticism of his environment and the key to his revolutionary sentiments and his desire to free territory.*

References to free territory in the Spirituals are variously described as “my home”, “Sweet Canaan, the Promised Land”, “Heaven” or “free country”. This ‘free country’ was on the northern side of Ohio River that the enslaved called “Jordan.” Thin this sense, when one speaks of freedom in Spirituals, such as “Oh Freedom” or the “Gospel Train,” it is not just an afterlife freedom, but pointers to freedom in the present world.

Spirituals and its religious content became a foundation for subsequent African American musical styles, particularly Gospel Music. With the abolition of slavery in 1865, ex-slaves began to migrate to the North, especially during the Great Migration between 1914 and 1920 in search of a better life. In the new urban African American world, the need for adjustments to urban life became pertinent for their new social, economic and spiritual experiences. Writing on this change, Okwori (2002:154) has this to say about the new religion of ex-slaves in urban North:

*Once there, they felt uncomfortable in the northern African American churches. For one the churches here had very large congregations that made the migrants anonymous. Two, the style of worship was more restrained, the songs were unfamiliar, and the service was less direct. More, their northern brothers were more affluent and dressed better which made the migrants feel inferior. The migrants therefore sought a religion that will accommodate them and minister to their needs and problem. Some found this in the Holiness Church.*

Formed in the late nineteenth century as an alternative to the other mainstream Protestant denominations of Baptist and Methodist, the Holiness-Pentecostal churches seem to provide the Southern migrants or ‘socially underprivileged’ elements missing in the mainline denominations. Vinson Synan (as cited in Darden 2004:139-140) asserts that the “emotional nature” of Pentecostal worship became the appealing factor for African American Christians, most of whom were already accustomed to highly charged modes of worship. In such arena, music appears to be indispensable. The concern of Okwori and Synan on Gospel Music penetrates its development, style and emotionalism. No mention was made about the peculiar aesthetic features of the music genre, which this thesis sets to contribute.

Unlike camp-meeting songs and hymn-like compositions that characterized the music of African American churches affiliated with white denominations, the Holiness-Pentecostal style was close to the rural spiritual style with its singing and dancing. In the newer churches, instrumentation was allowed and encouraged, which provided a rhythmic atmosphere akin to their erstwhile ‘Invisible Institution,’ where hand clapping, foot stamping and shouts were freely displayed. But beyond this congenial environment to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of the adherents, Gayraud Wilmore (1998) contends that these religious assemblies emerged in response to the “search for a new identity.” Expanding this same theme, Arthur Paris (as cited in Harvell 2010:156) argues that the Pentecostal environment provided “a nexus of social connections and a web of relationships,” and most importantly an “ideological framework for dealing with a new world.” Even though the ex-slaves brought their music and dance to the churches that they started to attend, it is not surprising that with the passage of time, they started to distance themselves from Spirituals because they felt that it did not reflect their new reality. Perhaps to avoid past memories of slave life, new Gospel songs were created.

### **2.1.2 The Gospel Tradition**

W.E.B. DuBois appears to be one of the early scholars that have discussed the evolution of Gospel Music. In an essay “The Problem of Amusement,” DuBois’ main thrust was neither focused on identifying the musical traits of Spiritual and Gospel Music, nor their specific functions, but a contention with early misconceptions that surrounded African American music of his days. DuBois rejects the idea that conventional African American religious music should be discarded for classical music and protestant hymns. Rather, he considers the originality and dignity of Spirituals as starkly different from Gospel Music. Rejecting Gospel Music as a replacement for Spirituals, DuBois firmly described Gospel Music as “flippant music and

mediocre poetry” (p.7). This view on Gospel Music bears a striking resemblance to Sterling Brown’s observation in “Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Secular, Ballads and Work Songs” (1998). He observes that “many lovers of the older Spirituals disdain the Gospel Songs as cheap and obvious” (p. 50), especially because the songs are more heavily influenced by Jazz and Blues. Therefore, Sterling cautioned that “this new urban religious folk music should not be dismissed too lightly,” but considered as a form of music vigorously alive with its own musical values within the locale of the American society. It is in the light of this that Brown in distinguishing it from Spirituals, illustrates the rhythmic intensity of Gospel Music, especially as the singers:

*Fight the devil by using what have been considered the devil’s weapons. Tambourines, cymbals, trumpets and trombones and bass fiddles are now accepted in some churches. The devil has no right to all that fine rhythm, so a joyful noise is made unto the Lord with bounce and swing (Sterling Brown, as cited in Gates and Mckay 1997:16).*

Robert Darden in *People Get Ready* (2005) provides an overview of African American religious music from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the book, Darden specifically attempts to trace the development of Gospel Music over hundreds of years, tracing it to its African roots. He establishes the fact that Gospel Music is a direct descendant of Spirituals, evidenced in the following attributes: call-and-response format, improvisation and rhythm. Equally, he provides intriguing insights into the development of musical styles that served as foundation to Gospel Music, such as jubilee music, minstrel music, barbershop Quartets and the Jack-Leg Preachers. Although Darden primarily dwelt on tracing the entire history of Gospel Music, he was not particularly concerned in establishing the aesthetics of Gospel Music, which this study seeks to investigate.

In contributing to the evolution of Gospel Music in *African American Music: An Introduction*, Earl L. Stewart views Gospel Music as a blues-influenced religious style that developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century musical practices of black Holiness and Sanctified Churches. He traces back Gospel Music essentially to Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993), whose major influence was Reverend Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933), a Methodist minister in Philadelphia, who developed the Gospel Hymn style. Furthermore, by identifying “solo,” “quartet,” and “choral styles” as performance traditions in African American Gospel Music, Stewart spells out common characteristics of the music style. These include: improvisational style, harmonic language, vernacular root progression, and verse/chorus form. Although there is the illumination on certain features of Gospel Music as mentioned earlier, Stewart does not pay particular interest on the usefulness of the music style to the African American community. Despite this gap, the richness and diversity of African American music styles are elaborately provided under the four distinct parts of the book: Folk Tradition; The Jazz Aesthetic; Black Popular Styles since 1940; and Black Theatrical and Classical Music.

Stressing on the performance of Gospel Music in the mid-twentieth century, Horace Clarence Boyer in *The Golden Age of Gospel* (2000), attempted to connect Gospel Songs to slave songs. Although, Boyer covered a variety of topics, he specifically singles out “ring shouts,” which developed during the second Great Awakening, as an essential foundation to Gospel Music. He views ring shouts not only as a feature peculiar to the early Christian slaves, but as an expression that has found its way into the main stream of the African American church. Recognizing ring shout as an African survival in Gospel Music, he observes that in the midst of singing and dancing, there are energetic displays of hand clapping, stamping of feet, etc., to indicate the affective responses to percussive rhythm. In effect, such responses appear to be

manifestations of the worshippers' 'getting the power' or being filled with the Spirit. Boyer, therefore, examines the performance of a number of gospel singers and composers in America cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Tennessee, St. Louis and New York.

From a thematic standpoint, Jon Michael Spencer (1990) in *Sacred Music of Black Religion*, emphasized that a number of Gospel songs were anticultural in their themes. This implies that the lyrics dwelt more on personal or individual conversion to Christianity and salvation. In other words, the lyrics emphasized the tenets of holiness or sanctification, requiring the singer to turn away from the human domain – “a world of sin” – to focus on Heaven or God. Therefore, because of the ‘heavenward’ focus of these lyrics, Jesus – “the Ultimate Alternative” – assumes the central position of Gospel songs. Spencer adds that the earliest gospel songs, in forms of hymns, heralded by Charles Prince Jones and Charles Albert Tindley, “reflect the tragedies of urban life during the first quarter of the twentieth century” (p.211). He traces this development to the years following Reconstruction, precisely at the time African Americans, on account of oppression and desolation, migrated in their numbers from American South to cities in the North. He arrived at this after categorizing the history of Gospel Music into three distinct periods within the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Pre-Gospel Era (1900-1930), the Traditional Period (1930-1969), and the Contemporary period (1969-present).

Similarly, McClain (1981) in *The Songs of Zion*, asserts that Gospel Music is a style of music deeply ingrained with the theology of “experience,” “imagination,” “grace,” and of “survival.” As a theology of experience, he holds that Gospel songs express the theology of God “who is very much alive and active and who has not forsaken those who are poor and oppressed and unemployed” (McClain 1981:x). Also, Gospel Music is a theology of imagination that “grew out of the fire shut up in the bones, of words painted on the canvas of the mind;” a mind that

fixes not its attention on adverse circumstances, but is anchored on hope for better life. To McClain, it is this hope that finds expression in songs, and brings consolation to the African American in the midst of oppressive circumstances. He further contends that Gospel songs express God's amazing grace – which allows African Americans partake in God's unearned kindness, even in the midst of tears, and allows the faithful to survive against all odds. Gospel songs as a theology of survival allow African Americans to “celebrate the ability to continue the journey in spite of the insidious tentacles of racism and oppression and to sing...” (McClain 1981). Singing does not only afford African Americans to vent their feelings in response to their experience of injustice and inequity, but a mark that music is inextricably linked to the African American culture.

From the various works cited above, much emphasis tends to be on the emergence, definition, scope and thematic concerns of the musical genres under study. As a result, not much attention was given to the overriding value and aesthetic features of the two vernacular forms: Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs. This study attempts to address the limitation by providing a systematic investigation of these musical forms. This includes examining the didactic elements as well as the thematic concerns, the deployment of figurative devices such as repetition, rhyme, rhythm, allegory, imagery, and allusion. Also, focus shall be extended to the stylistic attributes of call-and response structure, improvisation, and other stylistic features. In addition, the usefulness of the musical forms will be considered side by side the context, meaning and identity of African Americans with respect to these black music forms in the United States of America.



