THE POLITICS OF REAL SPIRITUALITY
IN
GOSPEL MUSIC DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

Black gospel music has historically been a site of contention and debate about what constitutes “real spirituality.” Despite the diverse meanings that it evokes, the rhetoric of the real continues to pervade the discourse and music of gospel artists. “Real spirituality” connotes an understanding of God and God’s work in everyday living; it entails a genuine relationship with God and an earnest desire for God’s will to be fulfilled on earth. This dissertation shows how artists use various musical and discursive practices as strategies to authenticate and redefine their spirituality.

Although scholars have documented the early history of gospel music throughout the mid-twentieth century, current gospel practices and emerging conceptions of spirituality have not been examined. Gospel artists are increasingly engaging in various practices to reconceptualize existing notions of spirituality. Artists have recently released love albums to demonstrate that God and sex need not be opposed and that religious beliefs are not necessarily incompatible with physical desire. In addition to love albums, gospel artists have embraced multiculturalism by asserting through their music that ethnic inclusion reflects God’s divine will; these albums stress the oneness of humanity. At the same time gospel music aspires to a global reach, it also affirms its own communities through worship albums that seek to validate a personal relationship with God. Lastly, I discuss how gospel artists have exposed their flaws through reality TV to demonstrate that perfection is not a requirement for having a real relationship with God.

Drawing on hours of fieldwork at gospel conferences, countless personal interviews, and intensive critical analyses of online and televised interviews, I examine how gospel artists discuss their spirituality in relation to four genres of contemporary gospel practice: love albums, multiculturalism, worship albums, and reality TV. I also analyze the entire construct of the
contemporary gospel album, including text, music, and visual images. My analyses reveal how artists harness each practice to renegotiate identity and to challenge how their listeners interpret God. Finally, I suggest how these practices are used as methods of evangelizing that attempt to maintain the relevance of the black church within contemporary popular culture.
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I end with a scripture that often kept me during my lowest moments from Romans 8:18: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Amen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures and Musical Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personal Anecdote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Scholarship and Individual Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Note On Terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Gospel Love Album: Sex, Desire and Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex and The History of Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Pentecostalism And Its Engagement With Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Studies on Marriage and Divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel Music’s Sexual History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel Artists and Their Sexual Discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop T.D. Jakes: Sacred Love Songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Love Songs 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reception History of the Saxophone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Burrell: The Love Album</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Hammond: God, Love And Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2: Thy Kingdom Come: From a Black Identity to a Global Identity 118

Gospel Music and Its Articulation of Black Identity 121

Technological Advancements and the Emergence of World Music 123

The Praise and Worship Movement 126

Gospel Artists’ Appropriations of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) 128

Theological Antecedents 130

Kirk Franklin 132

Israel Houghton 140

Kurt Carr 150

Donnie McClurkin 157

Conclusion 171

Chapter 3: My Worship Is For Real 173

A History of Christian Worship Music 179

Judith Christie McAllister 189

Israel Houghton 202

William McDowell 211

Conclusion 229

Chapter 4: The Gospel Reality Show 231

Secular and Faith-Based Reality Shows: A Brief History 234

Mary Mary 240

Preachers of L.A. 253

Conclusion 274
Postlude 277

Discography 282
Videography 284
Bibliography 285
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Promotional photo for Erica Campbell’s 2014 single “Help” 41
Figure 1.2 Cover photo for Sacred Love Songs 56
Figure 1.3 Cover photo of Kim Burrell’s The Love Album 89
Figure 1.4 Burrell stylishly poses—photo from center of CD booklet 89
Figure 2.1 Racially diverse members of Kirk Franklin’s One Nation Crew 133
Figure 2.2 Images of Houghton in South Africa from CD booklet 146
Figure 2.3 Kurt Carr with ethnically diverse children in CD booklet 152

List of Musical Examples

Example 1.1 Piano introduction to Natalie Cole’s “Inseparable” 73
Example 1.2 Saxophone introduction to Sheard’s version of “Inseparable” 74
Example 1.3 Sheard and saxophone musical climax 76
Example 1.4 Sheard’s final melismatic gesture in “Inseparable” 77
Example 1.5 Burrell creates dissonance on “Every day” 92
Example 1.6 Burrell sings complex melisma with dissonances 93
Example 1.7 Burrell sings intricate nine-note melisma with dissonances 93
Example 2.1 Salsa ostinato figure 136
Example 2.2 Houghton’s militaristic unity chant – “It ain’t a black thang” 145
Example 2.3 Jonathan Butler’s “hallelujah” unity chant 147
Example 2.4 Kurt Carr’s “hallelujah” unity chant 153
Example 2.5 Donnie McClurkin’s “hallelujah” unity chant 161
Example 2.6 Donnie McClurkin’s “hallelujah” unity chant 161
Example 2.7 Donnie McClurkin’s “thank you Jesus” chant 162
Example 3.1  Israel Houghton’s construction of ineffability – first theme  208
Example 3.2  Israel Houghton’s construction of ineffability – second theme  208
Example 3.3  William McDowell’s construction of ineffability  216
Introduction

What is of God and what is not of God in contemporary black gospel music? The proper way to define real spirituality in the gospel community remains an ongoing polemic. Despite the diverse meanings that it evokes, the rhetoric of the real continues to pervade the discourses and music of gospel artists. Gospel musicians doggedly ask, “Can I just be real?” and insist, “let’s keep it real.” Such questions and declamations speak to a growing call within the black church and gospel music communities to challenge traditional religious doctrine and to create nuanced theologies that they believe are more reflective of God’s real desire for humanity.

In order to facilitate understanding and translation between gospel artists’ calls for spiritual realness and the academy’s call for intellectual clarity, I engage Marla Frederick’s anthropological work, Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith. Frederick provides an apt definition of spirituality that elucidates the rhetoric of real spirituality so often invoked within the gospel music community. In her ethnographic work on black women in a North Carolina community, Frederick asserts that spirituality connotes “their understandings of God and God’s work in their day-to-day lives.” Real spirituality thus refers to what gospel artists believe the metaphysical world has to say about the physical world, what God’s will is for humanity. One who is spiritual desires a genuine relationship with God, a deeper understanding and connection to God, and is most concerned about what is on the mind and heart of God. That is to say, in the words of Frederick, a spiritual individual is “especially concerned about what God thinks.” Real spirituality supposes that one’s actions, intentions, and concerns are motivated and inspired by a relationship with God and a desire to please God.

1 Erica Campbell and Tina Campbell (Mary Mary), interview by Donnie McClurkin, Praise the Lord, Trinity Broadcasting Network, May 8, 2012, http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/xpa25uNDqc6KoZlnuley5ZsXDsOtaarW. During this interview, Tina
3 Ibid., 8.
4 Ibid., 14.
Frederick’s study also reveals that spirituality includes a dedication to public service and a commitment to “openly contesting unjust laws and practice.”5 In the discursive and musical practices that I examine, however, gospel artists’ definitions of spirituality are less social and political and far more individualized. Real spirituality is primarily concerned with the individual ability to obey God’s instructions and to realize the ethos of God’s kingdom on earth. To be fully submitted to God’s divine direction, one must also have an understanding of the scriptures. Real spirituality therefore assumes a mature knowledge of the Holy Bible and its applicability to daily living.6

In this dissertation, I examine how gospel artists use various musical and discursive practices as strategies to authenticate their spirituality. My aim is to provide a means of intellectual inquiry into the theological and spiritual commitments of contemporary gospel artists. How do their relationships with God and their biblical commitments inform what they do musically and discursively? How do their practices reflect what they believe to be God’s divine will for their personal lives and the lives of their followers? Ultimately, I reveal how contemporary gospel artists construct and enact their conceptualizations of real spirituality, uncovering what they believe to be God’s divine plan for themselves and all believers.

Gospel artists often pit spirituality against religion. Religion usually represents that which is static and retrogressive—a capitulation to routine, traditional customs that are without evident meaning. According to some artists, religion thus stifles spiritual maturation and is devoid of contemporary relevance.7 Contrastingly, real spirituality is less about routine and more about a sincere relationship with God. Those who are spiritual have personal relationship with God,

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5 Ibid., 8-10.
6 Ibid., 14.
7 Ibid., 10, 14. Frederick discusses how the women she interviewed constructed this same dichotomy between religion and spirituality.
hence the popular church aphorism—“I don’t have religion, I have relationship.” Throughout each chapter, gospel artists see themselves as deconstructing traditional religious norms and offering new ways to conceive of spirituality. By disrupting what they perceive as conventional ways of thinking and theologizing, gospel artists believe that they are a part of God’s plan to expand the gospel beyond denominational, doctrinal, and even aesthetic boundaries. Real spirituality therefore also implies the defiance of traditional religious standards and expectations, replacing them with what they believe to be more theologically sound practices that foster, rather than stymie, spiritual growth. The ultimate goal is to facilitate a real relationship with God.

