



PEOPLE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MASTER IN

Literature and interdisciplinary approaches

**Gospel Music in the United States**

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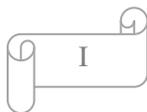
Academic Year : 2019 / 2020

## **Dedications**

*I dedicate this work to*

*My parents and my family*

*To all the gospel soldiers in the long struggle for human freedom*



## Acknowledgements

*First of all, I thank Allah for his help and guidance.*

*Enormous thanks to my supervisor Benneghrouzi Fatima Zohra.*

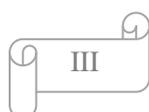
*An extra thanks to Mr. Tegua for his advises.*

*In addition, I owe additional thank to my friends for their support and advises.*

## Abstract

When Africans were forced to leave their homes in Africa and brought to North America to live and die in servitude, they brought with them their rich culture. Culture is a vital human resource for resisting oppression. This included music. The story of black music is also the tale of the enduring social struggles of American history. For slaves, songs were very important, they were used to communicate. Among the most powerful resources that sustained African Americans through difficulty was strong religious faith. The songs sung in slave times gave birth to religious songs known as Spiritual Songs. The secular and sacred songs of everyday black folk are bound up in loss, despair, hope, and dreams. Since the majority of slaves could not read, they used a variety of means to protest, for example, coded songs which encouraged escape and sabotage. Not to endanger their lives, they would use ambiguous languages and coded languages. Slaves sung of a desire for freedom and sung to warn others of a potential danger. African still use songs to criticize, to protest, and to resist oppression. The Spiritual Songs went through different stages and evolve throughout the years. The spirit of this style has influenced much of the American music that has followed. This research will reveal the essential grassroots force and spirit of gospel music and demonstrate that if music springs from America's soul, then gospel arises from its heart.

**Key Words:** slaves, music, religious music, hope, freedom, Civil Right Movement, coded songs



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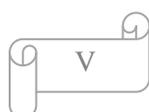
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## General Introduction

Music plays an important role in most religions. The Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition that draws its inspiration from it, gives it a value that deserves to be emphasized. Negro spirituals come from Protestant songs that African-American slaves seized to interpret them in the light of their culture. Gospel is an extension of this tradition, developed after the end of slavery, but with original compositions. Gospel music draws its origin from the song “negro spiritual” in which African American slaves sang praises to the lord. It has impacted other races and cultures. Gospel music has long been a source of comfort and artistic expression for African Americans.

The motives to choose this topic “gospel music” is that music is an obsession of mine and the struggle in writing about a particular topic is to find something new and touching to say. It is a very interesting topic in which it was a desire to figure out how gospel promote a spirit of hope, how it helped slaves to communicate and escape to freedom and the real meaning of the lyrics of their songs. This topic aims to enrich and bring something new and prove that culture was also a resource for resisting oppression. For this, two research questions were developed:

- How gospel music was used by African Americans to communicate?
- How Gospel music evolves throughout the years?.

To answer these questions, two hypotheses are suggested:

- Black African Americans could not speak English and did not have the right to communicate with one another, but had the courage to create a coded language and mixed it with music to facilitate the communication and escape to freedom.
- Gospel music went through different stages; from spirituals in the fields to gospel Hall of Fame. Thus, Gospel music comes out of the churches and opens to the public.

The first part of this research will be about the strong link between religion and music. Music plays an important role in religions; however, not all religious people appreciate the alliance between religion and music. This work will shed the light on how African Americans embrace the so called “White Religion”, their desire for evangelization gives birth to Negro Spiritual and they began to attend the religious services of the white churches. Black music has always been in ongoing interplay with white church culture. The white church has been the most vital institution in African American history, and the major source of black protest up to the modern civil rights movement. Besides, this work seeks to define what spiritual songs are, explores this form of American sacred music, its roots; and outlines the history of gospel music from its origins (from spiritual songs to gospel), identify the characteristics of gospel music and discuss its religious base.

The second part of my research will tackle the purpose of gospel music. This chapter will explore the relationship between black gospel music and the African American freedom struggle. As one knows African Americans were not allowed to talk to one another, and not to endanger their lives and others’ lives, they sung sacred songs. This chapter will explain how African Americans had the courage and the idea to create codified messages using only religion songs that contain specific directions or plan to escape slavery.

The third part will be about the evolution of gospel music. Gospel music went through different stages; from spirituals in the fields to gospel Hall of Fame. Gospel music is all about fighting racist America; it’s about sharing the pain, and singing their struggles in the American society. Gospel music was an organic part of the black community that gained widespread popularity during the postwar period; Gospel closely reflected the African American condition, as well as the consciousness of its mass fan base; and thus black gospel performers, a largely poor and exploited class of artists, embodied the African American experience while being its most natural cultural interpreters. This last chapter will also explain how Gospel music comes out of the churches and opens to the public.

**Chapter One**  
**Music and Religion**

## Chapter one: Music And Religion

Music plays an important role in most religions. This chapter will tackle the strong relationship between music and religions, especially music and Christianity, and how other researchers define it. Also this chapter will shed the light on how enslaved African Americans embrace the religion and created a very strong and moving music such as spiritual songs and gospel to protest, and to promote a spirit of hope. The first part of my research will also explore this form of African Americans sacred music, its roots and outlines the historical background of gospel music.

### I.1.Religious Music

According to Wikipedia religious music designates all forms of music related to all forms of religion. It is used for religious purposes and rituals. Ritual music or religious music, which is used in ordinary worship, usually performed by religious inside a building with a religious vocation. It is also used in extraordinary worship, often performed outside, during certain period, or during certain events such as illness, drought ...etc by people designated by the community by virtue of their acquaintance with the divine. Some religions such as Islam and Buddhist have a distrust of music, although there is a vast music repertoire from them. On the other hand, the music is particularly appreciated by the Christians, Hindus, or Sikh cults, which is an inherent element.

Music and Religion are closely related in relationships as complex, diverse, and it is difficult to define. Music holds an important place in religious rituals. It changes the availability in aspiration and, thereby, favors the approach of the supernatural. Religious believers have heard music as the voice of god and the cacophony of devils. Praised it as the purest form of spirituality, and condemned it as the ultimate in sensual depravity. The function of so-called religious music is therefore to establish a certain number of relationships. First of all, a direct relationship with the divinity, music acts on the “inner springs” and produces a long desired state. Moreover, this musical genre helps concentration; it is a question of freeing oneself from all materials concern, selfishness, in order to reach through sounds, the universal and the permanent, silence, to God.

“Music and Religion have the same roots”, believes Swiss musicologists and psychologists Maria Spychiger. She also added that, “Music and Religion can unleash feelings that are difficult to capture in words. Experiences emerge that go beyond the everyday” (Cords, 2013). If the sacred music of the whole world are each heir to traditions, they shared the same purpose of getting closer to the divine. Music psychologist Heiner Gembris expresses the phenomenon as such, “Music is like the flap of an angel’s wing. It touches us and lets us sense the momentary presence of something that transcends the boundaries of our captivity in the world” ( Cords, 2013).

The absence of written documents makes it impossible to determine exactly what songs were sung. Religious “text” has been recited, not written during most of human history. Navajo<sup>1</sup> priests are singers; the primary carriers of Sinhala<sup>2</sup> traditional religion are drummers and dancers; the inner Asia use music as their principal medium of contact with the spirit world. Through the centuries, priests and other specialists have sung the Christian masses, Islamic calls to prayer, Hindu sacrifices...etc.

It cannot be concluded that music and faith are not related in one way or another in any society or culture on earth. However, not all religions embrace the use of music in their worship to their god or gods, in fact, other religions believe music diverge the attention of followers away from their god, and see it as a tool of the devil.

### **I.1.1.Christian Music**

Many scholars believe that the early music of the Christian church originated from Jewish religious worship music, with some Syriac influence. The concept of sacred music started centuries before the churches even existed. Biblical references to sacred music, where the children of Israel sing praise to god for his deliverance in parting the Red sea.

The great psalmist, King David, was particularly used by god during a spiritual awakening when he reigned over Israel (1000 years B.C) to reform and organizes the sacred

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<sup>1</sup> The Navajo are a Native American people of the Southwestern United States.

<sup>2</sup> Sinhala is an Indo-Aryan language primarily spoken by the Sinhalese people of Sri Lanka.

service. Twenty four classes of singers led by Asaph<sup>3</sup>, Heman, and Jeduthun<sup>4</sup> were instituted to exalt god and to prophesy. Praise then became more expressive, more gestural, and the place of music more considerable and important.

They were performed with greater breadth in worship. At the time of the dedication of the temple, 120 priests sounded trumpets accompanied by cymbal, lutes and harps. The trumpets and the cymbal are still perceived today as the most powerful instruments of the orchestra.