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## Chapter Three

### 3.1 Key Elements and Features of Selected Spirituals.

This chapter focuses on six Spirituals: “*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober*,” “*I Got Shoes*,” “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*,” “*We are Clim’in’ Jacob’s Ladder*,” “*Crucifixion*,” and “*Soon I Will Be Done*.” The lyrics, which are attached in the form of appendix, have been examined in the light of the following aesthetic features peculiar to Spirituals: allegory, repetition, call-and-response pattern, rhythm, imagery and rhyme. In addition, the vital function that the Spirituals have played in the African American slave community has also been addressed.

#### 3.1.1. “*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober*”

“*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober*” is a Spiritual that contains three verses, encoded with double meanings and sung to express the hopes and inner desires for freedom. This is identifiable through the use of allegory. Ashcroft et al (1998:9) submit that allegory has been a prominent feature of postcolonial response to imperial dominance. In imperial discourse, allegory assumes an important function because it offers the colonial subjects the medium to refer symbolically to some situation and action of imperial power (Ashcroft, et al 1998:9). Accordingly, this feature is traceable to the ‘symbolic’ lyrics of Spirituals creatively created by African American slaves.

A poet and critic, Sterling A Brown (as cited in Gates 1997:6), notes that makers of Spirituals employed some “fairly easy allegories” in the lyrics of their songs by overlaying them with overtones or connotations. Such connotative overlay is what Charshee C.L. McIntyre (1987) calls “metonymic devices” – that is metaphors that allowed the enslaved attach additional layers of meaning to Biblical figures and tales, and decipherable only to the slave community. Perhaps, this became necessary for the slaves in communicating sensitive information, veiled criticism or in charting the brutal environment of slavery. Therefore, by infusing allegory into

Spirituals, the enslaved often make use of certain ‘codes’ which are incomprehensible to those outside the slave community. Some of such allegories are aptly captured by historian Hildred Roach (1994:23):

*Canaan may have depicted a Heaven, a better life to the north, or freedom after Emancipation. ‘Home’ could have meant either Heaven or Africa. In any case, the slaves were eventually forced to resort to the use of words and actions of significance contrary to the outwardly spoken or suggested .... Some ambiguity or dual meaning could have pointed to ‘Jesus’ or ‘Saviour’ as either the God of Christianity, Ntoa, the supernatural spirits or ancestors, or to a Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad.*

Amongst other examples, African American slaves identified the land of ‘Egypt’ with the South and ‘Pharaoh’ with the slave master(s). Slaves also metaphorically regarded themselves as the ‘Israelites;’ and ‘Moses’ or ‘Angel’ with their leader or the abolitionist who guided them to freedom. It is not surprising therefore that the feature of double-entendre is evident in the consolatory Spiritual - “*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober:*”

**Chorus:**

*Oh, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober children  
De winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children  
Yes my Lord ...*

**Stanza 3:**

*Oh, Jordan’s ribber is deep and wide,  
But Jesus stan’ on de hebbenly side,  
An’ when we get on Canaan’s shore,  
We’ll shout and sing forever more.*

The chorus, characterized by lyrics of consolation and hope, indicate slaves’ expectation for a better future. Slaves console themselves by being hopeful that “*de winter’ll soon be ober.*” Darden (2004:85) notes that slaves in their songs equated ‘winter’ (sometimes ‘Babylon’) not literally with the weather but with the brutal and toilsome environment of slavery.

Meanwhile, through the lyrics of deliverance of the third stanza, the enslaved metaphorically make reference of their escape to freedom. In this context, African American slaves envisioned the American North as “*Canaan*” or “*heaben*” - a place they imagined as their ‘promised land’ that offers relief from the horrors of slave life in American South. The land of freedom located beyond Ohio River seems to bear a striking resemblance to the home of biblical Hebrews border by Jordan River. This is suggested in the lyrics of “*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober*” as African American slaves appropriate the river Jordan as a metaphorical reference to the thin line between slavery and freedom. From the lyrics, the stated aim to cross “*ribber Jordan*” appears to be the slave’s way of saying he/she longed to experience freedom. Though difficult to cross because of the presence of white vigilantes or “Patrol Officers,” the singers felt that all will be well if they could get to the free land north of the Ohio (Darden 2004; Caldwell, M. 1957).

Furthermore, Jesus who “*stan’ on de hebbenly side*” is not just the abstract Christ, but a helper of the oppressed, or one who gave a slave a right to life. Spencer (1990) is of the view that such helpers of the enslaved meant the Underground Railroad Conductors, who were ex-slaves (like Harriet Tubman, Thomas Garrett, etc) or free individuals, who helped fugitive slaves escape from Slave States to freedom. Helpers of slaves in that respect are metaphorically addressed in other Spirituals as “Moses” or “Angels.” This is made obvious in the lyrics of “*Go Down Moses*,” “*Ride on Moses*,” and “*Moses*.”

### **3.1.2. “*I Got Shoes*”**

Also known as “*Heav’n, Heav’n*,” the Spiritual - “*I Got Shoes*” was used by the slave community to ‘protest’ against slavery and its hierarchy. It is a song that reflects a postcolonial response to imperial dominance of the enslavers. In this sense, the reassertion of self by the

enslaved is not merely for an individual but the group / race caught up within the web of slavery. This perhaps explains the ‘antagonistic’ undertone that lies beneath the lyrics.

An obvious poetic element that adds to the beauty of “*I Got Shoes*” is repetition. To appreciate the lyrics and their repetitiveness is to take cognizance of the privileges / rights denied the African American slaves, especially basic necessities like shoes, clothing amongst others. Decrying such injustice, the creators and singers of this song insisted that they are “all God’s children,” and have a right to “a robe,” “shoes,” “a crown,” “harp,” as well “to heaven.” Each of these needs is reiterated in the stanzas through repetition, possibly for emphasis or harmonic effect. The song goes thus:

*I got a robe, you got a robe,  
All God’s children got a robe.  
When I get to Heav’n gonna put in my robe  
Gonna shout all over God’s Heav’n, Heav’n, Heav’n  
Everybody talkin’ ‘bout Heav’n ain’t going there  
Heav’n, Heav’n, Heav’n.  
Gonna shout all over God’s Heav’n.*

*I got shoes...  
Gonna shout all over God’s Heav’n*

*I got harp...  
Gonna shout al over God’s Heav’n.*

When African American slaves sang “when I got to heav’n,” says John Lovell (1972:343), they meant “when I get free.” Freedom in this context is metaphorical. Lovell asserts that references to freedom in Spirituals suggests first of all physical locale away from slave states; and second the Christian heaven where God dwells and good people go to when they die. In either of the ‘heavenly worlds,’ the enslaved were optimistic of life free from denials. With a ‘prophetic’ tone, the anticipation for a better and sweeter life is perceived in the lyrics to include the unrestricted access to the necessities of life – sufficient clothing, shoes to wear, etc which the

cruelty and bitterness of American slavery denied them. The lyrics therefore, breathe a desire for freedom not only for an individual slave but for posterity as well. Lovell (as cited in Darden 2004:92) captures this aptly: "... 'I' meaning any slave, present or future. If I personally don't, my children or grandchildren, or my friend on the other end of the plantation will." Spencer (1990:85) concurs that "traditionally 'I' has had a communal aspect in black musical culture." He adds that the pronoun "'we' also had personal bearing, for when the group overcame, so did the individual." In essence, expressing the group's mind for freedom, the lyrics offered African American slaves the consoling promise of a better world and the possession of the things therein, that is if freedom was attainable through escape or death.

With a satirical tone, the lyrics also speak about the hypocritical behaviour of slave masters. Sharing the same belief, which was Christianity with their masters, the enslaved perhaps, expected better and humane treatment from their 'pious' owners, hence considered themselves and their owners as "all God's children." In the song, the slaves' sense of 'brotherhood' with their masters, appear to be an allusion to the biblical injunction on master-servant relationship: "Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers" (1 Timothy 6:2 New International Version of *The Holy Bible*). But slave masters, whose regular attendance and activities in the Church earned them 'saintly' reputation, returned to their plantations indifferent to continue their racist, inhumane treatment of their slaves. Frederick Douglass (1987), an escaped slave and influential abolitionist before the American Civil War (1861-1865), details his experiences with the "religious" Master Thomas Auld at St. Michael's in 1832:

*Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty. He made the greatest pretensions to piety.*

*His house was the house of prayer. He prayed morning, noon and night. He was very soon distinguished himself among his brethren, and was made a class-leader and exhorter. His activity in revivals was great, and he proved himself an instrument in the hands of the church in converting many souls. His house was the preachers' home. They used to take pleasure in coming there to put up; for while he starved us, he stuffed them (p.287).*

In painting the picture of the phoney lifestyle of his master, Douglass expresses dismay at Master Thomas' Christianity. While his reputation towers high among his fellow believers, his slaves like Douglass had to subsist on meager food, hence encouraging them to beg and pilfer from their neighbours (Douglass 1987:286). To ex-slave Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1987), masters who professed a faith they did not really possess were "white-faced, black-hearted brother(s)" (p.399). Outraged and displeased at the deceptive appearances of the oppressors, slaves through the veiled lyrics of the song, considered hypocritical slave masters unfit to make the Christian eternal home - heaven. Although "Everybody talkin' 'bout heav'n," but to the creators and singers of the Spiritual, two-faced or insincere slave masters "ain't goin' there."

### **3.1.3 "Swing Low, Swing Chariot"**

A traditional Spiritual, "*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*" is a song considered to contain coded communication. The Spiritual provided African American slaves a means to convey secret messages as guide to freedom. Its lyrics reveal a close link to the Underground Railroad, with emphasis on two important messages. First is the message of the soon arriving "band of angels" or chariot drivers, a metaphorical reference for the Underground Railroad Conductors. These conductors helped slaves escape from the slave states of the American South to freedom in the North through the instrumentality of a clandestine network of people, secret paths and homes in a process known as Underground Railroad (Friedman 2010; Champion 1990). Second, the



repetitive character of the lyrics caution a slave to be alert and ready to leave for “*home*”- a veiled reference for the North or Free State. The slaves’ longing for the North is hinged on the fact that slavery was abolished earlier there, and life for runaways was often better than the slave life in the South. Other lines, informative and instructive in content, tell an escaping slave where a safe station was located, or if their family and friends had escaped safely.