In addition to connoting an understanding of God, a mature knowledge of the scriptures, and the defiance of tradition, real spirituality also involves expressions of candor and transparency that gospel artists feel are not normally embraced in conservative ecclesial spaces. Gospel artists often claim that the standards of piety that conservative churches demand do not allow them to fully express their human nature. As a consequence, artists engage in various practices to express a level of honesty that they believe is denied within certain sacred spaces. Thus, real spirituality also opposes the fake—that which does not represent the true self.

A Personal Anecdote

In discussing how I conceptualize gospel music, I would be remiss if I did not explain my personal connection to the topic of this dissertation. My theological journey has been both multifaceted and complex. I was raised in the traditional Baptist church for most of my childhood, which is where I was first introduced to the rich sounds of gospel music. The traditional Baptist church that my family was affiliated with eventually evolved into a

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8 For other examples of this dichotomous construct see Joyce Meyer, “Joyce Meyer – Religion or Relationship (1),” YouTube video, 11:17, posted by “DEFM11985,” August 7, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vcg8HLAC1ks. Creflo Dollar also released a book on September 1, 2015 entitled Why I Hate Religion: 10 Reasons to Break Free from the Bondage of Religious Tradition. This YouTube video with televangelist Joyce Meyer, a popular figure among African American audiences, reveals how “religion” and “relationship” are often placed in tension with one another. Portraying religion and relationship as antagonists can also be heard in the lyrics of gospel songs, such as “Different” by Tasha Page-Lockhart and “Flow” by Jessica Reedy. Most recently, Kirk Franklin released an album on November 13, 2015 entitled Losing My Religion, which serves to admonish the church that traditional customs should not take precedence over demonstrating love and grace.
“Bapticostal” church—a church that is Baptist by title and affiliation, but Pentecostal by worship experience.⁹ These kinds of churches, while still maintaining their Baptist label, embrace “shouting” or dancing in the Spirit and all kinds of supernatural phenomena and spiritual gifts: glossolalia (speaking in tongues), prophecy, healing, and the working of miracles are among the spiritual gifts that these ecclesial bodies practice. This “Bapticostal” church that my family was a part of soon severed its affiliation with the National Baptist Convention toward the latter part of the twentieth century and became a nondenominational church, as the nondenominational church movement began to grow immensely in popularity during the 1990s. Years later in my spiritual journey, I became affiliated with the Full Gospel Baptist Church, a denomination founded by world-renowned preacher Bishop Paul S. Morton. Morton founded this denomination in order to encourage Baptist churches to fully embrace the operation of spiritual gifts within the worship experience of the church.¹⁰

It was during my tenure at the Baptist, turned “Bapticostal”, turned nondenominational church and at the Full Gospel Baptist Church that I was introduced to the rhetoric of spiritual realness. Preachers, church mothers, and laypeople alike would regularly make judgments about various individuals or acts in the church that they thought fell short of a proper biblical standard. Among the common denunciations heard were: “that’s not spiritual,” “he’s in the flesh,” “that’s carnal,” “that’s not of God,” and “your spirit isn’t right,”¹¹ among many others. Such dogmatic assertions were often informed by the theological priorities of that particular ecclesial culture and the specific Bible verses exalted by that community above all others. Often times, individuals who articulate such accusations believe that their judgments are informed by scriptures such as

those found in the New Testament book of First Corinthians. In the third chapter of First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul makes a distinction between those who are “spiritual” and those who “carnal.” Paul describes “carnal” individuals as those who envy and quarrel, behaving as mere children. The “carnal” are those who are under the control of their emotions and the sinful nature, which are in opposition to God. By contrast, the “spiritual” are those who are more mature and make a daily decision to be submitted to the will of God and to follow the scriptures, despite the temptations of the sinful nature.  

While growing up around this kind of spiritual rhetoric I began to discover that appearing to know how to distinguish between “carnality” and “spirituality” granted certain individuals “spiritual points.” That is to say, an ability to draw distinctions between the mature and the immature portrayed those who were making judgments as wiser and more spiritually perceptive because of their supposed supernatural ability to see beyond the surface into the deeper realm of the supernatural. Although they often felt that what they were doing was “biblical,” their judgments about what was “of God” and what was “not of God” always seemed obscure, nebulous, and highly subjective to me. I remember often feeling as though I was “less spiritual” because I was unable to properly discern what was sufficiently spiritual and what was categorically unspiritual.

Engaging the concept of spirituality can be potentially problematic given the many meanings that it evokes and the myriad ways in which “churchfolks” employ it. In black church parlance, the concept of spirituality often seems to have no real objective measure. Yet, despite the diffuse implications of the term spirituality, it does in fact have meaning. Thus, to simply

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12 Other scriptures that distinguish between “carnality” and “spirituality” are Romans 8:6—“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace”; Another scripture that describes those who are spiritual is in Galatians 5:22—“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith”; For a better understanding of how Christian preachers often speak of “carnality” refer to this sermon preached by Bishop T.D. Jakes, “And Ye Shall Have It – April 7, 2013,” YouTube video, 28:30, posted by “T.D. Jakes,” April 6, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqjul79gBA.
disengage from the term for its lack of analytical precision would be a disservice to gospel music and black church scholarship, as terms like “spirituality” and “real” are a regular part of gospel music and black church vocabulary. And indeed it is precisely the seeming arbitrariness of real spirituality and its invocation that makes it such a fascinating and fruitful topic that begs for deeper analytical investigation.

The subjective and arbitrary ways in which the rhetoric of real spirituality is invoked in gospel music and black church culture sent me on an intellectual journey to ascertain how such claims inform gospel music practices, discourses, and theological teachings. My analyses thus reflect my own efforts to grapple with a concept that often seemed elusive in hopes not of fixing, but better understanding the multiple meanings of spirituality. This dissertation is therefore an attempt to dissect what these varied definitions of real spirituality actually mean and how such meanings are negotiated and articulated through the discursive and musical practices of contemporary gospel music artists.

Overview of Scholarship and Individual Contribution

Gospel music scholarship owes much to the contributions of venerable scholars like ethnomusicologists Mellonee Burnim and Portia Maultsby. In some of her articles from the 1980s, Burnim focused on the functionality of black gospel music—its transformative and communicative power and the ways in which it articulates black identity, resistance, and expression. Burnim has also examined the contributions of women to gospel music, like those of Lucie Campbell and Mahalia Jackson. Campbell and Jackson played crucial roles in popularizing gospel music and transforming it into a formidable and international genre.¹³ Maultsby’s

scholarship has emphasized how gospel music has traversed the contrived dichotomy of sacred and secular. She also discusses the ways in which the gospel sound has been appropriated by popular music artists and the extent to which gospel music has been commercialized and marketed in popular culture beyond the confines of the church.14

The historical development of gospel music has also been thoroughly documented. Scholars have focused on topics such as the early development of gospel music practices in Pentecostal churches during the Azusa Pentecostal Movement; the emergence of Thomas Dorsey and his publishing company, which contributed to the commercialization and dissemination of gospel music; the national and international popularization of the gospel sound through early luminaries like Mahalia Jackson and Rosetta Tharpe from the 1930s to the 1950s; the cultural and musical significance of male and female gospel groups in the forties and fifties; and the hit single “Oh Happy Day” (19699), arranged by Edwin Hawkins, which many scholars argue precipitated the dawning of the contemporary gospel music era.