For the early church, it seems obvious that the first concern of the apostles was not to innovate in the art of music but to found churches and establish the doctrine of Christ. However, Christian had to add a second part to the synagogue worship which they celebrated together in their homes while continuing to meet with other Jews for the first part. 1cor. 14:26, Eph.5:19 and col. 3:16<sup>5</sup> describe a little of what happened during these house meetings and introduce us to three types of songs Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual hymns. The psalms consist of traditional Jewish songs recorded in the book of the same name.

*“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.*

*Sing and make music in your heart to the lord” (Eph 5:19).*

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly as you teach*

*And admonish one another with all wisdom, and*

*As you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*

*with gratitude in your hearts to god” (Col 3:16).*

### **I.1.1.1.Hymns**

Hymns are contemporary composition often used to promote doctrine. Thomas Aquinas defined hymns as the praise of god with song. In Saint Paul’s letters the first Christian hymns are mentioned round the year 64, according to Wikipedia the Greek and Latin hymns, were

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<sup>3</sup> The psalms of Asaph are the twelve psalms located in the Book of Psalms.

<sup>4</sup> They are masters of music appointed by King David. They were responsible the playing of the instruments for sacred songs.

<sup>5</sup> From the King James bible’s translation of Ephesians. It is an English translation of the Christian bible.

introduced by Saint Basil around 370. Canticles are the early Christian hymns and are still used in catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Methodist liturgy.

Music played a large part in Old Testament worship, but the New Testament brings the first references to hymns. Hymnody rises as music notation and theory developed and progressed. Martin Luther, Charles Wesley, William Cowper and Phillip Bliss are the great hymns writers, and gave profound lyrics that are versatile musically, because they are strongly metric poetry.

Some Christians are against the use of musical instruments in church meetings. However, the Greek word for hymns is translated from psalms and which fundamentally means “songs accompanied by instrument”.

### **I.1.1.2.Christian in Modern Era**

In modern time, Christian music refers to a genre of modern popular music performed by Christian artists and groups that focus on topics related to the Christian faith. According to Wikipedia, contemporary Christian music emerged at the end of the 1960s with some artists from the Jesus Movement <sup>6</sup>such as Larry Norman or Keith Green.

In the 1970s, a growing number of Christian artists began to use more contemporary sounds, contributing to the rise of pop and rock in particular. In the 1980s and 1990s, contemporary Christian music has taken a considerable place in evangelical Christian worship a wide variety of musical styles have developed traditional worship. Contemporary Christian music differs from more traditional and exclusively liturgical genres such as Negro spirituals, gospel and southern gospel, thus adopting more recent style.

### **I.1.2.Islamic Music**

Islamic music is a Muslim religious music, sung or played in public or private. Islamic music is performed in the form of prayers. These prayers are for ritual and are the direct word

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<sup>6</sup> It was an evangelical Christian movement beginning on the West Coast of the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

of god. According to Britannica, Muhammad peace be upon him, tolerated war songs, pilgrimage chants, and public or private festival songs. He instituted in 622 or 623 the Adhan (call to prayer) and it was the Abyssinian singer Bilal who did the task.

According to the Islamologist Mactar Seck (2009), music is part of human life. Whether it is licit or illicit depends on the direction in which it is made. Therefore, he argues that Islam is for music that conveys positive messages. Islam is a global religion, which speaks of everything and touches on materiality and spirituality. In spirituality, there is the musical aspect. Among the Sufis, rhythm plays a great role, and rhythm is not far from music. According to Aisha Redouane and Habib Yammine a Sufi musicians, Sufism is a current of Islam that is oriented toward inner faith, and in which poetry and music are means of ascending to god (Yanbekian, 2012).

For Aisha Redouane (2012), music doesn't really have an existence of its own, it is just a tool, and this is the case of the call to prayer, for example. Habib Yammine (2012) clarified that the word "music" is not used in Islam to avoid confusion from a legal point of view but a semantic corpus has been developed to designate all acts where singing and psalmody intervene: the call to prayer, coranic psalmody (tajwid), or Muslim poems set to music (anasheed). Music inspired by Islam has also evolved with the time, notably with rap like Kery James or Abd Al Malik.

### **I.1.3.Jewish Music**

According to Wikipedia Jewish music refers first of all to Jewish liturgical music; it is the music made by Jews in the synagogue in particular. It could just be called Hebrew music since the term "Jewish" comes only late in the history of the Hebrews. Jewish feasts and prayers are an expression of the soul, in fact, each time characterized in a different way, they are celebrated with particular songs which are a divine revelation, a very ancient heritage.

### **I.2.Spiritual Songs**

Historically speaking, Spiritual songs also known as the Negro spirituals are a type of vocal and sacred music born among black slaves in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, born of a mixture of African and European cultures, and is said to be the origin of gospel.

*Far from his native land and his customs, despised by those  
Among whom he lived, experiencing the pain of separation  
From loved ones at the time of sale, having to know the  
Hard foreman, being subjected to the whip, the negro  
Grasps Christianity, the religion of compensation in the  
Coming life for the evils suffered in the present existence (...)  
The spirituals were literally forged from pain in the heat  
Of religious fervor (...).they are songs originally conceived  
Only for collective singing. Some of them may be  
Spontaneous creations of the group, but the vast majority  
Are the works of talented individuals (Spirituals, 1925).*

It is also the only form of expression used by black American slaves during the American civil war. The Negro spiritual goes back to the time of slavery. Expressing all the distress, the drama of the African populations uprooted from their lands, sold and beaten to work on the South American plantations, these songs were full of hope, fervor and religious love. They have always symbolized the voice and history of an oppressed people whose only outlet was music. Many songs allude to the arrival of the ancestors on American soil. This practice of singing in choir will develop mainly in rural areas, and will be expressed mainly during work in the field and also during masses in protestant churches. Lawrence Levine (1993) affirms that, “they were not sung solely or even primarily in churches or praise houses but were used as rowing songs, field songs, work songs, and social songs” mentioned in (William Woolfitt 30. 31).

These texts are inspired by the bible but also speak about the daily life of the slaves such as pain, search for a home...ect. Richard Allen, pastor of the first Methodist church published a collection of these songs in 1801 a collection of spirituals songs and hymns selected from various authors.

It all began in 1619, when a Dutch ship landed the first African slaves on the coast of Virginia. The slave masters found that these men adapted quite easily to the local climate and could therefore perform better, which was good for the local economy. Thus, often slave ships followed, year after year for more than two centuries. Thousands of men were uprooted from their native soil and transported in appalling conditions to American lands.

Slavery was at its peak in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. More than four million slaves were in the United States. At first, slaves were forced to live separated from the white world, with what little remained of the African tradition. Then, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during a huge religious awakening, Baptist and Methodist preachers came to make them discover the bible. The religion known at the time as “white religion” easily spread among the slave population, who received, thanks to the bible, messages of deliverance, a desire for justice and damnation from the oppressors. This creates a phenomenon of acculturation that American researchers called Double consciousness.

During this time, missionaries carried their hymns to the churches. From this came an unexpected marriage, this gave a completely new musical genre in terms of melody, rhythm and interpretation: the Negro spirituals. These were conceived in the fervor of religious assemblies, where the slaves transcended their thirst for justice and freedom. The learning of these songs is done by repetition; the leader of the song says something that the whole assembly takes up, no instruments accompanied these songs, only hands clapping.

The first independent black churches appeared around 1770, when the North American colonies wished to become independent. It was in South Carolina in 1774, and by 1780, the camp-meetings had somehow replaced the praise houses. Their heyday was between 1800 and 1830. Camp-meetings are multiracial open air religious gathering in tents where music and song play a vital role. They will strongly contribute to the development of Negro spirituality; this is what is more commonly known as the second religious awakening. The slaves are now converted, the tabernacle songs quickly became spirituals, made up of blues notes. On the other hand, of improvisation, running verses and of ring and shuffle shouts (dances of African inspiration, in dragged steps, without crossing the feet). The latter represent the essential contribution of black slaves to white services where dancing was forbidden. Here again, there is greater tolerance in the Northern and Central states (Fisher 76).

For centuries, the Negro spirituals were sung by the slaves without the care of the whites. Negro spirituals were not only usual songs but were regarded as codified messages for assisting slaves to freedom in the North. Many slaves’ owners believed that slaves were singing church songs because they were happy, and sometimes enjoyed listening to their performances, where in fact the slaves were secretly communicating (Bolima 4).