A singing technique peculiar to Spirituals such as “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*,” is the ‘call-and-response’ pattern. Also known as antiphonal singing technique, this pattern is traditional and typical of the African American music, and considered to have its basis in West African singing (Kolarova 2008:14). As a style in singing, call-and-response pattern features an alternation between two performers or groups of performers. By implication, the lead or solo singer, often improvising, sings something different each time, changing the words; but the group sings the same response or refrains after each solo. Such a musical pattern can go on indefinitely. This is evident in the Spiritual - “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*.”

The antiphonal singing technique employed in “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*” reflects a basic tenet of postcolonial discourse: esteeming non-western culture at the site of colonial dominance. In this context, African American slaves, despite being constrained in the furnace of ‘americanization,’ wove the performance technique of call-and-response pattern with the biblical story of Elijah being taken away to heaven by a chariot. It is as though celebrating or adoring their traditional structure in the midst of Christianity, the religion of their owners to which many slaves were converted. Therefore, in “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*,” the technique allows the alternation of lines between the soloist and the participating audience, but places emphasis on short phrases:

**Leader:** *Swing low, sweet chariot,*  
**Group:** *Comin' for to carry me home.*  
**Leader:** *Swing low, sweet chariot,*  
**Group:** *Comin' for to carry me home.*  
**Leader:** *I look over Jordan, what do I see?*  
**Group:** *Comin' for to carry me home.*  
**Leader:** *A band of angels comin' after me,*  
**Group:** *Comin' for to carry me home.*  
**Leader:** *Swing low, sweet chariot,*  
*etc., etc., etc.*  
 (p. 62, Johnson J. and Johnson R. *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*).

The call-and-response structure constitutes the lead singer, who slightly modifies his/her lines, sings a phrase or statement which is immediately followed by a response from the chorus. In this sense, the lines of the solo leader carry the theme and development, interrupted regularly by the participating group with their refrain. The beauty in the call-and-response pattern lies in the fact that it makes singing interactive and participatory, thus an individual's sorrow, hopes and joys are shared by the participating community. Considering the repetitive character of the lyrics, John Lovel, Jr. (as cited in Darden 2004:72) contends that repetitions in Spirituals "...are mainly singing devices, memory aids, and means of enlisting and holding the support of the group."

### **3.1.4. "We are Clim'in' Jacob's Ladder"**

From the lyrics of "*We Are Clim'in' Jacobs Ladder*," the Negro Spiritual reflects the need for perseverance in the struggle for freedom. Based on the vision the biblical Jacob had in Genesis of angels ascending and descending a ladder that stretched from heaven to earth, the song reminded the oppressed African American slaves that their earthly struggles would eventually lead them to heaven. "The refrain - 'Soldiers of the Cross'," as asserted by Constant James (2013:01) "is a reminder of both the devotion to God and the devotion to fight for freedom that is at the heart of many Spirituals from the period of the Civil War." Although with the

thematic emphasis on liberation from earthly toil, one striking aesthetic feature that is appealing to behold in the lines of the Spiritual is the use of rhythm.

The rhythmic effect of African American music is not only the seeming emphasis on the musical notes, but by the phonetic reproduction and arrangement of words themselves. The rhythmic effect seems to result from the manner African American slaves' accent certain syllables in the poetry of their songs. This is evident especially when the lines are read aloud. Rhythm in poetry, as Eagleton (2007:135) puts it, "... is the irregular sway and flow of the verse, its rippings and undulations as it follows the flexing of the speaking voice." The 'rippings' and 'undulations' of the verse, which is usually evident in the rise or fall of the "speaking voice" is often determined by the structure of a poem. The following lines illustrate rhythm in "*We Am Climin'in' Jacob's Ladder*" (p. 59, Johnson J. and Johnson R. *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*):

<i>We are clim'in' Jacobs Ladder</i>	}	8 syllables
<i>We are clim'in' Jacobs Ladder</i>		
<i>We are clim'in' Jacobs Ladder</i>		
<i>Soldiers of de cross</i>	]	5 syllables

The above verse is an example of trochaic octometer. This is arrived at by its meter. According to Terry Eagleton (2007:135), meter in poetry is "a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables." It is usually determined by the prevailing accentual pattern and the number of feet per line (Hirsch 2002). In this respect, the above extract is a stress syllabic meter in which there is a consistent balance between the number of syllables of a line and its stress pattern. In other words, the metre for each line (apart the last) has eight syllables, with alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. This pattern runs into the succeeding verses of the Spiritual. Consistency of this pattern

of meter gives the Spiritual a rhythm characterized by the sway and flow, as it follows the flexing of the speaker or singer's voice.

The rhythmic part of African American Spirituals is further influenced by the slaves' inability to accurately reproduce the songs they heard at camp meetings and insufficient knowledge of vocabulary. Aside enriching Spirituals by the rhythmic elements of body movement, hand-clapping and other percussive effects, the enslaved sang Spirituals in black dialect subject to regional differences, which influenced also the rhythm of the songs. By having aptitude for rhythm, African American slave singers would add or remove syllables to make them fit the song. Known as 'elision,' James and Rosamund Johnson (2009) hold that the slurring or omission of one or more syllable became needful for the slaves chiefly for easy pronunciation. They maintain that elision enabled the enslaved to do away with sounds that were "displeasing to the Negro ear, as well as troublesome to the Negro tongue ...." (p.44). The removal of such "troublesome" sounds is what early collectors of Spirituals – William Alen et al (2007) describe as "phonetic decay." This means the 'dropping' of certain sounds, especially at the beginning or end of syllables and words. This is evidenced in the following words of "*We Am Climin'in' Jacob's Ladder:*"

Climin' = Climbing  
Ev'ry = Every  
Roun' = Round

The sounds dropped at the end include the plosive consonants /b/ and /d/, as evidenced in "climbing" and "round" respectively; while the vowel /e/, centrally positioned, is elided in "Every." Although the Spiritual primarily addresses the deep seated need of liberty from slavery, the creator(s) / slave(s) still paid attention to the beauty of rhythm.

### 3.1.5. “Crucifixion”

The lyrics of “*Crucifixion*” shows how slave composers chose to provide motivation and inspiration for the liberation of the suffering slave. Rather than wallow in self-pity and despair, African American slaves encouraged themselves by graphically identifying and infusing into their songs biblical heroes who survived against all odds. It is not surprising that a common aesthetic feature in the Spirituals is the use of imagery.

The use of imagery in the poetry of Negro Spirituals is linked to the rich use of biblical allusions, or what Wyatt T. Walker (1979) calls “Deep Biblicism.” As a feature of Spirituals, Deep Biblicism entails the great reliance on Biblical stories, characters, symbols, etc which the African American slaves considered to be of great import to reflect the conditions of their servitude. James and Rosamund Johnson (2009:39) put this accordingly:

*Many of the stories and scenes in the Bible gave the Negro bards great play for their powers of graphic description. The stories are always dramatic and the pictures vivid and gorgeously coloured. The style ... is concise and condensed.*

What this implies is that slaves were intentional about the biblical figures they sang about. They easily identified with ‘heroes’ in biblical times that were delivered in their earthly difficulties in ways that struck their imagination. Perhaps to retain such amazing stories in their memory, since it was forbidden by slave masters for slaves to read the Bible, slave bards codified such Biblical accounts in their songs through symbols and imagery. Although a number of Spirituals draw primarily on images of the Old Testament enslaved Israelites, lyrics of Spirituals equally deal with Old Testament figures - Noah, Moses, Joshua, David, Ezekiel, Jacob, etc - and ‘heroic’ figures of the New Testament such as Jesus, Mary, Paul, Silas, etc.

From the New Testament, slaves most closely identified with Jesus Christ. The intimate nature of the relationship with Jesus is vividly expressed in the Spiritual – “*Crucifixion.*” Just like the lyrics of “*Were You There When They Crucified My Lord,*” the lines of “*Crucifixion*” relate the ordeal of the suffering Jesus, whom they considered as their deliverer from the pains and unhappy conditions of slavery. Even though the suffering Jesus was unjustly accused, sentenced to death but gained victory over the power of grave, slaves appear to empathize with Him in his death experience. It is through this empathy with Jesus that African American slaves convey a sense of emotional attachment to him, thus depicting a graphic memory of His death:

*Dey crucified my Lord,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word....*

*Dey nailed Him to de tree,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word....*

*Dey pierced Him in de side,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word....*

*De blood came twinklin’ down  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word....*

*He bowed His head an’ died  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word....*

(p. 174, Johnson J. and Johnson R. *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*).

The lyrics convey a sense of the immediacy of the series of events that preceded Jesus’ death. It is as though the singer(s) is there witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus as he is being “nailed to the tree,” “pierced in the side” with blood “twinklin’ down” and finally “bowed His head” in death. The imagery appeals to the senses of hearing and sight. The auditory imagery is suggested by the hammering sound of nails, driven through Jesus’ hands and feet; while the visual imagery is indicated by the drip of blood from the body of the dying Jesus. Such description helps lend a visual quality and the touch of ‘freshness’ to the long aged story.

The tone of sorrow and sense of emotional attachment to the suffering of Jesus is heightened arguably by the “tree” image, which the Biblical account refers to as ‘the Cross’. Christa K. Dixon (1976) holds that the tree image had a chilling psychic connection for slaves who witnessed gory sights, especially those whose loved ones were hung and lynched in trees. Such a connection, as noted Darden (2004:89), “endured for their children and children’s children in the South of Jim Crow through the late 1960s.” In the Southern and border states of the United States, Jim Crow was a racial caste system that not only separated blacks and whites through segregationist legislation, but as well perpetuated racial violence, like the lynching of blacks, amongst others. In effect, the emotional feelings attached to the Spirituals such as “*Crucifixion*”, gives the body of songs a general flavor of sadness/melancholy, making it “distinctly sorrowful” (Du Bois 2005:247).