Among the most commonly cited works that document various aspects of this historical narrative are Horace Clarence Boyer’s How Sweet The Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel, Robert Darden’s People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music (2004), and Jerma Jackson’s Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age (2004). These scholars spend the bulk of their attention on the early formative years of gospel music up until the late sixties when “Oh Happy Day” hit the radio airwaves. These works, among others, have provided

a very rich historical groundwork for gospel music research and have provided a foundation for further critical, analytical studies on this genre.\textsuperscript{15}

Additionally, a number of scholars have written on the development of gospel music in the latter part of the twentieth century. Melinda E. Weekes and Tammy Kernodle have written about gospel artists from the seventies and the eighties, such as Andrae Crouch, The Winans, and The Clark Sisters. Weekes comments on the cross-cultural influence of Crouch, who gained popularity among both black and white audiences, as well as the crossover success onto the R&B charts achieved by The Winans.\textsuperscript{16} Tammy Kernodle also examines the cross-cultural influence of The Clark Sisters and discusses how their innovative vocal approach has influenced R&B singers like Mariah Carey.\textsuperscript{17} Likewise, in his seminal work, \textit{Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop To Hip-Hop}, Guthrie Ramsey discusses the Clark Sisters. Ramsey pays particular attention to the vocal technique of Karen Clark-Sheard, the youngest sibling of The Clark Sisters, and the vocal stylizations of legendary gospel singers who remain virtually absent from other scholarship, like Daryl Coley and Vanessa Bell-Armstrong.\textsuperscript{18} Deborah Smith Pollard wrote the only book-length study that extensively examines gospel practices within the twenty-first century. She discusses recent phenomena such as holy hip hop, gospel stage plays, the praise and worship movement, and urban, cutting-edge sartorial trends that gospel artists have adopted as part of their performance aesthetic.\textsuperscript{19}


There are also young scholars who are doing groundbreaking work and whom I am honored to count among my gospel scholar colleagues. Alisha Lola Jones studies gender and sexuality in gospel music. Jones explores how men use gospel music to perform gendered identities, challenging heteronormative constructs within theologically conservative churches.\textsuperscript{20} Some of Birgitta Johnson’s work examines the megachurch phenomenon and the ways in which the megachurch platform has helped to facilitate the growth and popularity of the praise and worship movement.\textsuperscript{21} And doctoral student Charrise Barron is studying the interconnection between Pentecostalism and gospel music culture.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to the scholarship on gospel music, there are also a few works on authenticity that inspired my work and that also resonate with my analysis of realness. In his book, \textit{Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity} (2003), E. Patrick Johnson considers the ways in which performance is used both to appropriate and convey authentic blackness.\textsuperscript{23} It was Johnson’s interrogation of authentic blackness and the politics of cultural usurpation through various modes of performance that helped inspire my initial inquiries into the politics of realness in gospel music practice. Johnson’s work on the politics of authentic black performance introduced me to new conceptual possibilities and offered a critical model to interpret the various practices of gospel music artists.

Another work worth mentioning is John L. Jackson’s \textit{Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity}. Jackson attempts to clarify the concept of realness in his analysis of racial identity by constructing a differentiation between “authenticity” and “sincerity.” Both “authenticity” and “sincerity,” he argues, reflect and articulate realness in different ways. As Jackson asserts:

\textsuperscript{22} Barron has presented her work at multiple academic conferences and has discussed the contemporary practices of artists such as Kim Burrell and Mary Mary.
“Authenticity conjures up images of people, as animate subjects, verifying inanimate objects. Authenticity presupposes this kind of relationship between an independent, thinking subject and a dependent, unthinking thing. The defining association is one of objectification, ‘thingification.’”

24 By contrast, Jackson argues that “sincerity, however, sets up a different relationship entirely….Questions of sincerity imply social interlocutors who presume one another’s humanity, interiority, and subjectivity. It is a subject-subject interaction, not the subject-object mode that authenticity presumes.”

25 In his analysis, Jackson therefore argues for an analytical distinction between “authenticity” and “sincerity” in examining racial realness, as the former implies a subject-object relationship, while the latter connotes intersubjectivities, a subject-subject relationship.

While my work is indebted to and inspired by the growing literature on gospel music and the scholarship on authenticity and realness, my research also departs in significant ways from what has been written and offers critical insights to gospel scholarship that have not yet been explored. Unlike most of the literature that focuses on early gospel luminaries during the incipient stages of gospel music’s development, my research focuses primarily on the practices of gospel artists within the twenty-first century. I examine the new ways in which gospel artists express their theological commitments and explore how such commitments are an extension of recent theological developments in black church culture. Theological movements such as the Prosperity Gospel, the Word of Faith movement, and the Neo-Pentecostal movement have permeated the spiritual rhetoric and musical practices of gospel artists. Whereas scholars of religion have discussed the emergence of these movements and their impact on the contemporary black church, scholars have not yet given critical attention to the complex ways in which these

25 Ibid., 15.
Theological paradigms have inundated gospel music. My research thus elucidates the theological teachings that many gospel artists and black churches currently propagate and examines the ways in which the music of gospel artists participates in theological and spiritual formation.

Theological commitments of gospel artists significantly inform their identities. My research thus reveals how these nuanced theologies aid gospel artists in refashioning the self. Their reinterpretations of God help them to construct new subjectivities and re-present new personas to their audiences. In addition to examining how gospel artists redefine themselves, my work also illuminates how gospel artists redefine God and challenge their followers to reconsider their interpretations of God—to reconceptualize their spirituality.

In order to justify their practices, artists often emphasize the negative perceptions of the church and the church’s declining popularity in American culture. Their practices and their engagement with the real become strategies to restore the church’s reputation and maintain its contemporary relevance. Given the marketability of realness in the era of the reality show, gospel artists believe that engaging the rhetoric of the real gives them more secular appeal and grants them access to platforms and audiences not commonly obtained by gospel artists. Thus, I reveal how gospel artists engage the real in order to expand their market base and to spread the gospel message beyond the confines of the church. My research therefore also examines how their practices represent new methods of evangelism, as artists believe that their engagement with the real appeals to individuals outside the four walls of the church and resonates with those who have become dissatisfied with the cultural and theological politics of the church.

**A Note On Terminology**

While John L. Jackson makes strong distinctions between “sincerity” and “authenticity” as a way to articulate the meaning of realness, such distinctions are absent in the discourses of
the artists under consideration. The artists whom I engage tend to use the terms “real,” “authentic,” and “true” synonymously. For them, these adjectives denote a single concept—a desire to please God and to fulfill God’s will on earth. I also commonly use the terms “sincere” and “genuine” as synonyms to describe realness. Thus, these terms are used interchangeably to capture the desires of gospel artists to transport the ethic of the metaphysical world into the realm of the physical. The term “real” ultimately best encapsulates the perspectives of the artists because it is the term that they use most commonly to express their desires to enact God’s will in the material realm.

Another term that I use quite frequently that is important to clarify is “the black church,” along with the related phrases “the conservative black church,” “conservative church culture,” or just “the church.” Within this context, “the black church” and such variants refer primarily to the black Pentecostal and black nondenominational church traditions. All of the artists considered here have been shaped by these church traditions, particularly the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the largest Pentecostal denominational in the country. They are each either members of or affiliated with the Church of God in Christ, or they are pastors or members of nondenominational churches.

While there may be occasional doctrinal differences between Pentecostal and nondenominational churches—such as whether glossolalia is a sign of salvation, for example—the two traditions have much in common. Both church traditions are charismatic and embrace Pentecostal worship practices. These traditions place primacy on experiential encounters with the Holy Spirit, who is believed to be the spirit of God that abides within all who have accepted Jesus Christ as personal savior. Such encounters involve demonstrative, ecstatic worship experiences, which include the embracement of spiritual gifts as already mentioned: glossolalia,

prophecy, healing, and the working of miracles are among the supernatural phenomena that these particular church traditions embrace.\textsuperscript{27} These churches are also evangelical in their biblical interpretive orientation. They believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God—God’s divine message to humanity written through men under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth and instruction for Christian belief and daily living.\textsuperscript{28} Gospel artists regularly quote biblical verses to justify and validate their practices and their definitions (or redefinitions) of spirituality. By rooting their musical and discursive practices in the scriptures, artists attempt to convince their followers that their theologies are supernaturally inspired.