It was only around 1860 that American musicologists began to transcribe Negro spirituals. In 1861 the New York Time published for the first time the famous “let my people go”. It was an immediate success. It was discovered that slaves had created original music, incredibly rich and deeply moving. The civil war and the influence of humanist movements led to the abolition of slavery in 1865. But it was at the same time that the Ku Klux Klan and the segregation reactions appeared. The struggle for complete and real freedom would continue for many years, until the civil rights movements between 1960 and 1970, with the unforgettable figure of Martin Luther King (Bolima 3).

In 1871, spectators were able to hear the first spirituals sung by a choir of former slaves, the Jubilee singers from Fisk University. They sang to raise money for the school and also spreading a unique style of music. Three years later, the Fisk Jubilee singers performed for many presidents at the white house and even toured the world and sang for Queen Victoria in 1873 (Bolima 4).

After the civil war, blacks left the southern states to join the big cities in the north. Free, but without work, they gathered in communities to testify to their intense religious fervor, fuelled by pastors. Now free, they preferred to sing of their trust in Jesus Christ in everyday life, rather than the hope of freedom in death. It was then that the Gospel was born in the 1920s and the 1930s (bolima 5).

### **I.2.1.Field Holler**

Indeed, a Field Holler or Field Call are songs sung most often a cappella by country men or women. It is also known as Levee camp holler music and it can also refer to vocal music sung by enslaved Africans during their tasked work. According to Frederick Law Olmstead in 1853, field holler was a “long, loud, musical shout, rising and falling and breaking into falsetto” (Olivier, 2020).

It is completely different from the collective work, because it was sung solo, and it is believed that a “cry” or “complaint” could be passed from one to another. Enslaved people were not allowed to speak their native languages and were introduced to Christianity. There is a link between Field holler and spirituals since it is about religious faith and hope of freedom and escaping slavery. The field holler should not be confused with the American work songs

and is described by Phillip Baudoin as, “The Holler is between screaming and singing. Shorter than the work song, it is certainly of African origins, very much used by black slaves, as a solitary release, rallying cry or coded messages during their work, it can be taken up by other workers who spread it across the fields” (Bare, 104).

Congo Square is a field area where slaves from New Orleans gathered and were allowed to dance and sing more freely than they could on the plantation. This genre of music influenced strands of African American music, such as Gospel, blues, Jazz.

There are no holler examples that are recorded before the mid-1930s, but there are so many blues recordings that shows strong links between blues and the field holler such as *Mistreating Mama* by the play *Jaybird Coleman* in 1927. Field holler reflected the situation of blacks as slaves. They disappeared after the abolition of slavery but would have persisted in southern prisons until the 1960s.

### **I.2.2. Religious Influences**

The historian Sylviane Diouf and ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik (2014) believed that Islamic music has a major role in the influence of spirituals songs. Diouf refers to a strong link between the Islamic call to prayer and field holler music, both were at the antipodes of the call, raising a long, loud, musical shout, rising and falling, both had a particular way of singing that was different from the way the group of men sang. Diouf believes that the origins of the field holler music is the African Muslim slaves who accounted 30 percent of African slaves in America. Kubik attributes the vocal style of many spiritual singers to the relationships between the heritage of West Africa and the Maghreb during the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Curiel, 2014).

Christian hymns and psalms had also a role in the writing of African American spirituals. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, African slaves were introduced to the bible during the “Great awakening”. This term was coined by the American historian Joseph Tracy. It was at this time that Baptist and Methodists churches travelled the American lands bringing the Gospel to all, especially to the slaves. The slaves gradually adopted the religion of their masters, even if the practices were then very diverse, in line with those of the masters themselves.

Over time, an underground church, “The Invisible Institution” was built up. The slaves gathered at night for celebrations, Hush Harbor, inspired by what was lived in the “white” churches but where, by African rites, singing and dancing had a special place. The preacher is a slave himself, played an essential role in this community.

### **I.3.From Spiritual Songs to Gospel**

The word gospel comes from the words god and spell. According to the work of dr. Isaac watts and others, the gospel can be traced to the early 17th century. According to Britannica gospel music is a genre of American protestant music that usually has dominant vocal with Christian or biblical lyrics that took place during the 1920s and the 1930s, however the roots can be seen much earlier in the southern states. During the 1760s and the 1770s, the English writers John Newton and Augustus Toplady composed the most famous gospel “amazing grace” and “rock of ages”. It is a musical culture of afro American origin and has its roots in three centuries of slavery. Gospel synthesizes white evangelical hymns, spirituals, heritage of the past and black secular music, jazz and blues.

After the civil war and the abolition of slavery, Negro spiritual developed and influenced many musical trends such as gospel, its direct heir, jazz, blues and others. In spite of this abolition, racial segregation remains omnipresent for freed slaves and Negro spiritual strengthens itself as an escape song. Black Americans began to flock to cities in the second decade of the 20th century, they brought with them their spirituals, but they found that this music of rural origin did not suit the atmosphere of the city and did not conform to the needs. So the church singers created a more expressive music that they called “Gospel”. Black gospel would become the sacred equivalent of the blues, improvised in the same tradition, accompanied by piano, guitar or both (Southern, 1997).

It is mainly inspired by the first testament with an identification of African American slaves with the Hebrews enslaved by the Egyptians and freed by Moses. Unlike the Negro spirituals, the gospel involves more instruments, but also refers more often to Jesus Christ and the apostles, which means to the gospels. The gospel hymns are the first stage of the gospel songs of 1930s. They are traditional hymns and fashionable melodies. It is a mutation of the ritual songs of white Protestants. Since the 1870s, instruments have been increasingly present

at church services: organ, harmonium, string instruments, hand clapping, and body movements.

The beginning of the 20th century was then a real artistic effervescence for blacks. Gospels are performed either by vocalists accompanied by one or more instruments or by vocal groups. Originally, everything takes place in the church, the preachers of the black churches, even if they are not musicians, have left their mark by the form and the intention they give to preaching.

Great composer such as Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993) who is considered as the “father of gospel” composed his first gospel in 1917. The most famous one he wrote was entitled “precious lord, take my hand” in 1932. Many composers have animated the gospel movement by creating publishing and recording studios, organizing concerts and above all, by revealing to the world the superb voices of artists such as Mahalia Jackson, who performed on stages all over the world until her death in 1972 (Bolima 6).

It was during the 1930s that the Ku Klux Klan aggression developed with the rise of racism. But black culture began to assert itself in the United States, particularly through music. There are two gospels: sacred gospel music which is practiced only in temples, and secular gospel music for the general public in so called secular places, such as cabarets, clubs, concert halls and theatres. Gospel music today is a vital force in the United States and in many other countries. Its strength comes from its ability to integrate the music of the moment (soul, r&b, rap, electro), without ever denying its origins. Gospel is more than music; it is a whole culture, beyond fashions, which allows people to express their faith and their hope for a more fraternal world.

#### **I.4.The Difference between Negro Spirituals and Gospel**

They are above all songs of hope. A large part of Negro spirituals was born with the desperation of slaves. They were about a better life in paradise or in a society where slavery would be abolished, others served as coded warning signals, incomprehensible to white people. The references are Christian, but the texts express a personal point of view; it describes the struggle of slaves. It was sung in the field, often in cotton wool. The text often evokes characters from the Old Testament (Moses, Noah, Adam and eve...). The Negro

spirituals were for a long time a cappella because slaves were forbidden to use musical instruments.

On the other hand, Gospel songs took over from Negro spirituals. Gospel in its current version differs from Negro spirituals by an exclusive reference to the New Testament and an aspect borrowed from current music. It came after the liberation of the slaves, when many choirs were created, in every black community, in every neighborhood. It is also more joyful, it delivers a more direct message than the spirituals, more optimistic and more rooted in daily reality. It shows a willingness to forge close links between the divine world and contemporary society.

Gospel music is essentially based on a form of improvisation. It is an oral music that has been transmitted from one generation to the next and from plantation to plantation. The musical principle of the Gospel music is a base that the choir will repeat, and on this base is grafted one (sometimes several) improvising solo voices. The melodies are simple, the motives and harmonies are taken from folk song and blues.

## **I.5. Gospel Music Genres and Subgenres**

Gospel music has undergone a certain evolution since its appearance in the seventeenth century. In particular, it has been strongly influenced by Jazz and has soul roots. We can distinguish several types of Gospel and divide it into 5 main families:

### **I.5.1. Traditional Black Gospel**

Initially performed in Evangelical churches in the United States by a Choir that may have one or more soloists. It is characterized by an energetic rhythm like the famous “Oh Happy Day”. It carries the musical style of the past. It maintains a rhythmic pattern without compromise.

### **I.5.2. Southern Gospel**

Born in the south-eastern United States, it appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Southern Gospel groups were generally Quartets composed of two tenors, a baritone and a bass. These songs evoked the problems of daily life.