### **3.1.6. “*Soon I Will Be Done*”**

A close look at the lyrics of “*Soon I Will Be Done*” reveals its expressive power of sorrow and emphasis on the hardness of African American slaves’ life. Here, the themes of dissatisfaction with “the troubles of the world” and the desire to go “*home to live with God*” and to “*meet my mother*” are reiterated, especially through the employment of rhyme. Rhyme in this respect consists of chiming or matching sounds, especially at the ends of lines of verse, which create a very clearly audible sense of pattern. This aesthetic feature is common to short and longer-length Spirituals. However, it is worthy to note that not all Spirituals feature rhyme schemes. “They had no time to think about rhyme, so great was their concern for the ideas they wanted to express,” observed Eileen Southern (1997:198). She furthers that “perhaps during the choral response they could think ahead a bit, but not always to the extent of perfecting the

rhyme.” Notwithstanding, a close examination of Spirituals reveals rhymes in relation to position in line – like head rhyme and end rhyme.

In end or terminal rhyme, a rhyme occurs or concludes a line. In the poetry of Spirituals, Southern asserts that most songs feature four-line stanzas (quatrain) in the *aaab* rhyme scheme or the *aaba* format. Most often the structure of both rhyme scheme patterns often reflects the African call and response style that allows alternating solo verses with refrains. This is illustrated in the following lines of “*Soon I Will Be Done*” (pg. 11 of Gates and Mckay’s *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*):

<i>Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Troubles of the world, the troubles of the world,</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Goin’ home to live with God.</i>	<i>b</i>

The end rhyme scheme that applies in the above lyrics is *aaab* format. This is occasioned by three lines and a refrain. The refrain in this context occurs as the last line in every stanza with the following words: “*I’m goin’ to live with God*. Although the refrain in the Chorus as indicated above slightly differs, the desire for rest at ‘home’ in heaven or Free State is explicitly stated.

In head rhyme or initial rhyme (usually alliteration), there is a correspondence of the same consonant sounds at the beginning of each stressed syllable. The most obvious instance of this is in the recurring lines of “No more weepin’ and a-wailing” of stanza one, and “I want t’ meet my mother” of stanza two. While the aforementioned line of the first stanza emphasizes the suffering and frustration of African American slaves, the repetition of /m/ sound in the second stanza echoes the pain and longing for reunion with perhaps black mothers. Beyond this literal meaning, the desire to “meet my mother” could connote the longing of enslaved African to return to his/her country of origin. Irrespective of the levels of meaning associated with the stated lines,



“*Soon I Will Be Done*” appears to provide a medium for the slaves to vent the feelings of loneliness, grief and weariness of life experienced within the shackles of slavery.

Closely related to the aforementioned is the use of assonance, which tends to compliment alliteration. In assonance, the same vowel sound is repeated in close succession, as evidenced in lines one, three and four of the chorus. The vowel sound /ɔ/ is repeated in “done” and “trouubles”, both in the same line, perhaps to suggest the hope of emancipation from slavery. This shows that the singers are not only optimistic of better life, but prophetic in summoning their long awaited freedom. This is in addition to the vowel sound / əʊ/ in “Goin” and “home,” which seem to reiterate the slave’s desire for rest, comfort and peace from all earthly toil.

From the songs cited above, music for the African American slaves was a primary form of communication, consolation and social commentary. Through the medium of song, slaves could pass sensitive information in “*Swing-Low, Swing Chariot*,” console themselves with the lyrics of “*Soon I Will Be Done*,” voice their despair and hopes in “*We Are Clim’in’ Jacobs Ladder*” and “*Crucifixion*,” assert their humanity in “*I Got Shoes*,” and express optimism for a better life in “*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober*.” Besides the fact that the Bible provided a storehouse of materials for slave composers, the themes represented in the Spirituals are embellished with figurative devices and techniques. These include the use of long and short repetition, allegorical expressions, rhyme, the prevalence of call-and-response pattern amongst others, which in effect underscore the beauty and the full expression of the life and thought of the otherwise inarticulate African American slaves in the United States.

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## Chapter four

### 4.1 Hope and Assurance in Selected Gospel Songs

In this chapter, six African American Gospel Songs are considered: three Gospel Hymns of Charles A. Tindley (1859-1933) and three Gospel Songs of Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993). The Gospel Songs include: *“I’ll Overcome Someday,”* *“We’ll Understand It Better By and By,”* and *“Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me).”* Others include: *“Take My Hand, Precious Lord,”* *“Peace in the Valley”* and *“I’m Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song.”* The composition of the songs under study span the period between 1901 and 1941. The songs are analysed in the light of their themes, background about their origin, figurative devices and stylistic attributes of lyric improvisation and vocal rhythmization.

### 4.2 Charles Albert Tindley’s Gospel Songs/Hymns

#### 4.2.1 “I’ll Overcome Someday” ©1901

*“I’ll Overcome Someday”* is one of the most famous of Tindley’s many gospel songs. Its lyrics assert aspiration for the future, offer hope and assurances that triumph over adversity is possible. The song opens with the portrayal of human domain as a “great battlefield” wherein one has to fight for survival. To drive home the message, Tindley employs war terms and apocalyptic vision of the earthly life. Using war terms such as “forces,” “powers,” “snares,” “sword,” and “overcome,” Tindley illustrates the Christian life on earth as a spiritual battle against evil forces. “I’ll Overcome Someday” he declares “with God’s word a sword of mine,” and “if in my heart I do not yield” to the disagreeable circumstances of life. Similarly, in portraying the struggles of life and unpleasant situations, Tindley makes apocalyptic references such as “with forces all arrayed,” “seen and unseen powers” and “mountains in my way,” all of

which lend a vivid picture to the warfare of life in the six stanzas of the song. There are eight lines in each stanza with the definite rhyme scheme ‘ababbbab,’ except the slight difference in verse two – ‘abcbbbc.’

The idea and assurance of overcoming the world and its troubles seem to be a direct allusion to some biblical verses. The biblical verses include: John 16:3; 1John 4:4; Revelation 2:7and11. But the obvious verse that conveys the idea of victory over the world is John 16:3 which says: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (NIV). This verse is one of the comforting and parting assurances of the divine presence and help of Jesus to his disciples on earth before his second return. Identifying himself as Jesus’ follower, Tindley appropriates and claims the divine promise of a victorious life on earth not only for himself but the entirety of the African American community. Spencer (1990) observes that the pronoun “I” in African American music does not only have a personal bearing, but communal as well. Therefore, even when a songwriter personalizes his/her social commentary, Spencer holds that it is only a way of speaking for the black folk, thus fostering “the needed sense of community” (p.85).

Although without a chorus, each stanza of Tindley’s “*I’ll Overcome Someday*” closes with one of these phrases: “I’ll Overcome Someday,” “Lord, make me strong someday,” and “I’ll be like him someday.” The usage of these phrases provides the repetition essential in the gospel hymn tradition. In this sense, the repetition is most effectively used in lines four, five, six and eight of each stanza.

The utility of the song is linked to the hope and assurance of a better life it offered to the listeners in the early years of 1990s. This was a period Michael Hawn (2013:01) figured as a time

when “life was not easy for many members of Tindley’s congregation during the industrial revolution of the northeast United States at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century.” At this period of the century, the social and economic life of African Americans was marked by a trail of difficulties: discrimination, violence, segregation, and most importantly the search of better employment opportunities. What is integral and inherent in the early Gospel songs, like Tindley’s “*I’ll Overcome Someday*,” is the optimistic view about life; that a better life was realizable. This positive and optimistic outlook perhaps became the basis for the Civil Rights songs composed or refashioned in the 1950s and 60s.

Few decades after its composition, Tindley’s “*I’ll Overcome Someday*” was the basis for the adopted anthem of the black Freedom Movement for Civil Rights in the 1960s as “*We Shall Overcome*.” Amongst other acclaimed inspirational sources like the 1794 hymn called “O Sanctissima” and the old Spiritual “*No More Auction Block for Me*,” the text of “*We Shall Overcome*” derives its substance largely from Tindley’s “*I’ll Overcome*.” Eileen Southern (1997:473) notes that while the opening and closing phrases of the freedom song point to the aforementioned old Spiritual, the middle section of the Civil Rights’ anthem reflects Tindley’s gospel song “*I’ll Overcome Someday*,” as illustrated bellow:

**From: “I’ll Overcome”**

*I’ll overcome someday  
I’ll overcome someday  
I’ll overcome someday  
If in my heart I do not yield  
I’ll overcome someday*

**To: “ We Shall Overcome”**

*We shall overcome  
We shall overcome  
We shall overcome  
If in our hearts we do believe  
We shall overcome someday.*

For the crowd, the anthem “We Shall Overcome” was indispensable to their mass meetings often sung at the end before dispersing from the venue. “The anthem,” asserted by Spencer (1990:84) “was a baptismal dramatization of inward allegiance and mass initiation to a new socio-religious

order characterized by nonviolence.” The philosophy of nonviolence, which entails a commitment to nonviolent resistance to injustices, was what the Civil Right leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., considered the most potent weapon available to the oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and justice within the white dominated America. But at a time when African Americans were hard pressed to maintain their commitment to nonviolence, Southern (1997) notes that the black masses stopped singing the anthem. This to her was when they “began to realize that nonviolence was powerless against the entrenched racism in the United States” (p.473). Rather than rely on peaceful songs, Southern adds that the black masses resorted to “angry slogans and riots,” actions which critics like Robert Blauner (1969) and Robert Hind (1984:547) view as responses to their colonized status. However, a notable occasion the anthem was sung after the earlier mentioned resolution was at the funeral of the martyred Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 9, 1968 (Southern 1997). Despite its rare usage in latter Civil Rights’ rallies, Spencer (1990:84) holds that “*We Shall Overcome*,” alongside other freedom songs, helped to energize African American protests and in the process generated a reservoir of courage in the group’s quest for equality and justice in the mainland of American society.