\textit{Methodology}

It is my conviction that we cannot thoroughly comprehend gospel music discourses and practices unless we fully engage the experiential worlds of gospel artists. In his anthropological study on African American Pentecostals, Glenn Hinson admonishes other scholars not to suffocate the supernatural encounters of Pentecostals with academic verbiage in ways that deny the reality of their spiritual experiences. Hinson claims that when we ignore how Pentecostals talk about spirituality and explain away their supernatural encounters we “craft a portrait that speaks more to academic understandings than to the lived reality of believers.”\textsuperscript{29} Although Hinson’s work focuses on a faith community within a particular region in North Carolina, it is important to note that my work does not focus on specific regional particularities, but rather on the national gospel music industry at large. Even so, much like Hinson I take the ontological and spiritual realities of gospel artists seriously in order to understand their lived realities. While

\textsuperscript{27} Walton, \textit{Watch This!}, 75-102. In this third chapter of Walton’s book to get a thorough breakdown of various strains of Pentecostal worship traditions and practices. Also see Melvin Butler, “Songs of Pentecost: Experiencing Music, Transcendence, and Identity in Jamaica and Haiti, (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2005), 11-12.


some academic readers may consider the theological claims of gospel artists to be unreasonable, unlearned, or even outlandish, their theological positions are nonetheless being heard, believed, and propagated within the gospel and black church communities. Given then the influence that these artists have through the gospel industry, it is essential to respect the ways in which they construct spiritual meaning. One of the primary objectives of my work is thus to explore and reveal the actual “metaphysical and experiential worlds” of gospel artists and how they engage and invoke the spirit realm.\textsuperscript{30}

While I unhesitatingly take the theologies and ideologies of gospel artists seriously, I also exercise critical distance by considering what I believe to be the practical, and often times contradictory, implications of their actions. Gospel artists consistently spiritualize their actions in an attempt to convince their audiences that their every practice is divinely motivated and mandated by God. There are times when I push back from a different perspective that does not always align with the spiritual explanation that gospel artists so readily provide. I often problematize their actions by discussing how their practices may in fact contradict what they claim as their underlying motives. My goal, following the work of Melvin Butler, is therefore “to provide descriptions and analyses that both speak persuasively to an academic readership, and also do justice to aspects of Pentecostalism that resonate most strongly among those within and without the academy who adhere to the faith.”\textsuperscript{31} My analytical approach is thus neither overly sympathetic nor hypercritical; rather, I attempt to negotiate my multiple identities as both a cultural insider and an academic researcher by truthfully conveying the experiences of gospel

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{31} Butler, “Songs of Pentecost,” 19.
artists while also critically analyzing their musical and discursive practices. My hope is to facilitate productive conversations between laypeople, artists, and academics.

Ethnographic fieldwork has been essential to my methodology, which includes participant observation at multiple premiere annual gospel conferences. Among the conferences that I attended were The Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA), The Hampton University Ministers’ Conference, and The Gospel Heritage Conference. I include significant information from one of the panel discussions that I attended at The Gospel Heritage Conference in 2012 in Orlando, Florida, which helped to inform my analysis of multiculturalism in gospel music. Also, during the early stages of my research I conducted a number of personal interviews with multiple celebrated gospel figures, including Edwin Hawkins, Jason Nelson, Charles Jenkins, and songwriter V. Michael McKay. Many of these conversations implicitly, rather than explicitly, inform my work, but I do briefly mention my exchange with Edwin Hawkins and reflect on how our conversation illuminates the preoccupation of gospel artists with spiritual realness.

While participant observation and personal interviews helped me to formulate some critical ideas during the incipient stages of my research, the bulk of my data comes from analyses of televised and online interviews of gospel artists. I have spent countless hours analyzing and transcribing YouTube and televised interviews of gospel artists to uncover important information about their musical projects and theological commitments. Many of the televised dialogues that I have analyzed and transcribed come from the show Praise The Lord on the Trinity Broadcasting Network, a popular platform for gospel artists to engage Christian audiences. Extensive data collected from interviews and discussions from a plethora of online publications, including

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Monique Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 41-47. In her dissertation, Ingalls also discusses the “insider”/“outsider” tension that she confronts when doing research on evangelicalism while self-identifying as an evangelical.
popular Christian and gospel magazines and newspapers, also heavily inform my analysis. *The Christian Post*, Elev8.com, AllMusic, and *GOSPELflava.com* are among the many online publications commonly cited throughout my dissertation that provide grist for the mill.

I also engage statistical studies that have been conducted by evangelical researchers about the church. Oftentimes gospel artists justify their practices by quoting statistics about the church’s fading popularity in American culture or the high divorce rates in the church. By engaging such statistics, gospel artists are able to position their practices as a potential solution to the problems in the church. I examine the studies of evangelical research organizations like The Barna Group, which has released multiple reports about decreases in church attendance and what is believed to be the church’s overall declining cultural relevance. Such statistics contribute to the anxieties among gospel artists about the church’s influence and effectiveness in the everyday lives of Christians. These studies seem to indicate that traditional theologies and understandings of spirituality propagated in churches need to be nuanced and revamped to renew the relevance of the church. Thus, gospel artists regularly quote such studies to validate their redefinitions of spirituality.

Moreover, I analyze the music in light of what I believe the artists are communicating theologically. I look at specific musical gestures that artists deploy as testament to their spirituality and their personal conceptualizations of God. In other words, I reveal the theological meanings that certain musical phrases signify. I analyze the entire construct of the contemporary gospel album including vocal style, such as the use of vocal embellishments and timbral modifications, melodic gestures, thematic patterns, lyrical content, as well as visual images and text within CD liner notes. My approach also includes critically examining concert DVDs and
online video performances. An analysis of each element reveals how gospel artists attempt to shift traditional conceptions of spirituality and propose new ways of understanding God.

While my musical analyses are primarily informed by the claims that gospel artists have themselves made, I do take some interpretive liberties. The purpose of these analyses—particularly of performances by Karen Clark-Sheard and Kim Burrell—is to excavate potential meanings that may lie beneath the musical and discursive surface. The hope is that such analyses might challenge the reader to hear and experience the music differently in light of larger theological themes. My analysis at times is therefore an attempt to bridge the analytical freedom that often accompanies musicological interpretive methods with gospel vocality. The ultimate goal is for these analyses to reveal how gospel artists use their voices musically in service to a theological agenda.

In analyzing the musical content, I discuss how gospel artists commonly employ certain musical and lyrical gestures that contain coded meanings to communicate a significant theological message to their followers. Such coded rhetoric also appears regularly in their discourses as artists often use terms only understood by those within the Pentecostal tradition or familiar with traditional Pentecostal church rhetoric. Each chapter will elucidate the discourses that gospel artists engage in to convey theological meaning: sexual discourses, eschatological discourses, discourses of inclusivity, discourses of disavowal, and discourses of relatability are among the discourses that I attempt to analyze and decode. I reveal how their discourses justify and correspond to their musical practices, ultimately aiding artists in defining real spirituality.

Throughout my work, I also engage the concept of subjectivity. I argue that gospel artists’ reconceptualizations of the spiritual assist them in redefining the self. While conducting research on contemporary gospel music, I discovered that identity politics are often heavily
intertwined with some of the practices that gospel artists espouse. Each chapter deals with constructions and renegotiations of identity that involve both personal and interpersonal implications. I engage the concept of subjectivity, as well as intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity, to show how the practices of gospel artists function to redefine self and group identity.

My methodology is also connected to the concept of “theomusicology,” a term coined by Jon Michael Spencer. Theomusicology, according to Spencer, is “musicology as a theologically informed discipline.”\(^{33}\) Theomusicology helps to unearth the theological underpinnings of both sacred and secular music forms, offering a means of intellectual inquiry into how the theologies of gospel artists inform their worldview and how their understandings about God impact their music. This methodological concept was the basis for the creation of Spencer’s academic journal, *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology*, which has published articles by scholars of both music and religion, including Philip Bohlman and Cornel West. My approach examines such theological movements, like the Word of Faith and Neo-Pentecostal movements as referenced earlier, to illustrate how various theological modes of thought influence the musical and discursive practices of gospel artists.

The theological orientation of this dissertation explains why the Bible is quoted throughout. In her discussion of black sacred music, Mellonee Burnim asserts that “the Bible has been a mainstay of the textual imagery as well as the aesthetic underpinning of musical performance.”\(^{34}\) Each chapter of this dissertation therefore begins with a biblical verse that best illustrates the practices of the artists within that particular chapter. The focus on scripture thus


further positions this work as a kind of theomusicology, which takes into serious consideration the theological implications of musical practice.

The complex and multifaceted nature of gospel music demands that an interdisciplinary approach be taken in order to fully understand its value and meaning. I engage scholars from the disciplines of religious studies, theology, anthropology, musicology, ethnomusicology, and media studies. I hope that my engagement with scholarship across disciplinary boundaries will produce constructive dialogue from a variety of critical perspectives.