### **I.5.3.Urban Contemporary Gospel**

In the 60s, Gospel music came out of the churches. The phonograph enabled it to be disseminated internationally. At that time, many gospel artists wanted to take advantage of this commercial revival. The image of conservative gospel music was then broken by great artists such as Kirk Franklin, Kurt Carr, or Fred Hammond.

### **I.5.4.Gospel Blues**

Gospel blues or holy blues is a style of blues that has existed since the origin of the blues. Stemming from gospel and religious songs, especially evangelical ones, the blues has always had close links with Gospel and Negro spiritual. Gospel Blues musicians include Thomas Dorsey, Blind Willie Johnson and Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

### **I.5.5.British Black Gospel**

It refers to the Caribbean music of the African Diaspora in the United Kingdom. The Caribbean made contribution to the British black music for many generations. It can also be called the U.K Gospel. It is a mixture between U.K street culture and African and Caribbean heritage. According to Wikipedia, since 1996, the genre gained recognition and many award ceremonies had been held for African American music.

Since its origin to the present day, people have always worshipped music and dance. Music plays an important role in religious ritual and especially during slavery. In order to express themselves without risk, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, black American slaves acquired a whole jargon of metaphors, incomprehensible to the white masters. Many songs, circulate from plantation to plantation.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Gospel as a Means of Communication**

## **Chapter two: Gospel as a Means of Communication**

It is believed that along the way, people sang spiritual songs that served as secret coded messages to escape slavery. The second part of my research will tackle the purpose of gospel music. This chapter will explore the relationship between black gospel music and the African American freedom struggle and also examines spiritual and coded songs that were created by African slaves that contain specific directions or plan to escape slavery.

### **II.1.The Purpose of Gospel**

Music has always played an important role in people's lives. It is one of the most effective ways to imprint divine truths in hearts.

“Singing is a weapon that can always be used against discouragement, by opening our hearts in this way to the light that the presence of the savior brings; we can enjoy health and divine blessing” (White 254).

The colonial period was between 1619 and 1776. Approximately 1 Million slaves were deported against their will to the New World. 85 percent of them came from West Africa and more precisely from the Savannah Zone extending between present day Senegal and Angola. Slavery will have profound consequences on the history of music. Throughout history, music and, above all, religious songs have enabled black Americans to preserve their unity and culture, to assert their autonomy, their difference and their pride in the face of slavery and then racial segregation.

As mentioned earlier, Gospel is a musical revolt fighting against racist America. African American songs share the suffering of emancipated black people but are under the hegemony of white people, especially in the Southern part of the United States.

Gospel music has the power to evoke very deep feeling of the soul; going from exultation to anguish and always against a backdrop of hope. African American songs do indeed transmit important values such as love, sharing, fraternity, solidarity, cheerfulness, spirituality, and many others. Universal and unifying values that speak in one way or another to everyone, whatever the beliefs or the age of the listener. It tells about life and death as well as love, mercy, and justice. It expresses sadness and suffering but also hope and grace.

It is a way to express revolt against American racism without playing politics. It will be used by Martin Luther King Jr in defense of black rights. The song “We Shall Overcome” is the anthem of his civil rights march. This is why Gospel music is still so popular; thanks to its historical background and the emotions it transmits (Bos, 2013).

## **II.2.Singing in Slavery**

The spirituals were born shortly after the first slaves set foot on the American shore. An invention derived from the African rhythm, the work songs and shouts exchanged by slaves in the fields. They will give birth to Jazz and Blues, and Gospel music, in its modern form, was transformed from spirituals, blues and, of course, African rhythm. What Gospel music is today, and what it is becoming, is an integral part of the perpetual evolution of African American music.

For us who live one hundred and fifty years after slavery, the spirituals offer us a raw, unreduced glimpse into what animated the minds and hearts of slaves. As composer James Weldon Johnson wrote, only spirituals offered the illiterate slave the freedom to dream:

The songs proclaimed his despair and prophesied his victories; it also expressed the wisdom of the group and its philosophy of life. Clearly, the spirituals taken as a whole have documentary value, revealing the deepest thoughts and experiences of the black people of this country over a period of two and a half centuries. If we want to know them, we will find them expressed more clearly in these songs than in any history book as mentioned in (Darden 2).

John Wesley, who called slavery “the most despicable institution ever created”, also stressed that it had not destroyed the enslaved. Indeed, John Lovell argues that it gave rise to a unique poetic expression:

In a sense, the cruelty, and violence of the slave system, its frantic efforts to banish all hope of freedom for the black man in this land of free men, the energy deployed to prevent these possessions from becoming men and spiritual personalities, all contributed in making the Negro spirituals more intense as mentioned in (Darden 2).

In a country where slaves were forbidden to learn to read and write, where the slightest mention of freedom was punishable by the death penalty, these slaves developed an extraordinary secret language, so rich in meaning and so complex that words today defy explanation. Slaves used spirituals not only to convey a religious message but also to

communicate information essential for survival of the violence of oppression. Very few were explicitly deciphered.

### **II.2.1.Songs of Survival**

For the slaves, the spirituals were an ingenious tool used not to endanger their lives and the lives of others. Their theme is resurrection, the triumph of hope over misery and deliverance. These songs sometimes contain hidden messages of resistance that most slave masters could not understand. According to a white shipmate who made four voyages to Africa between 1760 and 1770 “ they frequently sing, the men and women answering another, but what is the subject of their songs cannot say” (Berry, 2017).

Slaves used ambiguous languages to communicate. Many slaves did not have the chance to read and write, they were also forbidden to talk to one another. They were very clever and found a way to talk and tell their stories without been punished. This ambiguous language was sometimes called Quilt Codes. They were a traditional way of passing down information from generation to generation.

These songs could also be codes or symbols that slaves used to communicate secret information without the knowledge of their masters. The following words are examples with double meaning:

Heaven: life after death meant freedom in the North.

Wade: take the river.

Moses: freedom fighter.

Steal away: which means sneak away secretly.

The song “Steal Away” is a great example, which Fisher (1990) suggests contains a coded message.

“Steal away, Steal away to Jesus,

Steal away, Steal away home

I ain’t got long to stay here,

My Lord calls me; he calls me by the thunder..."

This song was sung to inform the others of a religious or secret meeting that evening. Code songs could also be used to sabotage the functioning of the plantation which some spirituals encouraged slaves to run away ( Fisher 66).

Frederick Douglass talks about a song called "Run to Jesus, Shun the Danger".

"I thought I heard them say,

There were lions on the way,

I don't expect to stay

Much longer here,

Run to Jesus, face the danger..."

Douglass knew that this song was not about dying and going to a final reward, but, was about escaping slavery. The lions were not really lions but the danger on the road to freedom. Slaves were using this song to alert the others of their plans as Mentioned in (Fisher 108).

The song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" can be interpreted in multiple ways:

"Swing low, sweet chariot,

Coming for to carry me home,

Swing low, sweet chariot..."

The word "Home" can be referred to heaven, freedom in Africa, and freedom in free territories. Home for the slaves was the return to Africa which was synonymous with freedom.

"African slaves in many areas of the New World were convinced that death would free them to return to Africa. This notion was based not simply upon nostalgia for the homeland but upon a firm religious belief in reincarnation" (Raboteau 32).

Some songs also supported sabotage in the form of stealing. For example the song called "Move Daniel" on how a slave Daniel who was pursued by his master to steal meat from the smokehouse.

Raboteau disagree with the fact that spirituals are coded messages; he believed that spirituals can mean different things to different people and this is exactly why they could be used as coded protest songs.

## II.2.2.Songs of Freedom

These songs expressing a desire for freedom, they were also called “whish songs”, which are veiled expression of a desire for freedom. These songs were sung by African Americans to outsmart their masters. The masters didn’t pay attention to the lyrics of these songs and sometimes enjoyed the music of the slaves.

“It was necessary for their safety that the songs of that “Wish” should be veiled” (Fisher 55).

Spirituals played a role in the African slave community. Maps and signal songs were two types of coded spirituals. The most known map song was “Follow The Drinking Gourd”, which referred to a drinking gourd that symbolize the constellation of stars called the Big Dipper, containing the North Star, a vital compass guide for black Americans who needed to be sure that they were continuing to travel in the direction of north as they made their way to freedom.