#### **4.2.2 “We’ll Understand It Better By and By” ©1905**

*For now we are looking in a mirror that gives only a dim (blurred) reflection [of reality as in a riddle or enigma], but then [when perfection comes] we shall see in reality and face to face! Now I know in part (imperfectly), but then I shall know and understand fully and clearly, even in the same manner as I have been fully and clearly known and understood by God (1 Corinthians 13:12, Amplified Version of The Holy Bible).*

A close look at the biblical verse above indicates that Tindley may have been directly influenced by it. Written probably around A.D. 55 to the Church in Corinth, the writer – Apostle Paul – used the epistle as a medium to exhort the recipients to patience and perseverance in their earthly and

momentary trials. Correspondingly, the lyrics of “*We’ll Understand It Better By and By*,” as Andrew Legg (2008:44) asserts: “addressed African American religious and social sensibilities,” emphasizing that the inexplicable earthly trials and tribulations of an individual or group can only be understood fully with the passage of time and the eventual face to face view with God in heaven.

In the four stanzas of “*We’ll Understand It Better By and By*,” Tindley depicts the concerns of subsistence and suffering of African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. A music critic, Horace Boyer (2000:29) notes that most Tindley songs, like “*We’ll Understand It Better By and By*,” were “written during the rise of Ku Klux Klan and before the Great Depression (which would further disenfranchise a group of people barely getting by).” From historical records, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a type of hate groups in the United States that sought to frustrate and keep in subjection minority groups in direct economic competition with the lower and working class whites, especially through crimes. Such crimes ranged from minor acts of intimidation to major hate crimes like murder, torture, lynching, burnings and terrorism on non-white groups (Baudouin 2011; Sitkoff 1993). The KKK’s enemies were often minority groups such as the African Americans, Jews, Catholics, anti-Prohibitionist, immigrants, amongst others (Sitkoff 1993). In essence, the Ku Klux Klan was an instrument of fear, intended to control and subject their victims. This to a great extent underscores the deep seated opinions of white supremacy over non-white groups in America, where the African Americans, for example, were considered ‘inferior’ and second class citizens, even after the abolition of slavery in the American society (Ibid).



In an attempt to capture the social frustrations of the black folk, Tindley incorporated images to reinforce the “trials dark on ev’ry hand,” “temptations” and “hidden snares” which took African American community “unawares.” The “hidden snares” appear to be a veiled reference for the KKK’s ‘unexpected’ terror and atrocities meted on the Blacks in the then American society. In the lines of the song, Tindley considers the systematic terrorization of the black populace by the white supremacist group – the KKK as “some thoughtless word or deed,” capable of making “hearts ... to bleed.” Therefore, the life Tindley lyricizes is one “... tossed and driven on the restless sea of time / somber skies and the howling tempests oft succeed bright sunshine,” hence reflecting the uncertainty, insecurity and instability of life. To him the bright sunshine that dispels the dark trials of life can only be experienced “in that perfect day, when the mists have rolled away.” This seems to be a metaphorical reference to the day the promissory note of the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness becomes a reality for African Americans and all American citizens, or the experience of one’s ascension into an eternity of sorrow free, carefree and pain free existence.

In the free verse structure of “*We’ll Understand It Better By and By*,” Tindley further specifies the social condition – impoverishment- of African Americans. He confronts the abject poverty of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century black folk “as one that makes the nation so repressive to his people” (Spencer 1990:213). This is aptly captured in Verse two of the song:

*We are often destitute  
of the things that life demands,  
want of food and want of shelter,  
thirsty hills and barren lands;  
we are trusting in the Lord,  
and according to God's word,  
we will understand it better by and by.*

The life Tindley depicts in the above verse is that of earthly destitution of the then African Americans. Here, the desperate situations of want and inadequate basic amenities are reiterated - food, clothing, shelter, amongst other needs and difficulty. Such a portrayal is reflective of the life and difficult times of early African American migrants from rural South to urban North. “Southern blacks faced the boll weevil infestations (the years 1892 and 1915-1916), a series of floods (1915-1916), a virtual lack of justice in the Southern states,” observed Darden (2004:131). He furthers that the hardship extended to “barely adequate educational opportunities, atrocious to barely adequate access to quality health care, and almost complete disenfranchisement at the polls.” But despite these shades of troubles and afflictions, Tindley in the chorus of *“We’ll Understand It Better By and By,”* offers a ray of hope of a heavenly peace and rest from earthly trials and tribulations; a place where “saints of God are gathered home” and made to fully understand what they had gone through on earth.

#### **4.2.3 “Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me)”**

Charles Tindley is often viewed by critics and writers alike like Lindsay Terry (2005:100) as a writer of songs for “suffering people.” One of Tindley’s songs that concurs aptly with this assertion is *“Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me).”* From the title of the song, one could infer that Tindley wrote this song for a particular audience: the poor and the weak. By identifying with the poor and writing from an experiential approach, the issues Tindley addresses in the lyrics are universal in scope and emphasis, despite its particular reference to African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Part of the social realities Tindley confronts in the lyrics border on abject poverty of blacks in the post slavery era; the un-kept promises of man as against the unfailing promises of God; and the greed of “mighty men” who live in luxury at the expense of others.

An aesthetic element worthy of note in the poetry of the song is rhyme. Tindley employs two rhyme schemes in the five stanzas of the song. The rhyme scheme for each stanza can be represented as follow:

*Stanza 1 = 'abcdde'*  
*Stanza 2 = 'abcdde'*  
*Stanza 3 = 'aabccb'*  
*Stanza 4 = 'aabccb'*  
*Stanza 5 = 'aabccb'*

Of the six lines in each stanza, stanzas one, two, and five have 'abcdde' as a definite rhyme scheme; while stanzas three and four have same rhyme scheme of 'aabccb.' However, the chorus has a quintet structure (five lines) with the rhyme scheme 'aabba.'

Thematically, Tindley in stanzas one and two acknowledges the providence and sufficiency of God over the poor. He identifies himself with the downtrodden by the frequent use of the Pronouns "I" and "me:" "Here I may be weak and poor" but "God has promised to provide for me." This concept of divine provision of "all my raiment and my food / and my health and all that's good" was understood by the African American community as an all encompassing supply, which Tindley articulates well in the lines of the two stanzas.

In stanza three, Tindley provides a vivid imagery of America society at the turn of the twentieth century. In this sense, he depicts a society where starvation and want co-exist in the midst of extravagant luxury. In this respect, the lyrics partly serve as a 'mechanism' of reassertion of self as an individual and race, and questions the politics of human domination within the confines of United States. By employing alliteration (in the first line) and contrast in the subsequent lines, Tindley declares:

*Mighty men may have control,  
Of the silver and the gold;  
Want and sorrow for the poor there may be  
But the God of heaven reigns,  
And his promise is the same,  
And I know He will provide for me.*

It is as though with the sense of consternation that Tindley penned the above verse, for even the earlier lines of the verse reflect the American society in his days as stratified with two social classes: the rich and the poor. A society where the nation's wealth and resources, as symbolized by "silver" and "gold" are under the control and possession of a supposedly superior race – White Americans. Sustaining this idea in one of his songs "*The World of Forms and Changes (After Awhile)*," Tindley paints a similar picture of the decadence of American social aspect:

*Our boasted land and nation,  
Are plunging in disgrace;  
With pictures of starvation  
Almost in every place;  
While loads of needed money,  
Remain in hoarded piles;  
But God will rule this country,  
After awhile.*

The tone here is more of disappointment, perhaps on the words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. The United States' Declaration of Independence declared "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Du Bois 2007:110). It is a promise that all American citizens, irrespective of race, ethnic or any other differences would be guaranteed the inalienable human rights. But from the lyrics, it is obvious that the early twentieth African Americans had not yet entered into that experience of 'happiness' for reasons of racial discrimination, greed and marginalization by those in positions of authority and power.

Therefore, responding to the appalling situation of uneven distribution of the nation's wealth and resources, Tindley subjects the injustice in the country to divine judgment and control.

In verses four and five of "*Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me)*," there is the appropriation of ancient Israelites and their experience of divine provision and deliverance. The imagery Tindley portrays is in the deliverance of biblical Israelites (often the heroes of the Spirituals) from the shackles of human bondage and miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Proceeding to enumerate the event, Tindley in verse five paints the falling of "precious manna" from heaven for the newly freed Israelites, who under the leadership of a praying Moses were divinely provided for at the point of their needs. This approach of imagery seems to be Tindley's subtle way of encouraging and beckoning on the African American community to praying as a medium of having their needs met divinely.

Through repetition, Tindley in the chorus reminds his listeners of the protective and providential power of God who "has promised to provide for me," or any African American that prays to Him in faith for divine help.

### **4.3 Thomas Dorsey's Gospel Songs**

#### **4.3.1 "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" ©1932**

Akin to Blues music for its expression of personal feelings, Dorsey in "*Take My Hand, Precious Lord*," expresses his sorrow over the loss of his wife – Nettie Dorsey (in childbirth) – and newborn son a day after in August 1932. His tragedy in 1932 as Dorsey recounts, "chilled me, killed me off, I wanted to go back to blues" (Dorsey 1994:6). Caught in that dilemma and grief stricken state, Dorsey found himself playing a melody at a piano, with the notes falling

“one by one into my head. They just seemed to fall into place” (Mikkelson,B. and David P. 2009:1). Hence his greatest song – “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord,*” was birthed.

Dorsey through the use of vocal rythmization (in the introductory section) and rendition of the first verse offers a poignant imagery of isolation and death. In this sense, Dorsey sublimely depicts the image of a living God taking his hand and leading him through the period of his bereavement. By metaphorically describing his tragic circumstance as “darkness,” “night” and “storm,” Dorsey therefore pleads:

*Precious Lord, take my hand,  
Lead me on, let me stand,  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.  
Through the storm, through the night  
Lead me on to the light,  
Take my hand, precious Lord,  
Lead me home*  
(Track Number 01 of Thomas Dorsey’s “Precious Lord Recordings of the Great Gospel Songs of Thomas Dorsey”).