**Overview of Chapters**

Each chapter of my dissertation focuses on a different practice that has emerged in the twenty-first century and engages ideals of real spirituality. While each chapter functions as individual case studies, all are also in conversation with the other in exploring how gospel artists interpret God. Thus, despite their ability to stand alone, each chapter is connected under the conceptual umbrella of real spirituality. I reveal the similarities and differences in how artists articulate the real and engage their practices and individual narratives to understand how they conceptualize the ethic of the immaterial world.

Chapter one examines how gospel artists reconceptualize notions of the spiritual by challenging their followers to understand sex and sexual desire as intrinsic components of spirituality. Through releasing love albums, gospel artists assert that God and sex can be reconciled and that religious beliefs need not be antithetical to physical desire. As evidence, gospel artists commonly quote the Song of Solomon from the Hebrew Bible, which features remarkably explicit sexual language and imagery. I also discuss how gospel artists talk about sex and the ways in which they engage in a musical semiotics of desire in their compositions. I explain how artists strategically use their voices as mechanisms to musically encode sexual
desire. I also claim that they position their love albums as a musical critique of hyper-conservative Christians who deny the reality of sexual desire and who construct boundaries that separate sex from spirituality. Their attempted reconciliations of sex and the spiritual articulate new subjectivities—a self that is both spiritually and sexually whole. This chapter analyzes the love albums of Bishop T.D. Jakes, Kim Burrell, and Fred Hammond.

Chapter two explores gospel music’s transition from a black identity to a global identity. Gospel artists are embracing the concept of multiculturalism and are arguing that racial and ethnic inclusion is God’s divine will for humanity and is thus a reflection of real spirituality. Artists engage in an eschatological discourse that focuses on the kingdom of heaven as a future community devoid of discrimination. By invoking the future egalitarian ethos of heaven, gospel artists construct an imagined community of social equality on earth. To construct a transcultural identity, gospel artists incorporate lyrical and sonic codes that evoke “otherness”. These multicultural practices are embraced in order to challenge racial divisions within society and the church and are intended to advocate renegotiations of intersubjective identification. Terms like “global egalitarianism,” “transcultural unity,” and “universal oneness” are used interchangeably to connote the same idea of racial and ethnic inclusion that gospel artists promote through their music and discourses. Four artists exemplify the transition to multiculturalism in gospel music: Kirk Franklin, Israel Houghton, Kurt Carr, and Donnie McClurkin.

Chapter three focuses on the recent surge in popularity of worship music and explores how gospel artists use the devotional act of worship to measure the realness of one’s spirituality. In other words, for the gospel artists who I examine, the ability to worship is evidence that one has a real relationship with God. Authentic worship creates a real experiential encounter with

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God that transcends both physical place and temporal confinements to create an unrestricted space of spiritual euphoria. Coded terms like “atmosphere” and “glory” are often invoked to describe the transcendent space that is created through worship. Within this transcendent euphoric realm, gospel artists believe that a variety of supernatural phenomenological embodied experiences should occur, such as “healing,” “miracles,” and “transformation.” Thus, the realness of worship induces potential alterations in one’s spiritual identity.

Such transformations, however, can only take place through self-effacing devotion. Thus, artists engage in discourses of disavowal to detract attention away from their own artistry and onto God. 36 I also reveal how they express worship sonically through musical constructions of ineffability. This music technique employs nonsense syllables to describe the indescribable experience of sublime worship. Three worship artists who have made significant contributions to black worship music are Judith McAllister, Israel Houghton, and William McDowell. Each of these artists believes that worship reflects real spirituality because it is an outer manifestation of an inner sincere heart toward God.

The last chapter examines the gospel reality show. These shows defy traditional notions of spiritual respectability by disclosing the personal indiscretions and imperfections of gospel artists that are normally hidden from their churchgoing followers. In contrast to their polished public persona, on reality television shows gospel artists engage in “muddy authenticity” by revealing intrasubjective conflict. I explore how intrasubjective conflict manifests through multiple dualities: public persona and private struggle; divinity and humanity; and ministry versus capitalism and commercialism. 37 Exposing these inner dualistic conflicts communicates to

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their followers that one does not have to be perfect in order to have a real relationship with God. Real spirituality in this forum therefore implies a truth to one’s self—an acceptance of flaws and a removal of holy facades that deny the reality of imperfection. Gospel artists believe that by exposing their flaws, they are evangelizing to those who believe that their sinful nature has permanently separated them from God. Thus, they believe that their shows are a part of God’s will because it enables them to relate to those who might otherwise feel ostracized by the church’s judgmental attitude toward flawed individuals. Gospel artists therefore engage in discourses of relatability to demonstrate that despite their high gospel celebrity profile, they are just like anyone else. By “airing their dirty laundry” gospel artists believe that they are being more real and thus reconceptualize notions of spirituality by redefining the prerequisites for an authentic relationship with God. In this chapter, I discuss two gospel reality shows: *Mary Mary* and *Preachers of L.A.*

Ultimately, contemporary gospel artists attempt to critique religious traditions that seem to suffocate spiritual progress and maturation. Love albums push back against the demonization of sex and the silence surrounding sexual desire in conservative black churches; multiculturalism critiques racial and ethnic division in and outside of the church; worship critiques those who lack a real relationship with God; and the reality show rebukes sanctimonious Christians who may be dishonest about their inner struggles and imperfections. Thus, while these practices articulate new conceptions of spirituality, they also function as acts of defiance against what gospel artists believe to be traditional definitions of spirituality and ways of interpreting God. Yet the ideals can also have very practical, economic implications; financial and commercial interests may be among the most important motivations for these various practices in contemporary gospel. By interrogating musical and discursive practices, I hope to shed light on the theological
developments, spiritual commitments, and potential ambivalences, or even contradictions, within both gospel music and black church culture—as they attempt to interpret God’s will and communicate their faith to followers.
Chapter One
The Gospel Love Album: Sex, Desire, and Spirituality

Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies.  

- Song of Solomon 4:3-5 (NIV)

In an attempt to be more transparent about sexual desire, contemporary gospel artists have begun to release love albums. The sexual content embedded in the music, lyrics, and visual imagery of these albums reflects a growing commitment to sexual honesty and transparency. Although gospel artists have historically flirted with sexual expressivity through their music, love albums engage sex in ways that are more overt and forthright, setting them apart from any other moment in gospel music history. Moreover, because some of the gospel artists who are flirting with the romantic also belong to the clergy, this contemporary moment is all the more exceptional, as conservative clergy rarely have been as overt about sex historically.

To discuss sexual issues openly and to sing about sexual, romantic love, according to several gospel artists, is to stay true to the core teachings of the Bible. Because of the sexual content found in the Song of Solomon, it is believed that holistic spirituality should not exclude sex. Using Solomon’s love letter as biblical justification, some of gospel music’s most prominent artists are displaying a heightened level of sexual transparency, engaging in discourses that divulge their personal positions and theological stances concerning sex and sexual desire. Their sexual discourses reveal a theological agenda that is twofold: they are critiquing the overly sanctimonious propensities of conservative church people who deny the reality of sexual desire while attempting to speak the language of culture and win souls to Christ through unconventional means.
Love albums also provide a musical platform for gospel artists to participate in what they believe to be acts of theological defiance—their discursive and musical practices defy the marginalization of sex and traditional religious conventions within conservative black churches. In their discourses, gospel artists regularly use rhetorical codes and devices to articulate their theology about how sexual expression should be embodied and to resist traditional inclinations about sex. Their deployment of coded terms like “holy,” “pure,” “clean,” and “the world,” all have significant implications for how they understand the rules of proper sexual etiquette. Gospel artists also consistently use mimicry as a rhetorical device both to communicate their awareness of hyper-conservative traditions and to resist those traditions. Their mimicry of a hyper-conservative ethic of piety is intended to posture them as more progressive with regard to their theological worldview about sex. In their discussions, gospel artists mockingly invoke traditional hymns, like “Amazing Grace” and “Nearer My God To Thee,” as a strategy to offer critical commentary against traditional Christians who they believe are excessively conservative.

