

# NEGRO SPIRITUALS and GOSPEL SONGS

by  
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## PRELUDE

It was in 1952 when I made my first investigation trip down to the southern states. Those specific melodies and rhythms of the Negro Spirituals drove me from Chicago to North Carolina, where I met many colored brothers. Gradually, I moved toward west, and one Sunday, early autumn, I was asked to speak in "Faith Tabernacle" in Oklahoma city, Oklahoma. This was a Negro Church. Nearly two thousand people got together to hear me speak, and the song leader began the song service little after seven. It was quite amazing that I saw, on the platform, so many musicians and so many instruments: a group of jazz band on the right and a group of strings and wood-winds on the left, with two concert-grand pianos installed at the center of the stage. When they started to play all together, they were deafening my ears, and I could hardly stand those strong sound. On top of that, the Negroes clapped their hands as they sang. Many times, they sang the same Spiritual over and over again. That night the meeting was closed after midnight. The spirit of this tabernacle meeting made me to consecrate my time to the study of the Negro Spirituals.

This year (1968) I am planning my fourth trip to the southern states, hoping to further my study in and around New Orleans.

## HYMNS

"A good hymn is the most difficult thing in the world to write. In a good hymn you have to be commonplace and poetical. The moment you cease to be common place and put in any expression at all out of the common, it ceases to be hymn." - Alfred Lord Tennyson's talk to Professor Harbert Warren, 1892. The first recorded hymn in the Bible was sung by Moses on the bank of Red Sea, after the dramatic rescue of the children of Isreal from the clutches of Pharaoh's army. We find this song of victory and redemption recorded in Exodus 15 : 1-8.

I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath made triumph gloriously :  
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.  
The Lord is my strength and song,  
And he is become my salvation :  
This is my God, and I will praise him ;

My father's God, and I will exalt him.  
The Lord is a man of war ;  
The Lord is his name.  
Parah's chariots and his host he cast into the sea ;  
And his chosen captains are sunk in the Red Sea.  
The deeps cover them :  
They went down into the depths like a stone.  
Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power,  
Thy right hand, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy.  
And in the greatness of thine excellency thou overthrowest them that rise up  
against thee :  
Thou sendest forth thy wrath, it consumeth them as stubble.  
And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were piled up,  
The flood stood upright as a heap ;  
The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.  
The enemy said,  
I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil ;  
My desire shall be satisfied upon them ;  
I will draw sword, my hand shall destroy them,  
Thou didst blow thy wind, the sea covered them ;  
They sank as lead in the mighty waters.  
Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like thee, glorious in holiness,  
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?  
Thou stretchedst out thy right hand,  
The earth swallowed them.  
Thou in thy lovingkindness hast led the people that thou hast redeemed :  
Thou hast guided them in thy strength to thy holy habitation.  
The people have heard, they trembled ;  
Pangs have taken hold on the inhabitants of Philistia.  
Then were the chiefs of Edom dismayed ;  
The mighty men of Moab, trembling taketh hold upon them :  
All the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away.  
Terror and dread falleth upon them ;  
By the greatness of thine arm they are as still as stone ;  
Till thy people pass over, O Lord,  
Till the people pass over that thou hast purchased.  
Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance,  
The place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in,  
The sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.  
The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

This song was improvised many years ago by a man of God as he led Isrealite from Egypt into the land of Promise. The Negro Spirituals are also improvised by Negro themselves.

In the post-apostlic periods, we found the Greek influence brought in by Gentile converts caused the Jewish Christian to sing "Spirituals". For nearly a thousand years, since the time of Ambrose (4th century) the laymen had had no part in composing nor singing hymns. But, when we consider the mighty forces that were set in motion the days of the Reformation and the part that Martin Luther played, we feel that it is not exaggerating to say ; "God shook a monk, and the monk shook a world". He, not only translated the Bible into German language, but also caused his people to make songs and spirituals in their native tongues. His own example and encouragement led many to attempt hymn writing, and opened up a veritable golden age of evangelical songs in Germany, whose treasures have enriched Christian hymnody all over the world.