This can be found in Follow the Drinking Gourd, a book published by Texas Folk-Lore society in 1982 and written by H.B Parks. Parks writes that he first heard Follow the Drinking Gourd in 1912 from an African American boy in the Big Rich Mountain, near the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. The boy sang:

“Follow the Gourd

Follow the Gourd

No one knows, says the wise man,

Follow the Gourd”

This part of the song would surely not have caught anyone’s attention, Parks writes, he also mentioned that an old man who was sitting on a log in front of the hut, stood up, grab his cane and kicked the boy and warned him never sing that again. The old man refused to explain why he had silenced the boy Parks explains. A year later, it was in Louisville that the

historian heard the song again, hymned by a black man who was fishing on the docks. He too refused to talk about it. Finally, Parks befriended an old African American man from college station, Texas. This gentleman had known many freed slaves. He told Parks that just before the civil war, somewhere in the South, a sailor with a wooden leg had arrived; he landed on a plantation, asking to work as a painter or a carpenter. His talent ensured that he was welcomed everywhere with open arms by the owners. He quickly befriended the slaves, and soon they were all singing Follow the Drinking Gourd. After a week or two, the sailor left as mysteriously as he had come. The following spring, almost all of the young men disappeared and made their way North, then to Canada, following a trail laid by sailor and memorized by the fugitives in this song (Rall, 1995).

“When the sun comes back, and the first quail calls

Follow the drinking gourd

For the old man is waiting, just to carry you to freedom

Follow the drinking gourd...”

This is all Parks’ new friend could remember.

### **II.3.The Underground Railroads**

According to Wikipedia the Underground Railroad was a network of clandestine routes used by black American slaves to take refuge across the Mason-Dixon line and into Canada with the help of abolitionists sympathetic to their cause.

The term Underground Railroad was first used in 1844 and is clearly a reference at the time as the railroad was expanding across the United States.

“A model of democracy in action. An epic with many twists and turn and the first real campaign of civil disobedience by the American nation since independence”.

(Bordewich 46).

The Underground Railroad is not a real railroad. Colson Whitehead considered it as a network of people who acted to help slaves hide, to help them escape, by loading someone into a car, for example, to drive them a few miles north, or to help them across a river.

The words Underground and Railroad were in fact coded words used by the people who helped organize these escapes. They also used the same words used by those who work on the railroad. Slaves could use them too so that no one would imagine that they were planning to runaway. The ones who helped slaves escape were called “Conductors”; “Stations”; safe places for slaves to hide; “Passengers” referred to the escaped people (Henry, 2006).

In the Midwest of America, buying old properties can sometimes be surprisingly surprising. At the beginning of 2014, the daily “Indianapolis Star” reported this anecdote: “in Westfield, Indiana, the new owner of a two century old house had made a strange discovery. On the first floor of the building, at the bottom of a closet, a trap door led to a secret storage room. What was the purpose of such hiding place? In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it helped save lives. It was used to hide black slaves fleeing the plantation in the Southern United States for the Northern states and Canada, where they hoped to have their freedom. Along the way, these slaves were helped by sympathizers who hid them in places like this one. This house in Indiana was one of the countless links in a secret network that crisscrossed the Northeast from Illinois to Massachusetts, the known as the Underground Railroad.” (History, 2009).

Canada has long been a place of refuge for black American slaves escaping from the plantation; slavery has been abolished in Canada since 1833. Although the slaveholding states were clearly defined as being south of the Mason-Dixon line, this separated Pennsylvania from Maryland and extended westward, as early as 1793 (Henry, 2006).

The fugitive Slave Act allowed owners of fugitive slaves to come and reclaim their “property” in the Northern states. The Northern states were therefore not safe for fugitive slaves. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, volunteer relays were established to assist runaway slaves, guide them, lodge them, and take them to Canada.

This secret network, the Underground Railroad, which was very efficient and well organized from 1820, operated until the civil war in 1861. After congress passed a new, stricter law against runaway slaves in 1850, the Underground Railroad became very active. It is estimated that more than 100.000 slaves used it. The road was sometimes taken by both; those who fled North and by those who return to the South either to look for their families or to help other blacks to escape. Operations by whites to free slaves were rare; the famous John Brown’s 1858 expedition to Missouri made a lot of noise, as did John Fairfield’s expeditions to Alabama and Kentucky.

Many died or were taken back; others used faster or more cunning means: hiding on a boat going up the East coast or the Mississippi, and used the lyrics of a song like a map to show them the way, or even make up in white, like Ellen Craft in 1848. This light-skinned slave, disguised as a white man, pretended to be her own husband's master. But the prize for the most daring escape goes to Henry "Box" Brown in 1849, a Virginia slave who was locked in a box and then mailed to an abolitionist in Philadelphia. Whereas the others could find support on the road, the philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) hid some in his home near Boston (History, 2009).

This network was based on a principle: each person who took in a fugitive, whether for few hours or several days, would then direct him or her to the next town or hamlet where someone else could help them. Even in the free Northern states, slaves were in danger. The 1793 law allowed homeowners to chase their "property" all over the United States. Hunters roamed the country on horseback, accompanied by dogs, informed by informants, including other blacks. Caught slaves were punished, whipped, tortured or even executed as an example.

As for those who helped them, even the white ones, they too risked their lives; pressure and threats...etc. "Levi Coffin, a Quaker from Indiana, who supported more than 2,000 slaves, told of having been threatened with death because of his actions. But as he ran the local banks, the others acted as if nothing had happened" says Marie Jeanne Rossignol, a historian at Paris-Diderot University and a specialist on the subject (Waynet, 2020).

Another peculiarity of the Underground Railroad was that, it was not very structured, its organization remained local, and blacks and whites did not necessarily act together. All this gave the network a fluid, reactive and elusive side.

### **II.3.1. Songs of the Underground Railroad**

Songs were used in the everyday life of slaves. It was a way for them to communicate with others. Songs of the Underground Railroad were spirituals and work songs and were used as coded messages to give directions for where to go or how to proceed to freedom.

In the beginning, slaves usually ran away alone, without assistance. They left their huts on the edge of the fields, usually on foot and at night, with more or less information about the route to follow. They were guided by the Pole Star; a slave song advised them to "Follow the drinking gourd", i.e. the constellation of the Big Dipper recognizable by its saucepan shape.

“then the fugitives would hide in the forest and swamps, trying to put a great distance between them and their owners, who would try to find them”, says Olivette Otele, a lecturer at the University of Bath who has studied fugitive slave communities in Southern Canada.

The Quakers, those devoted Anglican Christians known for their sober dress, dark clothes, large black hat, were also numerous to help the runaways. Whites were less numerous than blacks, but they had more financial means, which were essential for the support actions.

Harriet Tubman worked with the Quakers during the 1850s to bring freedom to as many slaves as possible. Both, used songs as a strategy to communicate with slaves in their struggle for freedom. Harriet Tubman escaped slavery in the South and became one of the major figures of abolitionism before the civil war. She led hundreds of slaves to freedom the North offered them by guiding them along the Underground Railroad. Tubman was officially the conductor of the Underground Railroad. This meant that she knew all the roads of the free territory and had taken an oath so that the secret of the Underground Railroad was well kept (Wilkes, 20017).

“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say, unlike most conductors, that my train never derailed and I never lost a passenger” (NPS, 2017).

They used to call her the “Black Moses”, she was never caught, despite the slaveholders’ determination to have her captured. Abolitionist John Brown called her “General Tubman”. Tubman said that she used spirituals such as “Go down Moses” to signal slaves that she was in the area, and would help anyone who wanted to escape. She hymned famous tunes that gave the slaves directions to follow or warned them of a danger. For example, if runaway slaves heard her singing the classic “Go down Moses”, they had to stay hidden. It was in her memoire, written in 1869, that Tubman unveiled this famous code. She also used another song called “Wade in the Water” to tell slaves to go under water so that they could not being seen. Another unnamed song that she used to sing in order to let them know that it is safe to approach her (Wilkes, 2017).

Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave and abolitionist author who wrote an autobiography “Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American slave (1845) gave so many examples on how the songs were used and their multiple meaning. He believed the fact that slave used coded slave songs.

### II.3.2. Urban Legend or Truth

Many believe that the songs of the Underground Railroad are true. However, others believe that it is just an urban legend. They claim that the stories were published as facts without any proofs or historical documents.

“It was the Railroad that made America, without the Railroad, the United States would not have become the United States”. (Wolmar, 2012)

In his latest book, Christian Wolmar defends and illustrates this idea. Until today, the network has kept its mysterious side. Even the origin of its name remains unclear; it is said to have come from a Kentucky farmer who, surprised in 1831 by the sudden disappearance of a slave, let go that he had to take an “Underground Railroad.

Many facts remain uncertain, including the total number of slave who fled on these “rails”; an established 30.000 to 100.000 between 1830 and 1860. As for the thousands of people who contributed to it, the majority remain anonymous. History has nevertheless retained some of the names of these heroes of the Underground Railroad. The most famous is that of Harriet Tubman, she was close to another figure in the network, Thomas Garret. This Quaker provided him with money and logistics, and housed thousands of fugitives in his home in Wilmington, Delaware (Wilkes, 2017).