In their music, gospel artists use various musical encodings to construct desire. Vocal groans, complex melismas, harmonic dissonances, and lyrical codes are among the musical semiotics of desire that gospel artists deploy throughout their love albums to signify and intensify arousal. Because gospel music practices are not normally associated with sexual intimacy, their inclusion of sex into their discursive, musical, and theological paradigms enables the creation of a new kind of self-representation. These acts of theological defiance and musical encodings of desire thus participate in the reconstruction of their self-image and the articulation of new subjectivities.

Despite their attempts to express a more provocative and inclusive theological commitment, their progressive gestures are often mitigated by their capitulation to traditional
biblical standards of sexual propriety. Because their biblical hermeneutic implies a very prescribed definition of what constitutes acceptable sexuality, their liberal intentions are often complicated and obscured by their adherence to conservative mores. Four contemporary gospel love albums demonstrate how gospel artists grapple with understandings of sex and epitomize the ways in which they are challenging traditional views about the relationship between sex and spirituality: Sacred Love Songs (1999) and Sacred Love Songs 2 (2011) by Bishop T.D. Jakes, The Love Album (2011) by Kim Burrell, and God, Love, and Romance (2012) by Fred Hammond. Each of these artists negotiates their vocation, gender, and relational status in relation to conservative religious expectations of acceptable sexual behavior. Ultimately, a discursive and musical analysis of these four albums reveals how gospel artists are expanding conventional conceptions of spirituality and expressing the idea that sex and sexual desire are not impediments to spirituality, but rather assets to and intrinsic components of real spirituality.

**Sex And The History Of Christianity**

The tension that often exists between sex and spirituality within conservative black churches is reflective of a deeper antagonistic relationship that black churches have historically had with sex. The discomfort and uneasiness induced among churchgoers reveal the extent to which sexual desire is often misinterpreted as diametrically opposed to spirituality. But what are the historical causes of the apparent tension between sex and spirituality and how has that affected the reactions of churchgoers to the contemporary love album trend? In order to understand why some black conservative churchgoers respond to sexual desire with apprehension, it is first necessary to discuss the historical relationship between Christianity and sex. An understanding of the church’s history with regard to sexual matters will help to contextualize the love album trend and to better interpret its significance.
In first-century Hellenistic culture, Greek philosophical thought had a profound influence on the most popular scholars and apologists of the day. According to the philosophy of Platonism, the immaterial world, that which is only accessed by the soul, is superior to the material world, that which is perceived by the body and the senses. Platonic thought denigrated and devalued the body, while exalting the supernatural realm and the virtues of the soul. Alongside platonic thought was stoicism, propagated most notably by Seneca, a Roman philosopher. Stoicism placed emphasis on the mind and reason while disregarding passion and emotion. The devaluation of the body, passion, and emotion inevitably produced negative ramifications for human sexual relationships, which were perceived as signifying the indulgence of the physical body and the senses.

Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas argues that the coalescence of these two philosophical strands influenced Christian thought, which began to esteem “reason/spirit/soul” and to renounce “passion/flesh/body.” Within this paradigm of what she refers to as platonized Christianity, “the soul is divinized while the body is demonized. The soul is revered as the key to salvation. The body is condemned as a source of sin.” Douglas argues that this dualistic paradigm, in which the body is perceived as antagonistically related to the soul, had a significant impact on the writings of the Apostle Paul.

The New Testament writings of the Apostle Paul are inundated with admonishments about the potential dangers of unrestrained sexual activity. In Colossians 3:5, Paul encourages the faithful to “put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual

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39 Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, 25.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 352; The Apostle Paul is believed to be the writer of the majority of the New Testament of the Christian Holy Bible.
immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.”\textsuperscript{43} In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, he declares again that “it is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.”\textsuperscript{44} Also, in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, he tells the church at Corinth that celibacy is preferable, but to get married if one’s sexual urges cannot be controlled: “It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”\textsuperscript{45} 

Paul’s admonishments against sexual immorality significantly influenced the early church fathers as evinced by their advocacy of platonic dualism, which demonized sex. It is believed that Origen, in his adherence to a belief in a sharp dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, went so far as to castrate himself for the sake of his faith.\textsuperscript{46} Jerome did not completely condemn marriage, but clearly articulated that marriage was an inferior option to celibacy. Even if one chose the subordinate option of marriage, Jerome believed that sex within a marital context was only appropriate for the purpose of procreation and that sex outside of this purpose was dishonorable and unclean.\textsuperscript{47} Likewise, Augustine of Hippo believed that sexual desire is an indication of a lack of self-control and is a “reflection of humanity’s sinful nature.”\textsuperscript{48} Much like Jerome, Augustine believed that sexual activity in marriage should be avoided except for the purpose of procreation.\textsuperscript{49} The austerity of the early church fathers reveals the extent to which a platonic dualistic ideology, in which the spirit and body were conceived as irreconcilable entities, permeated Christian thought and practice. 

\textsuperscript{43} New International Version.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Douglas, “The Black Church and the Politics of Sexuality,” 352.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
Douglas contends that black people became influenced by platonized Christianity through the religious revivals of the eighteenth century, also known as the Great Awakening. During this period, many enslaved blacks were converted to evangelical Protestantism, which further perpetuated the belief in a bifurcation between the body and the soul. This artificial binary was antithetical to West African cultural sensibilities, as many West African-based cultures historically saw no difference between the sacred and the secular and valued the sanctity of sex. However, as more blacks were converted to Christianity, a Pauline, evangelical sexual ethic began to dominate the theological paradigms of blacks, eventually influencing the theologies that were preached in black religious gatherings and black churches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Scholars have also argued that the black community in general has reified the body/soul bifurcation for fear of confirming white assumptions about blacks as hypersexual predators. Black women have been viewed as salacious temptresses who seduce men, while black men have been historically depicted as rapacious bucks who sexually prey on the innocent. As a result of widespread stereotypes about blacks possessing animalistic sexual libidos, scholars have argued that black women and men have compensated by attempting to conform to respectable, middle-class, Victorian standards of conduct. This behavioral standard has aided blacks in desexualizing blackness and countering the stereotype of blacks as having insatiable sexual appetites.

As a result of evangelical revival efforts in the eighteenth century, along with the black community’s fear of conforming to hypersexual stereotypes about the black body, Douglas

50 Ibid. 356.
argues that black churchgoers have appropriated platonized views about sex into their faith traditions. However, in her work on women in the Church of God in Christ, Anthea Butler challenges this assessment and does not reduce the appropriation of conservative biblical standards about sex to anxieties about how whites have historically stereotyped black sexuality. Butler contends that conformity to a standard of sexual propriety was not exclusively about a “desire to advance the race” by conforming to a sexual respectability politics. Rather, Butler argues that COGIC women adhered to strict sexual conduct because they had a strong belief in sanctification and a desire to please God. Butler writes: “While Christian principles of piety and purity could be and were put to use in political ways, for many Baptist and COGIC women alike, devotion to the tenets of the ‘Bible, Bath, and Broom’ seems not to have been primarily about the politics of respectability but largely about serving God.” Butler’s observations thus provide a critique to Douglas’s findings by implying that “the specter of whiteness” has been “overly determinative in how blacks interpret the demands of their faith and in how they read Scripture.”

Despite the reasons for why black churchgoers have adopted a conservative sexual standard, there still remains discomfort with discussing sex openly within conservative spaces. Within the latter part of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century, many within the church have attempted to confront the church’s antagonism toward sex. Such attempts have been largely expressed through the neo-Pentecostal movement. The neo-Pentecostal movement purports to be a countermeasure to hyper-conservative black faith traditions that avoid conversations about sex. Such traditions tend to focus disproportionately on otherworldly

54 Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, 77.
phenomena to the exclusion of the quotidian realities of human existence.\textsuperscript{56} Neo-Pentecostals engage not only the invisible and the immaterial, but also the visible and the material. This engagement with the visible and the material has significant implications for the emergence of gospel love albums.