John Julian, the eminent hymnologist, states that there must be nearly one hundred thousand German hymns. Men and women of all ranks wrote hymns : pastors and scholars, converted monks and nuns, kings, princes and princesses, merchants and housewives, generals and statemen, students and teachers. Many of the finest hymns were born amid the trials and tribulations of the Reformation and the untold miseries of the thirty years' war.

The harsh condition of pioneer living were now yielding to the advance of civilization, and the people of the New World were beginning to have some time for the arts and graces. At the beginning of the nineteenth century number of evangelical hymn writers was increasing.

#### JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER (1807-1892)

This New England Quaker poet did not think of himself as a hymn writer, although he considered a hymn to be the best use to which devotional poetry could be put. He spent his childhood on a farm, faithfully doing his share of the heavy drudgery. He was nineteen before he had an opportunity for formal education. Later, as an editor, he devoted his time to the anti-slavery cause, using tongue and pen unsparingly in what was to him a holy crusade. From the great volume of Whittier's poetic, the following beautiful hymns have been extracted ;

O Brother Man, Fold to Thy Heart Thy Brother.

Dear Lord, and Father of Mankind.

Immortal love, Forever Full.

#### HARRIET BEECHER STOWE (1812-1896)

One of the most distinguished families of early America was the Beecher family of New England. The father Rev. Lyman Beecher had six sons, including the famous Henry Ward Beecher, who also became a minister. Upon the conversion of Harriet, at the age of eleven, her father, with tear-filled eyes, exclaimed, "A new flower blossomed in the Kingdom this day." Throughout a long and exceedingly rich life, filled

with much happiness and many hours, but which also knew much grief and suffering, Harriet Beecher clung to the simple faith in Christ. Her widely read book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" brought much fame in her lifetime, but her claim to a place in Christian hymnody rests upon a poem, written one summer morning in her garden and seeming to embody something of the calm, sweet, mystical atmosphere of the early morning.

"Still, Still With Thee"

### SPIRITUALS

In August 1619, Negro slaves were brought into the New World aboard Dutch boat. This was the beginning of their tragedy. They were sold to unknown places and to unknown hard masters. Planters in the south made "Slave Code" in order to keep their slaves by invisible chains. Days of hard labour and sorrow had been continuing over two centuries and half until the Declaration of Freedom was proclaimed on January 1st, 1863.

At the psychic moment there was at hand the precise religion for the condition in which they found themselves thrust. Far from their native land and customs, despised by those among whom they lived, experiencing the pang of the separation of loved ones on the auction blocks, knowing the hard task masters, feeling the lashes, the Negro seized Christianity. The religion of compensation in the life to come for the ills suffered in the present existence, the religion which implied the hope that in the next world there would be a reversal of conditions, of rich man and poor man, of proud and meek, of master and slave.

The result was a body of song voicing all the cardinal virtues of Christianity—patience—bearance—love—faith— and hope— through a necessarily modified form of primitive African music. The Negro took complete refuge in Christianity, and the Spirituals were literally forged of sorrow in the heat of religious fervor.

It was by sheer spiritual forces that African chants were metamorphosed into the Spirituals; that upon the fundamental throb of African rhythm were reared those melodies which rise above earth and soar into the pure, ethereal blue. And this is the miracle of the creation of the SPIRITUALS.

In the article written by Mr. Van Vechten, he said "Negro folksongs differ from the folksongs of most other races through the fact they are song in harmony. Harold Courlander stated "Negro folk music in the United States is preeminently "American" is all too evident. It could have come into being only in the United States, where elements of specific cultures were brought about under condition that were exactly duplicated anywhere else."

European and African elements mingled to produce one result in the Spanish islands of the Caribbean, another in the English islands, a third in the French islands. The result was still different in Brazil and Venezuela. In all of those places, the process of cross-fertilization of musical styles continues, but elements of European and West African tradition survive, some-times in pure form.

A great deal of American Negro music has been found to use the pentatonic scale, which in its commonest form is made up of tones corresponding to the black keys on the piano. Many Negro songs utilize other so-called "gapped" systems, such as the ordinary major scale lacking its fourth or its seventh—in other words, the pentatonic plus an additional note, either the major fourth or the major seventh. Other scales are the major with a flattened seventh, the minor with a raised sixth, the minor without the sixth, and the minor with a raised seventh; these four, according to some analysts, have been characterized as probable survivals of scales brought from Africa.