From the lyrics, Dorsey seems to acknowledge human frailty in grief-filled days, and the dependency on God for strength. Sustaining the idea of being “weak,” “tired,” and “worn” in the three stanzas of the song, Dorsey employs a definite rhyme scheme of ‘aabccde’ in stanzas two and three, with a slight variation in stanza one – ‘aabccbd.’ This mild difference gives the poetry of the song a variety in spite of the overall formal pattern used.

The repetitive character of the lyrics reinforces Dorsey’s plea for divine strength, comfort and guidance, as well the emotional appeal it has on the listeners. The element of emotionalism is one intrinsic beauty that characterizes Dorsey’s songs, especially in what is considered by many to be the greatest gospel song ever written: “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord.*” Listening to the original track of the song, the emotion effect is heightened by the use of

‘guttural effect,’ particularly screams and moan that often characterize moments of grief. Guttural effects are usually added by the performer, rather than written into the lyrics of the song (Stewart 1998:6). Other Guttural effects include shouts and groans. Similarly, commenting on the emotional effect of the song in its maiden rendition, Dorsey recalls that “the folk went wild. They broke up the church. Folk were shouting everywhere ... I don’t know what they were shouting for. I was the one who should be shouting ... or sorry” (Harris 1992:241). Reiterating on the song’s power of appeal, Darden (2004:171) asserts that:

*The result is an intensely personal and-at the same time-completely universal heart – cry, and an exhilarating combination of helplessness and trust that has inspired performers and moved untold millions of listeners.*

The inspirational power and impact of the song on untold number of listeners was not limited to the African American church audience, but as well civil right activists in the mid twentieth century.

During the Civil Right struggle of African Americans in 1950s and 60s, Lindsay Terry (2005) affirms that “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord*” was the favourite song of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As a Civil Right leader, King often invited Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson to sing “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord,*” perhaps to inspire the (multi-racial) crowds. Notably, it was sung at the rally of April 3, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee where King delivered his last speech -“I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” in support of Memphis Sanitation Strike: a protest for higher wages and better treatment of black sanitary public works employees (Anagwonye 2010). This rally preceded the assassination of the thirty-nine year old Martin Luther King Jr.’s on April 4, 1968 in Memphis.

Although composed out of personal experience of heartache, “*Take My Hand, Precious Lord*” is used as a church song virtually for all occasions, especially at funerals. This

tremendously moving song has continued to be heard in funeral services of Black and White Americans alike. At King's funeral, for example, Mahalia Jackson sang the song in the hearing of those in attendance, in fulfillment of King's request prior his passing (Rodney 2012). Similarly, the same song was rendered at the state funeral of President Lyndon Baines Johnson in January 1973 by Leontyne Price, and at Mahalia Jackson's funeral in 1972 by Aretha Franklin, amongst other examples (Rodney 2012; Dorsey 1994; Darden 2004). The wide spread and impact of the song on listeners is perhaps tied to its blend of a tragic sense of life with the triumphal assurance of spiritual solace and peace it offers.

#### **4.3.2 "Peace in the Valley" ©1938**

From historical records of Dorsey's musical life, "*Peace in the Valley*" is one song that rivals "*Precious Lord, Take my Hand*" in popularity. To appreciate more deeply the beauty and power of "*Peace in the Valley*" is to get acquainted with the story that led to its composition. Dorsey recalls that in 1939 (shortly before World War II) "while Hitler was rumbling his war chariots," he was on a train journey across the United States of America. As the train raced out of Indiana into the Ohio hills, Dorsey beheld a beautiful green valley with all kinds of livestock grazing undisturbed:

*Horses, cows, sheep, they were all grazing and together in this little valley. Kind of a little brook was running through the valley, and up the hill there I could see where the water was falling from. Everything seemed so peaceful with all the animals down there grazing together. It made me wonder what's the matter with humanity? What's the matter with mankind? Why couldn't man live in peace like animals down there? So out of that came "Peace in the Valley" (Horstman 1996:57-58).*

It is obvious from the text above that the manifestation of 'peace' and 'harmony' of the animals in the valley, despite the fear and upset of the coming war provided Dorsey the inspiration for



“*Peace in the Valley.*” It is as though Dorsey is utterly amazed at the failure of man in all his intelligence and ingenuity to keep and maintain peace like the lower animals in pastoral scene.

It is in the light of the above concern that Dorsey in the four stanzas of the song contrasts the anguish of earthly life with heavenly peace. In stanza one, Dorsey complains and laments of being “tired and weary/ but I must go along” toiling on the earth until “the Lord comes to call me away.” Here, he acknowledges a man’s life as the native possession of God – the determiner of physical life and existence. With the use of inner rhyme and alliteration, Dorsey’s longing and description of a heavenly peace in contrast to the toils and pains of the world is reinforced: “where the morning is bright and the Lamb is the light / And the night, night is as fair as the day.” These lines are reflective of few biblical verses in the book of Revelation – a book having some of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature, evidenced in the use of metaphors, pseudonyms, symbolic language, excessive use of numbers, etc:

*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it... for there shall be no night there (Revelation 21:23, 24a, 25b of the King James Version of *The Holy Bible*).*

The metaphor “the Lamb is light” as cited in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* is a reference to “an attribute of holiness, thus a personal quality. It is the outshining of Deity.” The frequent use of the metaphor in the book of Revelation is indicative of the personality trait of the Supreme Being, especially with the “Lamb” symbolizing Christ and ‘light’ as a symbol and expression of holiness. Therefore, Dorsey’s stated aim of dwelling with the Lamb suggests his desire for a heavenly and peaceful life unaffected by the darkness of war and its deaths or destructive implications.

In describing eternal peace that awaits the faithful, Dorsey parallels the serene pastoral environment at the valley to heavenly peace. The parallel construction is traceable to stanzas two and three which provide a vivid description of life in harmony in heaven. Similar to the peaceful valley he saw on his train journey, Dorsey with a tone of admiration describes the heavenly abode as a place where “the bear will be gentle and wolf will be tame / and the lion will lay down by the lamb.” In this peaceful environment, harmless “beasts from the wild” will “be led by a lit’le child,” with the landscape characterized by blooming “flow’rs,” green grass, “the skies will be clear and serene,” and “the sun ever shines.” These lines seem to be a recast of the biblical passage that reiterates peaceful co-existence in heaven from Isaiah 11:6-10. Verse six of the bible passage renders it this way: “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.” Also, the distressed free environment in heaven is further provided in stanza four. To Dorsey, there are “No headaches or heartaches or misunderstands,” “trouble” and “confusion” in heaven but “a big endless smile” where constantly there is “peace and contentment for me.”

The chorus of the song captures the main thrust of the song: “Peace in the valley.” Though, with the aid of repetition in the chorus, the phrase “Peace in the valley” is arguably an allegorical reference to heaven, where Dorsey longs to dwell. A close look at the lyrics suggests its utility to African American community, particularly when viewed from the context of its composition. The song as a whole offers a consolatory promise (for Dorsey and his listeners) for a better and more peaceful domain away from the hostilities and warfare of man’s earthly domain.

### 4.3.3 “I’m Going To Live the Life I Sing About in My Song” ©1941

“*I’m Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song*” is a short song with a chorus and two verses. Didactic in content, Dorsey in this slow paced song expresses his resolution to live a life worthy of his calling and according to the dictates of his faith. To buttress his determination, Dorsey employs alliteration in the line “I’m going to live the life I sing about in my song,” which does not only opens and closes the chorus, but as well provides the repetition that characterizes the lines of the verses. The repetition “I’m going to live the life I sing about in my song” emphasizes Dorsey’s resolution to live a sincere life. It also draws attention to the poet’s burning desire to desist from a hypocritical or phoney life style: “I can’t go to church and shout all day Sunday / Go out and get drunk and raise sand all day Monday.”

Basic to the beauty of the song is the stylistic attribute: lyric improvisation. This refers to the spontaneous creation or development of the text or lyric. In this context, the singer – Marion William (who renders the song on Dorsey’s behalf) – develops the original lines of the song by infusing comments or additional information of what is being stated. The lines below are illustrative of the improvisation:

Section of the Song	Number of Line	Original Line	Improvisation
Chorus	Four	“walking down the street or in my home”	“On the street, back in Philadelphia – that’s my home.”
Verse one	Two	“on the busy thoroughfare”	“On the busy, busy busy, busy thoroughfare.” The improvisation partly underscores the repetitive character of the song.
Verse one	Four to five	“say I’m foolish / But I don’t care”	“They tell me that I’m foolish / But I say to them I don’t care.”
Verse two	Five	“Because I want to do aright”	“Oh! I’m trying every day, trying to do what’s right.”
Verse two	Six	“I can’t go to church and shout....”	“I found out I can’t go to church and shout....”

Although the song is written in blank verse, the lyrics are reflective of Dorsey's principles to live a devotional and purposeful life irrespective of the circumstance and judgment of those around him. In effect, "*I'm Going to Live the Life I Sing About in My Song*" exemplifies aspects of African American Gospel music which raise questions about the relationship between Faith and culture as well as society. Here, Dorsey, through the song, articulates and enjoins the African American Christians of his days to disregard aspects of the world that are in contrast with the demands of their Christian faith. Hence, individuals are taught to live and practice the life they profess in Christ.

#### **4.4 Departing Points Between Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs**

African American musical forms and styles, Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs, developed at different times in the course of their cultural and social history in America. As a body of songs that was rural based, Negro Spirituals evolved out of the slave era, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period, the rendition of spirituals was without instrumental accompaniment, particularly drums, which were banned by many slave owners for fear of inciting rebellion against the master class. Slaves to this effect improvised rhythm through hand-clapping, finger snapping and foot stamping (Apice 2010; Southern 1997). Gospel Songs/music on the other hand was urban based, essentially a post slavery phenomenon, and largely a product of the 1920s (Jenks 2002:154). Its heavy influence from the preceding styles of Blues and Jazz, as well its rich percussive instrumental rhythm, mark its distinctiveness from the foundational style of Spirituals that was largely sung in a cappella form. A cappella is a term applied to unaccompanied vocal music.