\textit{Neo-Pentecostalism And Its Engagement With Culture}

Traditional Pentecostals are known for their adherence to a theology that disparages the body and demands a separation from worldly affairs.\textsuperscript{57} According to this tradition, an engagement in the secular affairs of culture signifies a deficit in one’s relationship with God. Neo-Pentecostals, however, seek to dismantle the perceived walls that separate the sacred from the secular and the physical from the metaphysical. They achieve this through an overt engagement with secular culture. Within the neo-Pentecostal theological paradigm, Christ is not antagonistically opposed to culture, but is a transformative agent within culture. Cultural activities that have been historically demonized by traditional Pentecostals, such as going to the movies, plays, and listening to secular music, are readily embraced by neo-Pentecostals.\textsuperscript{58}

Jonathan Walton explains that the full transition to neo-Pentecostalism did not occur until the 1990s.\textsuperscript{59} In his study on neo-Pentecostalism, he explains the overt engagement with culture that has become a hallmark of this movement: “Rather than denounce the devil’s media, music, and movie industry, they are willing to participate in these various arenas with the aim of converting the culture to Christ.”\textsuperscript{60} Neo-Pentecostals provide Christians with what Walton calls

\textsuperscript{56} Shayne Lee asserts that this movement began to grow in popularity in the latter part of the twentieth century. However, both Lee and Jonathan Walton claim that the movement reached the height of its popularity in the 1990s. See Jonathan Walton, \textit{Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism} (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 79-83; Shayne Lee, \textit{T.D. Jakes: America’s New Preacher} (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 34-38.

\textsuperscript{57} Walton, \textit{Watch This}, 82.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. 82-83

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 79.
“saintly alternatives.”⁶¹ These alternatives allow Christians to enjoy the same cultural festivities as non-Christians, provided that these activities have evangelistic implications and are geared toward spreading the Gospel. Despite their unabashed engagement with “this-worldly” cultural phenomena, neo-Pentecostals still stress otherworldly worship practices and experiential encounters that are identified with traditional Pentecostalism, such as divine healing, glossolalia, dancing in the Spirit, and deliverance from demonic forces.⁶² They also adhere to a conservative standard of piety and maintain support for the authority of the Bible as the inerrant, infallible word of God.⁶³ Essentially, the ecclesial practices of neo-Pentecostalism integrate “traditional Pentecostal beliefs with the cultural characteristics of the contemporary moment.”

Shayne Lee refers to this neo-Pentecostal phenomenon as the “new black church.” The “new black church” shuns traditional, denominational affiliations that emphasize doctrinal constraints in favor of denominational independence and an emphasis on personal empowerment. The neo-Pentecostal movement is therefore also a response to conservative mainline denominations, such as Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, that are perceived as adhering to rigid, legalistic doctrines.⁶⁴ Within this post-denominational religious climate, neo-Pentecostals share a passion for challenging “Grandma’s religion” and position themselves as the “antipode to the old religious establishment.”⁶⁵ They shun what is perceived as rigid “religiosity, denominationalism, and traditionalism” and embrace a more emotionally ecstatic, technologically savvy, and culturally palatable worship experience.⁶⁶ By challenging the traditional church establishment, they believe that they are attracting the “unchurched” and those who have become cynical about the institution of the church.

⁶¹ Ibid.
⁶² Ibid., 80.
⁶⁴ Ibid., 167.
⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.
⁶⁶ Ibid.
Along with a bold engagement with culture and the intentional transcendence of denominational restrictions comes the demystification of sex. As a strategy to maintain cultural relevance and further attract nonbelievers, neo-Pentecostals attempt to discuss sex in ways that are more overt than other conservative faith traditions. Whether they are discussing sexual relationships, sexual temptation, or sexual abuse, neo-Pentecostals portray themselves as more transparent about sexual matters than other religious traditions. Well-known neo-Pentecostal televangelists, like Juanita Bynum, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, and T.D. Jakes, openly discuss sexual issues, and even share personal testimonies about experiencing sexual temptations and abuse at the hands of sexual predators.\(^{67}\) This seemingly newfound sexual freedom also manifests itself through the incorporation of romantic lyrics in sacred songs and even through the employment of secular love songs during worship services.\(^{68}\) Neo-Pentecostals believe that an openness about sex aids in the eradication of spiritual facades that ignore and demonize the reality of human sexuality. Ultimately, neo-Pentecostals portray themselves as having “their finger on the pulse of society,” while maintaining a conservative belief in the authority of the Bible.\(^{69}\)

The various characteristics that constitute the neo-Pentecostal aesthetic provide instructive insight into the theologies of gospel artists and their preoccupation with sex and romantic music. All of the gospel artists who will be discussed are a part of or have been heavily influenced by this theological movement, as evidenced by their adherence to a theology and a worship ethic that conform to a neo-Pentecostal sensibility.\(^{70}\) Many of these artists were mostly raised in the Church of God in Christ, a black Pentecostal denomination, adhere to a charismatic

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 2.
\(^{68}\) Ibid., 165; Walton, *Watch This*, 80.
\(^{69}\) Walton, *Watch This*, 79.
\(^{70}\) Many gospel artists were raised in the Church of God in Christ (a black Pentecostal denomination), believe in the authority of the Bible, adhere to a charismatic worship ethic - which includes highly emotionally charged worship, speaking in tongues and dancing in the spirit (shouting) – while also maintaining a preoccupation with transcending the four walls of the church and engaging the wider culture.
worship ethic—which includes demonstrative worship practices like speaking in tongues and dancing in the spirit—and believe in the primacy and authority of scripture. The neo-Pentecostal engagement with culture has also significantly impacted many contemporary gospel artists, whose transparency about sex is often motivated by a desire to stay culturally relevant. This engagement with sex, however, is not only the byproduct of the neo-Pentecostal impulse to transcend the walls of the church, but is also a response to popular statistical studies on divorce rates among Christians. Recent statistics exposing the instability of marriages in the church have provoked many gospel artists to discuss sex more openly in order to save the institution of marriage from its supposed imminent demise.

Statistical Studies on Marriage and Divorce

Gospel love albums emerged in conjunction with increasing anxieties about divorce statistics and the instability of marriages within the church. The Barna Group released a statistical study on Christian divorce rates that left many within the black and white evangelical church in disbelief. Founded by George Barna, an evangelical preacher and author, The Barna Group specializes in the study of religious beliefs and behavioral patterns among Americans. It is considered to be among the leading research organizations that focus on the intersection of faith and culture and tracks the role that faith plays in American culture. Much to the chagrin of the conservative Christian community, a survey conducted by The Barna Group in 1999 revealed that Christians were more likely to get a divorce than non-Christians. After nearly 4,000 adults were interviewed, the research revealed that the divorce rate of born again Christians was twenty-seven percent, while the rate among adults who were not Christian was twenty-four

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percent. Atheists and Agnostics had the lowest rate of divorce at twenty-one percent. In 2004, The Barna Group released another survey with slightly different results. Based on a representative sample of 3,614 adults, this survey revealed that born again Christians were just as likely to get a divorce as non-Christians, with both groups measuring at thirty-five percent. Barna’s figures also revealed that about one-quarter (twenty-three percent) of born-again Christians get divorced two or more times.

Critics of this research claim that the project is inconclusive because it does not consider factors such as the age when the person got married. Other critics argue that a person who claims to be a born again Christian may not be consistently active in their faith communities and fully committed to God in their personal lives. Despite the potential loopholes in their findings, these statistics aroused confusion and indignation among evangelicals who wanted to believe that their faith was more of a contributing factor to the stability of their marriages. This research project revealed that, as it relates to marriage, Christians were not living lives that were significantly distinct from non-Christians. These findings thus raised questions about the church’s effectiveness in addressing the practical challenges that marriages and families endure daily.

Barna broaches this issue in his 1999 study: “The high incidence of divorce within the

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74 George Barna, “Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians,” Barna Group, September 8, 2004, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/194-born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians#.U7W5PyixFjE; Barna, “Christians Are More Likely to Experience Divorce Than Are Non-Christians,” https://www.barna.org; Wicker, “Survey inspires debate,” http://www.adherents.com/largecom/baptist_divorce.html. The Barna Group defines born again Christians as those who have made “a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today.” Born again Christians also believe “that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.”

75 Stacy C. Boyd, Black Men Worshipping: Intersecting Anxieties of Race, Gender, and Christian Embodiment (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 105;

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.