A considerable part of the early days controversy over African influence in the United States Negro music had to do with use of the pentatonic scale. Henry Krehbiel analyzed 527 songs and found 21 per-cent of them to be in the pentatonic scale, while other studies, with different samplings, showed a figure as high as 35 per-cent.

One general impression that comes from listening to Spirituals, worksongs, and other traditional forms of Negro music is that there is an absence of harmony. Group singing tends to be in unison, sometimes in octaves. But certain notes or groups of notes may be sung in simultaneous seconds, thirds or fifths. This is particularly true in church singing and gang singing. Responsive voices in one worksong, for example, sang in parts.

There are various singing conventions in Negro tradition which, although not unknown, are generally not found in other American folk music. One of them is the tendency or break into falsetto ones, sometimes for a note or two, on occasion for whole phrases or entire songs. This is not, as sometimes has been stated, the result of inability on the part of the singer to reach tones higher than his natural register. In Negro tradition the falsetto has an esthetic value placed upon it. African singers often use falsetto as an informal style for singing solo and in small group, and men singing at work in the fields or forests may sing to themselves in this register. Other Negro singing elements that are noteworthy are humming and moaning and groaning. They are found in religious songs, worksongs, old-style blues and field cries. "Moaning" does not imply grief or anguish; on the contrary, it is blissful or ecstatic rendition of a song, characterized by full and free exploitation of melodic variation and improvisation, sometimes with an open throat, sometimes with closed lips to create a humming effect. On occasion moaning is done in falsetto. Elements of this kind are sometimes observed in preaching and in church prayers, where they may result in rudimentary polyphony.

The folk song composes itself. It is the song of the people and came into being without the influence of conscious art, marked by certain peculiarities of rhythm, form and melody traceable to racial or national characteristics in subject matter. They are frequently vividly pictorial. The words are always simple and concrete. The language is the common dialect of the people, and not the careful diction of the educated.

Like the ballad, it is usually made with a refrain and is repeated over and over, and soon memorized. In 15th century, people wanted to sing more vivacious than the older plain song melodies.

In England, the 15th century was the beginning of the modern era, and the period of Chaucer's influence and humanism. They are usually expressed in the style of simple words and narrative phrases and scriptural story references, expressing the common emotion of the Negro race. The Negro was endowed with a great musical gift. The Spirituals stem from African music and the rhythm is fundamental in African songs.

Yet, the American Spirituals are more developed in the melody, and especially in harmony.

The very distinctive rhythm, melody and harmony-all three basic elements-are well illustrated in the music or Spirituals, such as :

“Steal Away, Steal Away. . . . .”

### Negro Population in the United States

#### 1790

New Hampshire	157
RhodeIsland	958
Connecticut	2, 648
New York	21, 193
New Jersey	11, 423
Pennsylvania	3, 707
Delaware	8, 887
Maryland	103, 036
Virginia	292, 627
North Carolina	100, 783
South Carolina	107, 094
Georgia	29, 264
Kentucky	12, 430
Tennessee	3, 417

#### 1860 (Negro Slaves)

Alabama	435, 080
Arkansas	111, 115
Delaware	1, 798
Florida	61, 745
Georgia	462, 198
Kentucky	225, 483
Louisiana	331, 726
Maryland	87, 189
Mississippi	436, 631
Missouri	114, 931
North Carolina	331, 059
South Carolina	402, 406

Tennessee .....	275, 719
Texas.....	182, 566
Virginia.....	490, 865

## GOSPEL SONGS

Phil Kerr said in his "Music in Evangelism"

A Hymn is a Prayer-Song

A Psalm is a Praise-Song

A Gospel Song is a Testimony Song

The distinction between a Hymn and a Gospel Song is quite important for the determining of how the song should be sung. Here is a good general rule. Sing a hymn with the same reverence and solemnity and humility with which a prayer would be offered, and sing a Gospel song with the same enthusiasm and earnestness and victory which a testimony or exhortation would be delivered. King David recommended playing "Upon the harp with a solemn sound (Psalm 92 : 3), but many more times he recommended making a joyful noise. Of the 124 reference in the Psalm to music, less than six times does David refer to solemn, mournful singing. Such terms as "Joy", "Cheerful", "Happy" and "Praise" are used in connection with music more than seventy times. Instruments are mentioned thirty-four times.