In thematic terms, Gospel Songs have a subjective and more expansive range of themes than Spirituals. Musicologist Eileen Southern (1997:459) holds that the wide ranging subjects of Gospel Songs encompass the treatment of salvation, conversion, deep longing for

spirituality, amongst others. This is in addition to the fact that the lyrics are commentaries more on personal religious experiences and specific concerns of African American Christians. Examples of such expressions include: trials, woes, earthly sorrows, blessings, as well the joy of the afterlife (Darden 2004; Costen 1993). This approach differs from the texts of Spirituals which are considered as group-oriented, and tended towards a persistent theme of radical change from slave life to the expression of personal worth and freedom. Rather than focus solely on Jesus, a peculiar trait in Gospel Songs, lyrics of Spirituals tended towards a variety of Biblical stories and characters, which slaves considered as apt in mirroring their slave experience (Reed 2008; Southern 1997).

A differing aspect in Spirituals and Gospel Songs lies in the matter of authorship. Generally, as a body of songs, early Spirituals were a product of communal creation that lacked individual stamp. This is anchored on the fact that Spirituals were spontaneous outburst and expressions of a group, even though 'kindled' by an individual singer. James and Rosamund Johnson (2009:21) hold that, whether Spirituals are collectively created or chiefly the works of talented individuals, "the responses...are largely the work of the group in action." Conversely, Gospel songs are easily linked to individuals of African American community. Though universal in appeal and scope, Hendricks Jr. (2011:18) is of the view that Gospel Songs "from the beginning have been written, copyrighted and widely identified with individuals." Examples of such early individual gospel singers include Charles Tindley, Thomas Dorsey, Lucie Campbell, Reverend Dr. William H. Brewster, etc

Another profound difference between Spirituals and Gospel Songs is the vernacular composition of the lyrics. Although the language used in both musical styles is fundamentally English, Stewart (1998:25) notes that the texts of Negro Spirituals were often

sung in “black dialect.” The “black dialect” which was subject to regional differences was the manner slaves pronounced words and spoke the form of English language that they variously used to communicate. Thus in Spirituals, there is a striking feature of some sounds, like /d/ and /t/ being substituted for /th/ sound in standard English; or the dropping of consonant /g/ in words ending in ‘-ing,’ amongst other examples. The use of ‘Negro’ or ‘black’ dialect is what James and Rosamund Johnson (2009) esteem as the “charm” of Spirituals. They caution that “most of them [i.e. Spirituals] loose in charm when they are sung in straight English” (p.43).

Ironically, it is the use of ‘straight’ English that chiefly characterize lyrics of early Gospel Songs. Though Tindley’s early hymns share partly in the vernacular characteristics of Spirituals, his use of simple and Standard English is recognizable in the text of his songs (Stewart 1998:66). The use of more refined English in Gospel Music must have been influenced by the level of education and renewed race-spirit that served as impetus for poetry and music artists of the Black Renaissance of the 1920s. This movement which coincided with the early years of Gospel Music, placed emphasis on the production of black arts by better educated artists to prove their worth in the American society (Gifford 1999:4). It is not surprising therefore that with an unprecedented outpouring of writing, visual arts and music in the 1920s and 30s, Negro dialect fell into disuse.

Furthermore, different approaches were adopted in the dissemination and popularization of the two bodies of songs. Typical of folk song(s), Negro Spirituals created by African American slaves relied mostly on oral transmission from one generation of slaves to another (Southern 1997; Wright 1992). In such a context, the songs were never written down, but existed only when sung or played from memory. However, Gates (1997:5) notes that Negro Spirituals were first gathered in a book in 1801 by Richard Allen, a black church leader. Such

pioneering effort by Allen paved way for subsequent notation and publication of Spirituals like William F. Allen (et al) *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867), James and Rosamund Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), Gates' Norton Anthology (1997), etc. Other attempts like audio and visual recordings/performances by individual artists (for example, Paul Robeson's, Mahlia Jackson's, etc) and corporate musical artists such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, helped in the spread and preservation of Spirituals. In contrast, composers of early Gospel songs, Charles Tindley and Thomas Dorsey, for example, copyrighted and published their songs in collections such as "Gospel Pearls," and "New Songs of Paradise" in the infant days of the music genre (Jones 2007). Unlike the creators of Spirituals, Tindley, Dorsey and their successors spread their musical message(s) through commercial means. This is in addition to other practical means of promoting their works through revivals, tours, concerts and events like the Nation Baptist Convention (Jones 2007; Southern 1997).

Despite the differences noted above, the two musical styles are identical in some respects. Both Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs, as George Ricks (as cited in Darden 2004:183) puts it: "are emotionally inspired – by visions, trouble, sorrow, thanksgiving, and joy" of African Americans. In this sense, the vernacular styles were born out of the collective and personal experiences of political and social oppressions that bedeviled the African American community during the colonial days of America, and the years following the abolition of slavery in the United States. Ricks further asserts that improvisation and innovation are at the centre and "demand" of the two art forms.

The two musical genres harbor eschatological hopes of heaven. Eschatology in this context refers to "one's belief or understanding of how the present world order will end" (Hendricks, Jr. 2011:14). For the enslaved, the eschatological expectation for justice and

deliverance grew out of the oppressive reality of the race based American slave system. The unrelenting hopefulness and certainty of justice is evident in Spirituals, amongst which are “*We Are Climin’in’ Jacob’s Ladder*” “*There is a Balm in Gilead*” and “*Soon I Will Be Done.*” Similarly, the expressions of hope and affirmation are part of the intrinsic elements of the Gospel songs of Thomas Dorsey, who alongside his major influence, Charles A. Tindley, attested the role of early Gospel Songs in the days of Great migration and economic depression respectively:

*I wrote to give them something to lift them out of that Depression.... We intended Gospel to strike out of the muck and mire of poverty and loneliness, of being broke, and gave them some kind of hope anyway (cited in Hendricks, Jr. 2011:16).*

The kind of hope Tindley and Dorsey speak about in their Gospel Songs is not only of being free from the harsh economic, political and social realities of American life, but also from the pains and peril of earthly life. This is traceable to Tindley’s “*We’ll Understand It Better By and By,*” “*I’ll Overcome,*” and Dorsey’s “*Peace in the valley*” and “*The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow,*” amongst others.

With all these attributes in mind, Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs, as channels of expressions, were used by African Americans at different epochs to give vent to their experiences and struggles: religious, cultural, social and political dimensions of black life in America. This stretches far back from slave days of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the early twentieth century of the existence of African Americans on the American soil.



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## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the beauty and usefulness of selected Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs in African American community. The two song types, which fall under the umbrella of African American music, are part of the vast array of African American vernacular styles. As a dynamic process of expression, past and present, the vernacular tradition has its beginnings between the period of seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; a period of time when an oral tradition - Spirituals - was born.

Being the earliest body of vernacular folk literature, Spirituals is a unique creation of enslaved Africans on American soil. It was born out of the ordeal and experiences of slavery which stirred and awakened in the slaves a verbal art that had characterized the West African cultures: music. Compelled to be resourceful and realizing that they had a survival instinct in a land where the practices of Old World culture and religion were banned by the master class, African American slaves employed singing as an antidote to depression, cruelty and inhumanity of America's slave system. The nature of servitude placed on the enslaved made them to 'manageably' retain and creatively reshape their cultural heritage in spite of the hostile surveillance of the enslavers. It is interesting to note that Spirituals, considered as a whole, is not explicitly African or American, but a synthesis of the forms and styles of the two cultures. Slaves in this context combined Anglo-American melodic and harmonic forms with African elements of strong rhythm, improvised texts and call-and-response pattern to produce a unique music style that came to be known as Spirituals. Couched in religious language, imagery and symbols, Spirituals for the African American slaves became a medium not only for reflecting their religious beliefs, values and musical standards, but social and political commentaries as well.

The badge of ‘savagery’ and ‘primitiveness’ placed on the enslaved by their owners is countered and regated by the employment and use of certain aesthetic elements that underscore the musical instinct and talent of African American slaves. This includes the call and response pattern in songs like “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*” to communicate clandestine meetings and escape; repetition in “*I Got Shoes*” to protest against white oppression; rhyme in the consolatory lyrics of “*Soon I Will Be Done*,” and allegorical references in “*De Winter’ll Soon be Ober*” in expressing optimism for a better life, amongst other examples. Sung in sacred and non-sacred settings, the resistant nature of Spirituals played pivotal role in mediating and empowering the African American slaves in surviving the cruelty of American slave system, which officially came to an end in the middle of the nineteenth century.

A major significant implication of Negro Spirituals after slavery is the established roots for subsequent African American sacred and secular musical genres. At the turn of the twentieth century, the sacred sound of Gospel Music was making its entrance and establishing itself as the church music of the post-slavery African Americans. For blacks caught within the web of devastating social conditions in post emancipation era, Gospel Songs were found to be comforting and consolatory. This is hinged particularly on the pioneering efforts of Gospel artists such as Charles Albert Tindley and Thomas Dorsey. Tindley’s hymns and Dorsey’s songs played a pivotal role in rallying the hopes and aspirations of African Americans in the midst of social and economic changes of the twentieth century American society. Retaining some of the characteristics of Spirituals, Tindley’s texts - “*We’ll Understand It better By and By*” and “*Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide for Me)*,” for example, deal with the immediate problems of despair, poverty, and segregation that bedeviled the African American in the early 1900s. Similarly, Thomas Dorsey considered to be the ‘popularizer’ of the genre in the 1920’s

and 30's, turned heavenward in the lines of "*Precious Lord, Take My hand*" and "*Peace in the Valley*" for direction, consolation and peace. His lyrics provided hope that the devastating conditions of economic depression, World War II, amongst others could be overcome. The genres' popularity in terms of the hope and aspiration it offered, especially to the downtrodden underscores the enduring social struggles of African Americans in the American history.