On January 31, 1865, President Lincoln passed the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment, which completely abolished servitude. With the abolition of slavery, the Underground Railroad no longer has a reason to exist; it died out as it has appeared.

There are all these singular and moving trajectories of anonymous heroes who, by their courage, shattered the slavery system. Today, from Dresden to Windsor to Buxton, Chatham and the Niagara region, the descendants of these “freedom seekers” defend the memory of the railroad through museums and historic sites.

They all tell of the heroism of their ancestors, the complexity of this network, made up of blacks and whites abolitionists who helped the fugitives along the way, but also the reality of the black presence in Ontario, and in Canada. For once free in Canada, these blacks pioneers experienced decades of racism and segregation. The civil rights struggle also took place in this part of America. Today, all of these “children of the Underground Railroad” carry this legacy, pleading for more truth and recognition.

## II.4.Songs Associated With the Underground Railroad

The themes of the Negro spirituals are redemption, the triumph of hope over misery and deliverance. These songs reflect the deep faith of African American and sometimes contain hidden messages of resistance. Most slave masters cannot understand them, or are forced to tolerate them.

### II.4.1.Go down Moses

“Go down Moses,

Way down in Egypt land,

Tell all pharaohs to

Let my people go

When Israel was in Egypt land

Let my people go

Oppressed so hard they could not stand

Let my people go.”

Go Down Moses is a gospel song by Louis Armstrong, a very famous Jazz singer and trumpet player. This song was recorded in 1958 in an album entitled Louis of the Good Book, dating from the time of the slavery of black Americans during a revolt in the name of freedom.

It is a traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century negro spiritual, inspired by the Old Testament ( Exodus 5:1 and 8:1: “The Lord said to Moses, go to pharaoh, and say to him, thus saith the Lord, let my people go, that they may serve me”).

Black people indeed gave a very special meaning to themes drawn from the bible, especially the Old Testament. The accounts of the sufferings and sorrows of the Hebrews had a very deep resonance among the black slaves.

The song tells the story of Moses delivering the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. This Negro spiritual thus represents an allegory of dream of freedom of black American slaves. Egypt evokes the South, Israel represent the African slaves of America, the pharaoh are the slave masters. The reference to the Jordan River, in another version of the piece evokes Ohio or the Canadian border, synonymous with freedom. The Hebrew stories had a profound impact on black slaves (Hawn, 2019).

#### **II.4.2.Wade in the Water**

“Wade in the water  
Wade in the water  
Children wade, in the water  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Who's that young girl dressed in red  
Wade in the water  
Must be the children that Moses led  
God's gonna trouble the water”.

Wade in the water is originally a mythical Negro spiritual song from North America, a call to brotherhood and liberation. Thanks to a secret network, thousands of slaves found freedom during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The song warned slaves to get off the land and into the water so that the dogs and masters chasing them could not detect their scent. Negro spiritual published in 1901 by brothers Frederick and John W worked in the collection new Jubilee songs as sung by the first Jubilee singers in 1901, and attributed to Harriet Tubman, who helped hundreds of slaves flee to the North ( Hawn, 2015).

Wade in the water recommended not to flee by land, but by waterways. It alludes to the exodus of the people of Israel led by Moses ( Old Testament) and to the Gospel of John ( New Testament, john 5:4), speaking of an angel who regularly went down to a pool in Jerusalem, at the edge of which stood many cripples, and stirred the water. The first one who entered the water after it had boiled was healed, a clear message about water having the power to “Save”.

### II.4.3.Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

“Swing low, sweet chariot  
Coming for to carry me home  
Swing low, sweet chariot  
Coming for to carry he home”

The song is set before and during the civil war, it was written before 1862 by Wallace Willis. It refers to the Underground Railroad, which was neither a railway nor an underground railroad, but a clandestine network of anti-slavery people who helped slaves from the slave states of the South to escape. The word “Chariot” could refer to a wagon such as those of the western, wagons or boats that allowed them to escape. Thus, the chariot came to mean, in a clandestine way, escape and freedom. “Swing low, Sweet chariot” refers to the prophet Elijah who, according to the bible, was taken up to heaven by a chariot of fire. Elijah was taken up to heaven and he disappeared from this world (Raboteau 32).

The song speaks of angels, of soul stretched toward heaven “My soul feels heavenly bound”, and of purification “when Jesus washed my sins away” and one has the impression that the narrator is getting ready for his last journey. This text can sing of the hope of freedom or the expectation of death which can be, in the context of slavery, the only liberation from this valley of tears.

These songs highlight the pain and sorrow of a people enslaved to slavery. Thus freedom, a hope for the end of slavery, victory and a desire for revenge are strong ideas of the gospel. Many African Americans saw the spirituals as a historic art form and sought to weave them into the musical culture. Music continued to evolve in the churches, and was even performed all over the world.

**Chapter three**  
**The Evolution of Gospel**

## Chapter Three: The Evolution of Gospel

The greatest spiritual songs explore the history of some of the world's best known spiritual tunes, from Christianity hymns to gospel. The third part will be about the evolution of gospel music, how gospel music became more widespread after slavery. How gospel music comes out of the church and opens to the public, and its entry into the music industry. It will also explore the importance of gospel during the postwar period.

### III.1. Gospel Music

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pastors included these songs in their celebrations to facilitate evangelization. Negro spirituality then became an essential part of liturgical practices, especially among Protestants. The musical style began to travel the world and gain international visibility. During the Southern Diaspora, over twenty million Americans left the south and moved to the northeast, Midwest, and west coast of the United States. Gospel music was now heard across the nation.

It is then the Negro spiritual will take the more commercial name of gospel, from the old English "god spell" that is "god's call". Gospel will become a derivative of Negro Spiritual, influenced around 1930 by the rapid development of radio that will promote the success of the music. Gospel is thus a modernized evolution of Negro spiritual in response to the market of that time. Around 1940s, gospel music became the object of commercial diffusion that reached a wide audience thanks to concert such as Mahalia Jackson. However, it still retains its religious roots. Finally, reverend Martin Luther King who in the 1960s revived African Americans songs in the United States by readapting them to defend the rights of the black people (Bolima, 2007).

Gospel music is all about fighting racist America and about sharing the pain. Emancipated blacks but still under white hegemony, especially in the southern states, hence the strong desire to migrate by underground or rail networks to the big cities of the North. They do not get involved politically even if they remain loyal to their "liberator".

Gospel music is part of the soul of America, it serves as spiritual support during difficult time; it accompanied the civil right movement, and it was also there to accompany Americans in their grief after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

### **III.1.1.Gospel Comes out of Church and Opens to the Public**

Gospel music began to become a real phenomenon in the 1930s with mainly quartet formations consisting of two tenors, a baritone and a bass. These artistic formations gradually seduced the whole country and then soon the whole world.

Gospel music accompanied the civil rights movement and the development of artistic culture after the Second World War, influencing Ryth'N'Blues, Doo Woop, The Bougie-Wougie or Jazz. These musical current are called "Secular Music" while gospel is still preserved from the record industry with an exclusive practice in places of worship (Miguel, 2017).

With the success of groups such as the Golden Gate Quartet, gospel music is gradually coming out the churches. The production of religious titles was accompanied by more commercial titles for cabarets. However, not everyone liked the marketing of gospel music. A fear of a gospel music far from its sacred roots, quickly gospel was divided into two streams: "Sacred music" dedicated to places of worship and "Secular music", more commercial and aimed at a general public.

### **III.1.2.Gospel Entry into the Music Industry**

During the 1950s and the 1960s, gospel music in the united states continued to gain new followers, while Blues and Jazz were exported all over the world and Funk and Rhythm made their appearance. Gospel music comes out of the churches with the phonograph which will contribute to its diffusion all over the world.

As gospel music enters the music industry and the commercialization circuit, the instruments become more and more popular in places of worship. Mass choirs are being formed in many towns and cities in the United States, and this musical form with a conductor accompanied by a "mass choir" has met with great success all over the world.

Record labels are interested in gospel music with choirs that are getting more and more funding. Many gospel artists wanted to take advantages of these commercial impetus for their career and do not hesitate to rely on “Secular music” such as Rock, Jazz, Funk or even Electro to reach a wider audience (Miguel, 2017).

### **III.2. Contemporary Gospel: Between Authenticity and Diversification**

Contemporary gospel music was born in the 1960s and has joined other musical styles and new instruments to generate new crossbreeding. It evolves with the countries and new forms such as gospel blues, rap gospel...etc.

#### **III.2.1. Development of a Contemporary Gospel**

As one has seen previously, contemporary gospel appeared in the 1960s and was born out of diversification of gospel music, which draws its inspiration from other musical styles and takes advantages of the resources of the record industry.