Many of our best Hymns and Gospel Songs are sung to tunes which were originally driven from secular melodies. The Salvation Army often applies gospel words to secular tunes.

In the past, Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474) chief chorister in the Papal choir in Rome, often combined the secular music of his day with religious words, and his works were accepted officially by the Church. He realized the vital difference between the music of the people and the music of the Church, and he desired to bring these together, endeavoring to imbue the scholasticism of the monastery with the spirit of the people.

Josquin du Pres (1455-1525) one of the most brilliant religious composers of the 15th century, often employed the custom of uniting sacred and secular melodies and texts in his church compositions.

The Gospel songs came into vogue during the last quarter of the 19th century and is of American origin and development, although it first gained its distinct impetus in England under the patronage and usage of D. L. Moody and his singing co-partner, Ira D. Sankey. These men began conducting their evangelistic campaign in Newcastle in 1873. They made use of a book previously compiled by Phillip Phillips, entitled "Hallowed Songs", and supplemented by Mr. Sankey's own compositions.

In 1874, Major D. W. Whittle and P. P. Bliss compiled a book similar to Gospel Songs of Moody and Sankey, but they called it "Gospel Songs". Thereafter many followers compiled song-books of similar kind, but they lack good judgement and good literary and musical training which have often weakened the movement in religious songs.

We should keep in mind that the Gospel Songs first gained attention by its introduction on special occasions amid the glamour and enthusiasm of large crowds, with large choruses and often loud musical instruments; when extra time was given to sing and ingenious leader was able to work people's feeling up to higher state.

Their melodies are of the street-song variety and can quickly be learned by the average person without much effort. Prof. Waldo S. Pratt once said "they tend to embody more sentiment than thought, and to express it rather crudely, even melodramatically. Some of them shade off into more sentimental of true hymns containing both valuable feeling and felicitous expression." Gospel Songs neglect the growth in Christian grace. Simply dealing with the beginning and ending of earthly life, is leaving out a large part of what pertains to Christian life and its spiritual development.

The Gospel Hymn has been described as "American most typical contribution to Christian song." It has also been accounted for as the off-set of the Literary hymn, -a counter movement to reach that class both in and beyond the church whose taste is for light music and emotional verse. Again, it has been interpreted as the modern counterpart to Paul's Spiritual Song (Eph. 5 : 19) where these are interpreted as the "Folk Hymnody of people which has been always in existence, but not always heard in the sanctuary.

It is not surprising that the Gospel Hymn should find its first real outlet in America. The rugged condition of pioneer life, with meager education opportunities even for those whose parents and grandparents came from cultured environments in the Old World.

Religious ballads reflected the stern and somber faith of the New England Puritans, and dwelt at length and with considerable relish upon such subjects as damnation and death.

As they began to move southward and westward, however, they became brighter in text and tune, untill they emerged in the Sunday School Books, the camp Meeting Songs, and finally found their greatest expression in the YMCA Praise Service.

Around the year 1800, one of the outstanding characteristic of the camp meeting was the enthusiastic singing, with songs often composed spontaneously by a preacher under the spell of his message, and lined out to the eager crowd. The form of the camp meeting song was that of the ballad, with a refrain or chorus being its predominant feature.

We have seen how influence of these Revival songs even reached the East and into New England where, inspired by Charles G. Finney's great revival, one Joshua Leavitt published the Christian Lyre especially for revival use.

#### **SIDE-LIGHT**

In 1966, we (a group of 20 scholars, including scientists, historians, geographers, archeologists, Bible teachers and musicians) started our research tour from Rome, Italy. We used a Japanese bus and two Japanese drivers faithfully helped us complete our valuable works, We visited many historical places such as Pompei, Corinth, Athen, Jerusalem and Babylon, etc. And when we came to Turkey, especially in Istanbul (old



capital) we found that the Turkish Rhythm had much influence upon the Western Music.