The divergence between Negro Spirituals and Gospel Songs is striking. Some of them are traceable in the following areas: Spirituals are largely products of African American slaves during the American slave era; while Gospel Songs are post-slavery musical products that originated in the black church at the turn of the twentieth century. In content, Spirituals reflected slave existence and their metaphysical concerns. Contrastingly, in Gospel Songs, the early composers concerned themselves not only with the 'good news' of Christ, but with the subsistence and suffering of African Americans in the early decades of 1900s. Unlike Gospel Songs that can easily be traced to individuals, Spirituals on the other hand, lack individual stamp and are considered to be chiefly communal product.

By adopting Postcolonial theory, this thesis argues that the two bodies of songs – Spirituals and Gospel Songs – are African Americans' artistic responses to the oppression and race-based discrimination within United States society. Inclining more to postcolonial responses such as resistance, protest and reassertion, the study examines the songs as expressive outlets of social and political circumstances of black life in white dominated America. In doing this, that is, in developing and practicing these musical forms, African Americans resourcefully imbued them with aesthetic qualities that have endured generationally. On the whole, the study's scope stretches backwards to the colonial past of American slavery to the dynamics of neo-colonialism in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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## Appendix

### Negro Spirituals:

#### *“De Winter’ll Soon be Ober”*

Oh, de winter, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children,  
De winter, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children, (repeat line)  
Yes my Lord.

Oh Lord, up yonder what I see,  
Bright angels comin’ arter me.  
(Oh, two white angels walking down,  
With long white robe and starry crown.)

Oh, de winter, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children,  
De winter, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children, (repeat line)  
Yes my Lord.

I turn my eyes towards de sky,  
An’ ask de Lord for wings to fly,  
If you get dere before I do,  
Look out for me, I’m comin’ too.

Oh, de winter, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children,  
De winter, de winter, de winter’ll soon be ober, children, (repeat line)  
Yes my Lord.

Oh, Jordan’s ribber is deep and wide,  
But Jesus stan’ on de hebbenly side,  
An’ when we get on Canaan’s shore,  
We’ll shout and sing forever more.

#### *“I Got Shoes”*

I got a robe, you got a robe,  
All God’s children got a robe.  
When I get to Heav’n gonna put in my robe,  
Gonna shout all over God’s Heav’n, Heav’n, Heav’n  
Everybody talkin’ æbout Heav’n ain’t going there,  
Heav’n, Heav’n, Heav’n.  
Gonna shout all over God’s Heav’n.

I got shoes, you got shoes,  
All God's children got shoes.  
When I get to Heav'n gonna put in my shoes,  
Gonna walk all over God's Heav'n, Heav'n, Heav'n  
Everybody talkin' æbout Heav'n ain't going there,  
Heav'n, Heav'n, Heav'n.  
Gonna shout all over God's Heav'n.

I got a harp, you got a harp,  
All God's children got a harp.  
When I get to Heav'n gonna play on my harp,  
Gonna play all over God's Heav'n, Heav'n, Heav'n  
Everybody talkin' æbout Heav'n ain't going there,  
Heav'n, Heav'n, Heav'n.  
Gonna shout all over God's Heav'n.

***“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”***

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home,  
Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home,

I looked over Jordan and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home,  
A band of angels coming after me,  
Coming for to carry me home

If you get there before I do,  
Coming for to carry me home,  
Tell all my friends I'm coming too,  
Coming for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home,  
Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home,

***“We Are Clim’in’ Jacob’s Ladder”***

We are clim’in’ Jacob’s ladder,  
We are clim’in’ Jacob’s ladder,  
We are clim’in’ Jacob’s ladder,  
Soldiers of the cross.

Ev’ry roun’ goes higher, higher,  
Ev’ry roun’ goes higher, higher,  
Ev’ry roun’ goes higher, higher,  
Soldiers of de cross.

Sinner, do you love my Jesus?  
Sinner, do you love my Jesus?  
Sinner, do you love my Jesus?  
Soldiers of de cross.

If you love Him, why not serve Him?  
If you love Him, why not serve Him?  
If you love Him, why not serve Him?  
Soldiers of de cross.

***“Crucifixion”***

Dey crucified my Lord,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
Dey crucified my Lord,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
Not a word - not a word – not a word.

Dey nailed him to de tree,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
Dey nailed him to de tree,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
Not a word - not a word – not a word.

Dey pierced Him in de side,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
Dey pierced Him in de side,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
Not a word - not a word – not a word.

De blood came twinklin’ down,  
An’ He never said a mumblin’ word.  
De blood came twinklin’ down,

An' He never said a mumblin' word.  
Not a word - not a word – not a word.

He bowed His head an' died,  
An' He never said a mumblin' word.  
He bowed His head an' died,  
An' He never said a mumblin' word.  
Not a word - not a word – not a word.

***“Soon I Will Be Done”***

Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Troubles of the world, the troubles of the world,  
Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Goin' home to live with God.

No more weepin' and a-wailing,  
No more weepin' and a-wailing,  
No more weepin' and a-wailing,  
I'm goin' to live with God.

Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Troubles of the world, the troubles of the world,  
Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Goin' home to live with God.

I want t' meet my mother,  
I want t' meet my mother,  
I want t' meet my mother,  
I'm goin to live with God.

Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Troubles of the world, the troubles of the world,  
Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Goin' home to live with God.

I want t' meet my Jesus,  
I want t' meet my Jesus,  
I want t' meet my Jesus,  
I'm goin to live with God.

Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Troubles of the world, the troubles of the world,  
Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,  
Goin' home to live with God.

**Gospel Songs**  
**Charles Albert Tindley Hymns**

*"We'll Understand It Better By and By"*

We are tossed and driven  
on the restless sea of time;  
somber skies and howling tempests  
oft succeed a bright sunshine;  
in that land of perfect day,  
when the mists are rolled away,  
we will understand it better by and by.

*Chorus:*

By and by, when the morning comes,  
when the saints of God are gathered home,  
we'll tell the story how we've overcome,  
for we'll understand it better by and by.

We are often destitute  
of the things that life demands,  
want of food and want of shelter,  
thirsty hills and barren lands;  
we are trusting in the Lord,  
and according to God's word,  
we will understand it better by and by.  
*(Chorus)*

Trials dark on every hand,  
and we cannot understand  
all the ways of God would lead us  
to that blessed promised land;  
but he guides us with his eye,  
and we'll follow till we die,  
for we'll understand it better by and by.  
*(Chorus)*

Temptations, hidden snares  
often take us unawares,  
and our hearts are made to bleed  
for a thoughtless word or deed;  
and we wonder why the test  
when we try to do our best,  
but we'll understand it better by and by.  
*(Chorus)*

***“Here I May Be Weak and Poor (God Will Provide For Me)”***

Here I may be weak and poor,  
With afflictions to endure;  
All about me not a ray of light to see.  
Just as He has often done,  
For his helpless trusting ones,  
God has promised to provide for me.

*Chorus:*

God has promised to provide for me,  
God has promised to provide for me;  
All creation is His own,  
All my needs to him are known.  
He has promised to provide for me.

All my raiment and my food,  
And my health and all that's good,  
Are within His own written guarantee,  
God is caring for the poor,  
Just as He has done before,  
He has promised to provide for me.

Mighty men may have control,  
Of the silver and the gold;  
Want and sorrow for the poor there may be,  
But the God of heaven reigns,  
And his promise is the same,  
And I know He will provide for me.

Ancient Israel heard His voice,  
How the people did rejoice,  
When he lead them safely thro' the mighty sea.  
In the wilderness they knew,  
What the living God can do;  
He's the one that doth provide for me.

When they hadn't any bread,  
Good old Moses knelt and prayed;  
And the God who gives plentiful and free,  
Sent the precious manna down,  
Israel saw it on the ground;  
'Twas the God who now provides for me.



## **Thomas Dorsey's Gospel Songs**

### ***"Take My Hand, Precious Lord"***

Precious Lord, take my hand,  
Lead me on, let me stand,  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.  
Through the storm, through the night  
Lead me on to the light,  
Take my hand, precious Lord,  
Lead me home.

When my way grows drear,  
Precious Lord, linger near.  
When my life is almost gone,  
Hear my cry, hear my call,  
Hold my hand lest I fall.  
Take my hand, precious Lord,  
Lead me home.

When the darkness appears  
And the night draws near,  
And the day is past and gone,  
At the river I stand,  
Guide my feet, hold my hand.  
Take my hand, precious Lord,  
Lead me home.

### ***"Peace in the Valley"***

I am tired and weary, but I must go along  
Till the Lord comes to call me away.  
Where the morning is bright and the Lamb is the light,  
And the night, night is as fair as the day.

#### *Chorus:*

There will be peace in the valley for me someday.  
There will be peace in the valley for me, oh, Lord I pray  
There'll be no sadness, no sorrow, no trouble I'll see  
There will be peace in the valley for me

Well, the bear will be gentle, and wolf will be tame  
And the lion will lay down by the lamb  
And the beasts from the wild will be led by a lit'le child  
I'll be changed, changed from this creature that I am.

There the flow'rs will be blooming, the grass will be green.  
And the skies will be clear and serene

The sun ever shines, giving one endless beam  
And the clouds there will be ever seen.

No headaches or heartaches or misunderstandings,  
No confusion or trouble won't be  
No frown to defile, just a big endless smile  
There'll be peace and contentment for me.

**“I'm Going To Live the Life I Sing About in My Song”**

Chorus:

I'm going to live the life I sing about in my song  
I'm going to stand for the right, always shun the wrong  
If I'm in a crowd, if I'm alone  
Walking down the street or in my home  
I've got to live the life I sing about in my song  
I'm goin' to live the life I sing about in my song.

Every day and everywhere  
On the busy thoroughfare  
Folks may watch me, some may spot me  
Say I'm foolish  
But I don't care  
I can't sing one thing and then live another  
Be saint by day and a devil undercover  
I've got to live the life I sing about in my song

If a day,  
Tell me if a night  
You say Marion you got to always walk in the light  
Some may mistake me; underrate me,  
Because I want to do aright  
I can't go to church and shout day Sunday  
Go out and get drunk and raise sand all day Monday  
I've got to live the life I sing about in my song