Gospel music became a kind of “chameleon” music, source of many local creations or adaptations. It thus finds “local stages” in Europe and in many African countries where groups associate singing with their musical culture. Gospel evolves with new instruments rhythmic inspiration such as country gospel or rock gospel of which Elvis Presley remains the greatest symbol. In addition to these local and musical appropriations, new and more current trends are gradually appearing such as gospel rap and urban gospel.

If contemporary gospel or “modern gospel” has diversified over the years with new musical influence by entering the record industry, it should not be forgotten that it always deals with themes specific to gospel, such as faith, pain or hope. Moreover, behind the mediatized artists of modern gospel music, traditional schools of gospel music respect the sacred characters of its interpretation. There is also a strong public demands for acapella singing and Negro Spiritual classics at concerts, weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

#### **III.2.2. Black Gospel Icons**

In 1930, vocal groups were recognized internationally as fashionable bands such as Spirit of Memphis, Sensational Nightingales; which fought against racism, Sam Cooke's band, the Soul Stirrers and the very fashionable women's band Staple singers.

The most important women will be in relation with Thomas Dorsey, the "Father of Gospel" who has been able to put them in the spotlight and initiator of contemporary gospel who wanted to feminize it. Although gospel music developed in the 1930s, but it wasn't until 1945 that women were able to make themselves known in musical register.

The first gospel star remain Sister Rosetta Tharpe who, after a beginning in music Hall and blues, returned to a more orthodox and spiritual gospel around 1947. Following in the footsteps of Sallie Martin and Willie Male Ford Smith, Mahalia Jackson is another great gospel voice. Considered as the embodiment of the black soul and gospel, Jackson collaborated with Dr.Watts, Duke Ellington and Thomas Dorsey.

Jackson was born in New Orleans; she attended the Baptist church at a very young age. She joined the Johnson Gospel Singer, a mixed group, but at the same time worked as a laborer, domestic until 1935. She then decided to open a beauty salon in 1938 and worked as a florist for ten years. She crossed paths with Dorsey with whom she collaborated on tours. Her first major recording success came in 1947 with "Move on up a little higher", composed by Brewster. 50.000 copies were sold in less than a month, and she reached a million copies later. Mahalia Jackson became the "Gospel Queen" and set out to conquer Europe in 1950. She signed a contract in 1954 with Colombia and fought politically with Martin Luther King (Castellini, 2013).

Let's not forget other women of great vocal and artistic quality such as Roberta Martin, Marion Williams and Bessie Griffin. The great Aretha Franklin who sang gospel in the purest Baptist tradition, her album "Amazing Grace" is in the top gospel records. Gospel finally went mainstream in the 1960s largely thanks to Aretha Franklin and gospel was soon a hit with a wider audience; "Think" remains one of the most popular songs of the era.

The gospel has vocal quartets and renowned women. Vocal quartets remain the most popular phenomenon in gospel music, a four-part polyphony, also known as the male quartet, which was largely inspired by the Barbershop singers, who used to meet in barbershops. The simple harmonization of these quartets has the particularity of involving a voice above the melody. These vocal quartets are more spontaneous and take more risks than university choir.

One of the best known is the Golden Gate Quartet during the interwar period. At their beginning, they called themselves the Golden Gate Jubilee singer and sang acapella in 1934. Between 1937 and 1943, they recorded more than a hundred titles in a religious register but also secular in cabarets. The Golden Gate Quartet experienced a meteoric rise in the 1950s and settled in France to popularize contemporary gospel throughout Europe. A mythical group that collaborated with several French artists and contributed largely to the diffusion of contemporary gospel music in France and through the world (Castellini, 2013).

Another emblematic figure of these gospel songs is Charles Albert Tindlley. This black Methodist pastor published in 1916 his collection entitled “New Songs of Paradise”; a true musical reference. Another important character is Alan Lomax, in the early 1930s; he collected and preserved the American musical memory. Without this man, it would be difficult today to analyze the gospel and to explain it.

### **III.2.3.Loss of Authenticity**

While the commercialization of gospel music outside places of worship was for some the end of authentic gospel music, its reinterpretation by other musical styles or locals is leading to criticism.

The lack of sincere religious morality is felt, today, gospel music is more fragmented and diversified like other musical genres such as R’N’B, New Jack, or New Soul. The divine spirit is always present despite the call for fame and popularity. The lyrics are less relevant, the themes addressed are without originality. Creation is no longer in this “gospel” of today. However, religion is still very much alive in the choirs and hearts.

On the other hand, if some people think that gospel music is losing its soul, contemporary gospel music had led to the emergence of a wave of world-famous artists, who remain truly involved in the religious tradition, such as pastor Kirk Franklin, Yolanda Adams, Richard Smallwood, Donnie McClurkin, the Blind Boys of Alabama and the group Take 6 and its vocal instruments.

Veteran of the American Christian music industry, Kirk Franklin is worried about his future, fearing that gospel music will become obsolete. The Grammy Award winner and

Pastor Ezekiah Walker were both guests on Erica Campbell's American radio show "Get Up! Mornings", a chance for them to discuss the decline of gospel music.

Campbell insisted that the industry could still thrive if musicians were creative, while Walker spoke about the lack of integrity of some Christian artists. Kirk shared his fears that gospel music would die and the work of thousands of artists would be buried. He declared (2016), "It's not only a decline of the music but a decline of Jesus in the culture. Kids are not going to church and they're not listening to the music anymore," Franklin said. "So if music dies ... See, my fear is, I don't want gospel music to die like disco and rock 'n' roll. Nowhere in the Bible is God commanding us to do records" (Christine Thomasos, 2016).

There is also a gospel rap trend, with the famous rapper Kanye West and the Sunday Service choir. His latest and 9<sup>th</sup> album called "Jesus Is King"; more gospel than rap, divided the Christian community. On Twitter, black Christians have accused West of hypocrisy. West depicts himself as, "a lonely martyr barred from the Christian kingdom." In one of his tracks on the "Jesus Is King" "Hands on me" he says about Christians (2019), "they'll be the first one to judge me, make it feel like nobody loves me." However, West received support from many gospel artists; Richard Smallwood the famous gospel singer and songwriter, tells the magazine Time (2019), "The traditional Christian church has always frowned upon anything that is new and innovative." He also added, "He's singing about Jesus Christ and God and that, to me, is the bottom line." Many listeners believe that "Jesus Is King" has the potential to be a turning point for gospel (Andrew R. Chow, 2019).

Contemporary gospel music has not led to the disappearance of traditional gospel songs, which are still in demand for their authenticity. In the end, one can even add that the evolution of gospel contemporary gospel music in the world of music industry, only adds more interest and credit to the beauty of gospel songs to give rhythm to different moments of life.

### **III.3. Post War Freedom Struggle**

After the First World War, African Americans would claim their civil rights and artistic culture, something they had never done before. The most significant figure in the early development of gospel music was Charles Albert Tindley, Pastor of a large congregation in Philadelphia. His church became renowned for its social services, "Tindley Temple" helped members survive their unfamiliar and often desperate urban experiences. The songs of

Tindley were his legacy, “Stand by Me” (1905) and “We’ll Understand it Better by and by” (1905) became gospel standards.

“We Shall Overcome” became the Civil Rights’ anthem. Tindley’s songs were written expressly for blacks’ congregations, and attempted to speak directly to them. As Horace Clarence Boyer<sup>7</sup> notes, “Tindley’s songs used the musical and verbal language of the poor, struggling, often illiterate black Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”<sup>8</sup> (103).

After the early contributions of Tindley, the acknowledged “Father” of modern gospel was Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993). Dorsey was a composer, and wrote many of the famous and beloved gospel songs. According to Anthony Heilbut<sup>9</sup>, during the Great Depression, Dorsey, “kept turning out dozens of optimistic songs aimed to lift the spirits of the unemployed laborers and domestics who comprised his audience. Tindley and Dorsey talk directly to the poor. In so many words, it’s about rising above poverty while living humble, deserting the ways of the world while retaining its best tunes.” In Dorsey’s own words, “this music lifted people out of the muck and mire of poverty and loneliness, of being broke, and gave them some kind of hope anyway”(28,35).

His best known composition “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” (1932) was the favorite sacred song of Martin Luther King, who requested its performance in Memphis the night of his murder. Mahalia Jackson sang “Precious Lord” at King’s memorial service, as he had prophetically asked her to do for him years before.

Dorsey’s only rival for the title of greatest gospel songwriter was William Herbert Brewster. In Memphis, Brewster was best known as pastor of East Trigg Baptist Church and founder of the Brewster Theological School of religion. Reverend Brewster had a fierce commitment to work for the betterment of his people.