The first major cultural contact between East and West began with the First Crusade in the eleventh century. Records show that by the year 1544, European musicians employed giant kettle drums and military oboes, which they had borrowed from Turks. In 1529, and again in 1683, Vienna, already a center of music, was besieged by the minions of the Sultan of the Ottomans. These battles were accompanied by the awesome and terrifying sounds of drums, cymbals, jingles, trumpets and oboes of the Sultan's Elite Guards. Those who were caught in the path of the advancing Turks must have been frightened out of their wits not only by the army, but also by its attendant boomings, jinglings and clangings. Some of these instruments, usually in a modified form, have been retained to the present.

The rapid acceptance of these percussion instruments during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was not long confined to the military bands. Around 1760, Gluck wrote the first Turkish Opera "La Cadi Dupe" which was followed by others by Gretry, Andre, Bickerstaffe, Dibdin and Mozart in his "Abduction from the Seraglio" in 1781. Hayden recognized the Turkish influence in his Symphony No. 100, the Military, 1784, when he rudely interrupted the docile second movement with the clangorous noise of "Turkish music". He employed the standard European Alla Turca effects: heavy beats emphasizing with bass drum and cymbals, the small stick triangle "trotting" along. Mozart's fascination for this musical fad began in 1772 when he wrote "ballet turc" for his opera "Lucio Silla". He later borrowed this in "toto" for the "Minuetto" of his Violin Concerto in A Major, K219 (The Turkish). In 1778, he incorporated a spirited "Rondo alla Turca" into the piano Sonata in A Major, K331.

Some of the most exciting "alla turca" music is found in the "alla marcia" of the finale of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. At the height of a tremendous tutti of the orchestra and chorus, the harmony suddenly shifts from a "sharp" tonality (A) to a "flat" one (B-flat). After the dramatic silence, a muffled squawk from the bassoon and bass drum played on the off beat, begins the accompaniment for an unusual march in the new key. The strangeness of the key is emphasized by the colorful effect created by the pianissimo triangle and cymbal. We can find these percussion colors in "Surprise" of Hayden, in Beethoven's "Turkish March" and in his "Ruins of Athens". The influence of Turkish music extends beyond the military and court life of the eighteenth century. Even, today the countrysides of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Hungary reflect the long years of Ottoman occupation (I personally visited these countries in the summer of 1967).

The great vitality of Turkish music, which so strongly influenced Western art music and Eastern European folk music, has continued down to the present day. Folk music and dance are not only very lively throughout the entire land, they are also generously supported by the Turkish government.



Dr. Louis F. Benson concluded his lectures at Princeton with these words; "The Gospel Hymn was merely a modern instance of the lighter popular song that has always

hovered at the border of church worship ; a rival or supplement of what Dr. Lapsley calls "The Standard Hymn".

The hymns and tunes were embodied in a series of six books ranging from 1876 to 1891, under the title of Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs. Apart from formal church worship these books for a time monopolized the field, partly by the popularity of the songs, partly through the rigid protection of copyright.

The Gospel Hymn continues the form and manner of the old spirituals and equally charged with emotion. It has a contagious melody, pathetic or ringing, a frequent march or dance rhythm, and that peculiar thinness of effect which comes of continuing the harmony unchanged through the bar. Can the church afford to sanction a stand of worship music below that of the educated society in which it moves.

### POSTLUDE

The abilities of Beethoven expressed themselves most forcibly when he began to lose his hearing, and attained true sublimity only when he became totally deaf. Pasteur made some of his greatest discoveries after a stroke threatened to cut short his life. William Cowper, the hymn writer, suffered from spells of insanity, yet rendered outstanding service. Milton wrote his best books when he was blind, and the choicest poems of Anien Johnson Flint came out of her years of deepest suffering.

Indeed, forged of their deep sorrows these Negro Spirituals have shaken and is still shaking, not only the United States, but also many other countries both in the East and West.

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