“The fight for rights her in Memphis was pretty rough on the Black Church....Before the freedom fights started, before the Martin Luther King days, I had to lead a lot of protest meetings” (Ramsey 52).

According to Heilbut, “Reverend Brewster himself has always been a political radical” (98). Brewster wrote over two hundred songs, “I write these songs for the common people

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Boyer (1935-2009) was one of the famous scholar in African American gospel music.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Albert Tindley : progenitor of black American gospel music, 1983, p103-132.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Heilbut was born in 1940, he is an American writer, and record producer of gospel music.

who could not understand political language...Common people who didn't know anything about economics, I had to write song after song" (209).

In 1946, Brewster encouraged African American to progress in his masterpiece, "Move On Up a Little Higher", according to its composer, the song was not only a Christian climbing the ladder to heaven, but it was an exaltation of black people to keep moving. Brewster became a political force in Memphis, with white candidates wooing him for support. He was devoted to Dr. King, and saw him on the day of his assassination in Memphis.

"Brewster's political boldness and courage, combined with his brilliant development of black folk art, is a thrilling realization of the best impulses in gospel. On the strength of his achievement he should be a culture hero of the first rank" (Heilbut 105).

Another gospel hero, was Reverend Clarence LaVaughn Franklin (1915-1984), the father of the "lady soul" Aretha. Franklin was the most famous African American preacher in the country by the 1950s, by far the greatest "gospel preacher" of them all. Beyond his considerable cultural impact, Franklin was among the black gospel community's who supported the civil rights movement.

By 1942, Franklin had his own radio show featuring music and guest speakers to discuss issues of the day. Franklin began addressing broader social and political problems like civil rights and blacks in the war effort and was a friend of Dr. King and his father.

Franklin's dear friend Mahalia Jackson was not only the "world's greatest gospel singer", but is popularly recognized as the most open and consistently supportive ally of the postwar freedom struggle. Jackson's tireless efforts on behalf of the civil rights movement were unsurpassed among the black gospel elite. Dr. King and Jackson became good friends, when in Chicago, he and his advisors would come to her house to eat, relax and hold meetings. After King's first national speech in 1957, Jackson sang the old spiritual "I've Been Bucked, I've Been Scorned" at the prayer pilgrimage for freedom.

In 1963, Martin Luther King delivered his speech in front of thousands of people, until his friend singer Jackson whispered to him to tell his "dream". Without her, "I have a dream" would certainly not have existed. King's advisor said to The Wall Street Journal in 2013, "while he was reading the speech that had been written for him, his favorite gospel singer

Mahalia Jackson, who was on the podium, suddenly says to him : “talk about the dream Martin, tell them about the dream”.” He also added, “From that moment, that part of the speech that was so famous as “I Have a Dream” speech was completely improvised and spontaneous.”

### **III.4.Success of the Gospel Music**

Although gospel is intended for religious worship, it can and must be shared and sung for all occasions. The messages that gospel conveys such as peace, love and hope are universal values that speak to everyone, far beyond belief. Gospel can therefore find its place in any place for any occasion.

#### **III.4.1.In the United States**

The united states are really passionate by African Americans music, because these songs are linked to the history of the country and its black community, but also because it conveys messages full of values and hope, Americans are the first fans of gospel music and they live it in an intense way.

It is not uncommon for a mass in a small church in any neighborhood to turn into an incredible show thanks to songs and staging around gospel. Tourists visiting a city in the United States for the first time often try to go to a liturgical ceremony, regardless of their religious beliefs, to witness this passion and talent. The energy of gospel music has often an impact on them.

Other American gospel projects and groups benefits from international exposure. This is the case of the emblematic New York Harlem Gospel Choir. Considered as the America’s premier gospel choir for more than two decades, the Harlem gospel choir has performed all over the world.

Also, the 1000 voices of gospel were created by an all American artists producing 100 of the bet international choir members from more than 24 countries and of all faiths. The breathtaking show has been performed in many countries and has won four GMA Dove Awards by the Gospel Music Association in Los Angeles.

So there is a special recognition of gospel in the United States like nowhere else. In particular, there are major promotional opportunities for gospel artists with record companies specializing in African American music, which have established themselves in the national music industry. There are also several media specialized in gospel music, including radio, magazines and digital media. Major events are also entirely dedicated to gospel music and benefits from an international influence. This is notably by the case of the Chicago gospel music festival.

### **III.4.2.The Golden Age**

The golden age of gospel music was between 1945 and 1965 with male, female and mixed groups. But also artists such as Brother Joy May, the “Caruso of gospel”, or Alex Bradford. Two leading artists with independent careers. Women’s groups were very successful even in the 1970s. Today, on the festival stage, women’s group are still omnipresent.

Gospel music can be divided into several genres without making an abrasive line between them: country gospel in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the white gospel of the South after the Second World War.

In the 1970s and 1980s, gospel is still as alive and vibrant as ever with James Cleveland who revolutionized the gospel world. He turned choirs into “a sophisticated art form”. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the phenomenon of the Mass Choirs with a preacher, charismatic choir master, which enjoyed considerable success even though they were already present in the 1950s.

### **III.4.3.The International Success of the Gospel**

The world wide success of gospel music is indisputable, since its expansion outside of the United States in 1945; gospel music has enjoyed a real international craze, both in its origin country, in Europe, and other countries. Many of the world’s most famous artists are now embarking on international gospel tours, for example the case of the famous South

African Soweto Gospel Choir. The choir, which has won an Emmy Award and two Grammy Awards, has toured the world in honor of Nelson Mandela.

There are indeed many gospel concerts around the world that pay tribute to historical figures such as Mandela or Martin Luther King but also to artists such as Elvis Presley. Also, solidarity gospel concerts are very numerous every year all over the world. On these special occasions, funds are donated to associations for the defense of international and universal causes such as human rights, the fight against various diseases or helping underprivileged countries. Gospel music is thus an actor of solidarity dynamic on an international scale, especially in the United States and in Europe.

Gospel is a communicative music that conveys many positive messages and strong values. One only has to listen to these African American songs live to realize their universality and their unifying side, far beyond liturgical practices. Although gospel is first and foremost an art that allows African Americans to commune and express praise to god all over the world.

## General Conclusion

Gospel music has the power to evoke very deep feelings of the soul. African American songs effectively transmit important values such as love, fraternity, solidarity, spirituality, and many others. Universal and unifying values that speak in one way or another to everyone, whatever the beliefs or age of the listener. This is why gospel music is still so popular, thanks to its historical background and the emotions it transmits

In the first chapter this research explains the importance of music in religion and especially Christianity. The Christian world has a very varied musical tradition; each current of Christianity has its own style. This is true in the United States, where diversity of faith has a corollary of musical diversity. Since colonial times, music has had a great influence on the religious practice of African American; both individually and collectively.

Slavery had profound and irreversible consequences on the history of music. Throughout history, music, and especially Negro Spirituals have enabled black Americans to preserve their unity and culture, to assert their autonomy, their difference and their pride in the face of slavery and racial segregation.

The black deportees were not allowed to bring instruments, it is therefore from their memory and the terrible need to hold on to their ancestral beliefs and expressions that songs, dances and probably instruments, linked to religious ceremonies and practices emerge. Their desire for evangelization gave birth to Negro Spirituals. Indeed, they began to attend the religious services of the white churches.

The second chapter had dealt with how African Americans used gospel to communicate and escape slavery. In the South, the number of slaves is much higher and there is no question of educating them in anything, because they were not considered as human beings. It was only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and especially after the War of Independence (1775-1783) that the situation was reversed and all slaves were evangelized. Black religious activities are subject to very strict control and excessive limitations. Many traditional spirituals had a new meaning.

Slaves composed songs and used coded symbolic language to protest their condition; they complained and criticized. Most blacks had to emigrate to the North via the Underground Railroad; about 60.000 blacks reached the North or Canada between 1830 and 1860, by this means, known by the metaphor "Underground Railroad".

The third chapter presents the evolution of gospel, and the gospel after slavery. At the end of the Civil Rights Movement (1861-1865), slavery was abolished throughout the country and four million black people from the South found themselves free.

Gospel songs are based on the Negro Spirituals and deals with different themes. Gospel music is more optimistic and creates links between the everyday life and the divine. It was also a way to express revolt against racism in America without playing politics and would even be used by Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights Movement.

In the 1920s, gospel came out of the churches thanks to the phonographic industry, to conquer a new public and to acquire a new notoriety. Great gospel artists appeared, mixing modernity and tradition. Today, gospel music is more diversified like other musical genres such as R'N'B, new Jack or New Soul. The divine spirit is always present despite the call for fame and popularity. This musical style is dynamic and creative, and contributes to the strong spirituality.

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