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Christian community challenges the idea that churches are providing truly practical and life-changing perspectives and tangible support for marriages.\textsuperscript{80}

Increased anxieties about divorce have been accompanied by anxieties regarding the supposed overall destruction of morality in American society. Such suspicions are amplified by multiple research projects and writings by reputable conservative Christian organizations and media outlets such as Focus on the Family, Family Research Council, The National Association of Evangelicals, \textit{The Christian Post} newspaper, and \textit{Christian Today} magazine.\textsuperscript{81} These organizations emphasize what is perceived to be the onslaught of moral decadence in American society and use their platform as a way to help rectify these issues. In addition to divorce, other issues that are usually addressed as a part of America’s moral decadence are unwed parenting, cohabitation, and increased support for same-sex marriage.\textsuperscript{82} Particularly within the twenty-first century, the Christian community has been confronted with increased support for gay marriage and challenged with the task of upholding the importance of traditional family values. On the official website for Focus on the Family, strong statements are made concerning what is believed to be an attack on marriage: “The standard of lifelong, traditional marriage as the foundation of family life in our nation is under attack.”\textsuperscript{83} In another article on the Family Research Council website, under the subheading, “The Current Cultural Crisis,” one writer states: “Marriage and the family are institutions under siege today, and only a return to the biblical foundation of these God-given institutions will reverse the decline of marriage and the family in our culture today.”\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

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As we will later see in my analysis of the music of Bishop T.D Jakes and Fred Hammond, contemporary gospel artists are offering their love albums as a potential response to the high divorce rates within the church and as a remedy to the “cultural crisis” and the “attack” on the family. The rhetoric that is used by these gospel artists to support their artistic endeavors is often framed to communicate a state of emergency with regard to the institution of marriage and relationships within the church. This state of emergency is also fueled by studies confirming the decrease in church attendance and the overall decline in the church’s relevance within American culture. Gospel artists thus feel compelled to address openly issues of sexuality both to restore and strengthen the marriage institution, and also to keep the church relevant in a culture that is becoming increasingly disinterested and detached from the church.

Gospel Music’s Sexual History

Although contemporary gospel artists are becoming more overt in their sexual expressions, the idea of gospel artists transcending the sacred space of the church and expanding traditional expectations of gospel performance respectability is by no means a new phenomenon. The love album trend represents a continuation of a long lineage of gospel artists who have flirted with sexual boundaries and were infamous for broadening and subverting conventional religious standards. It has been well documented that Thomas Dorsey (1899-1993), also known as the father of gospel music, was not embraced in many churches in the early years of his career because of his unconventional stylistic approach. Dorsey began his music career as a blues musician and was known for his popular, sexually tinged compositions such as, “It’s Tight Like

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That.” He also toured extensively as the leader of the backup band for Ma Rainey, a blues singer who was not timid about expressing her sexuality through music. Dorsey took the same melodies and rhythmic patterns that were used to sing about sex and used them in sacred music. The jazz and blues inflections that were incorporated into Dorsey’s gospel soundscape were considered inappropriate according to the religious music standards of many black Baptist churches that Dorsey would frequent. The upbeat, driving rhythms of his sacred compositions were too closely aligned with the sonic dimensions of “worldly” music and even led to Dorsey being thrown out of multiple churches. Dorsey’s incorporation of secular music styles caused churchgoers to label him as inauthentic and as one who lacked spiritual integrity.

One of the most subversive artists in the early decades of gospel music was Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915-1973). Having grown up in the sanctified, Pentecostal tradition, Tharpe countered what was expected and accepted for a female within the church. Her choice of wardrobe was one of the ways in which she defied traditional expectations, causing some to speculate that she was abandoning her Pentecostal roots. Tharpe traded in the traditional sanctified look, “the oxford shoes, dull colors, and long, decorous sleeves,” for elegant, silk evening gowns. These silk, multi-colored gowns, though conservative by today’s standards, had more of a secular and sexual appeal during the 1930s and 40s. Although her body was fully covered, wearing short sleeve gowns and exposing her arms was definitely a provocative statement for a sanctified woman. To add to her secularized image, Tharpe often incorporated ambiguous lyrics in her songs as a professional strategy to crossover into the secular market. The use of lyrical hybridity was most noticeable in songs such as “Rock Me,” a remake of Thomas Dorsey’s “Hide Me In Thy

87 Ibid., 42, 54.
89 Jackson, Singing in My Soul, 27.
90 Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, 77-86. Butler discusses how women “were expected to be fully covered, showing little or no skin in their everyday dress.”
Bosom,” “Four Or Five Times,” and “My Man and I.” In the song “Rock Me,” lines such as, “Oh if you leave me, I will die,” left listeners wondering to whom “you” actually referred. The ambiguity of these songs allowed listeners to interpret them as songs either about God or a significant other. Because the object of her affection was veiled in obscurity, the sexual innuendo implied in the lyrical messages often caused discomfort among her conservative followers.

Tharpe has also been hailed for her mastery of the guitar as her accompanying instrument. Her adeptness at playing the guitar subverted understandings of gender norms, as guitars were perceived as being predominately a man’s instrument. Further undermining traditional norms, Tharpe often showcased her vocal and instrumental proficiency in secular venues, such as nightclubs and theatres, locations where the blues and more sexually provocative music were often performed. Her seemingly careless traversal into the secular terrain, aided by her secularized image and her employment of ambiguous lyrics, incensed some of her COGIC followers, who believed that Tharpe was denying her Pentecostal roots and thus compromising her Christian faith. However, Tharpe retorted by asserting that the real meaning of the music lay neither in the lyrical content nor in the context of the performance, but in the personal intent of the singer. Essentially, Tharpe contended that it was one’s underlying motives and one’s personal relationship with God that determined the sacred value of gospel music.

BeBe (b. 1962) and CeCe Winans (b. 1964), who are brother and sister, also established a reputation in the 1980s and early 1990s for singing songs that were lyrically ambiguous. Although Sister Rosetta Tharpe had already accomplished this throughout the thirties and forties, BeBe and CeCe catapulted this lyrical approach to a new level of prominence and visibility.

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91 Jackson, *Singing in My Soul*, 93.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 39.
95 Ibid., 94.
96 Ibid., 112.
97 Ibid., 129-130.
With songs such as “I.O.U. Me” from their self-titled debut album, *Introducing BeBe and CeCe Winans* (1987) and “Lost Without You” from their second album entitled *Heaven* (1988), BeBe and CeCe began to play a significant role in popularizing ambiguous “you songs.” In the song “Lost Without You,” the lyrics to the second verse read: “You pick me up, those times I’m down / You make me laugh when there’s no clown / No one else can love me like you do.” This is then followed by the chorus: “I’m lost without you, so easy to see / I’m lost without you, and there’s no letting go / So let me be the first to say, I’m lost without you / So don’t ever go away.” The object of affection, “you,” is intentionally undefined and left to the imagination and interpretation of the listener.

BeBe and CeCe’s songs attracted criticisms from the church community, as many conservative churchgoers felt that they were exploiting the gospel message for economic gain. Critics felt that their songs “catered to the tastes of secular listeners. They interpreted the duo’s use of ambiguous pronouns not as blatant references to divinity but as a dilution of the gospel, bringing into question the duo’s real motives.”

Indeed, it cannot be disputed that BeBe and CeCe’s lyrical ambiguity and flirtations with the sexual were economically expedient and helped to catapult them professionally. *Heaven* went gold and their 1991 release *Different Lifestyles* achieved platinum success, with lyrically ambiguous songs like “Addictive Love” and “I’ll Take You There” reaching number one on the R&B charts.

Despite criticism from the church, BeBe and CeCe maintained that their lyrics were not about a romantic relationship, nor about economic expediency, but an expression of their sincere relationship with God.

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100 Other gospel artists have also released “you songs” that had double meanings. In her 1987 self-titled album, Vanessa Bell Armstrong released a single entitled “You Bring Out The Best In Me,” which contained no clear reference to God in the lyrics. Also Marvin Sapp’s 2007 single “Never Would Have Made It” crossed over to the secular charts, peaking at number fourteen on the “Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs” charts. In this song, Sapp does not explicitly mention God as the object of affection.
Most recently, Erica Campbell (b. 1972) who is a part of the gospel duo Mary Mary, released a promotional photo for her single, “Help” (2014). In this photo Campbell is wearing a form-fitting dress that accentuates her curvaceous physique (Figure 1.1).101

Even though Campbell is not exposing any skin, the “hip-hugging” dress still managed to generate an extraordinary amount of backlash, as her followers accused her of misrepresenting Christ by trying to be sexually seductive. Among her critics was a female pastor, Apostle Stacey Woods, whose critique of Campbell went viral. Woods felt that Campbell’s photo attracted her followers to her body, rather than attracting them to God: “I want women of God to represent the KINGDOM without feeling as though they must become a sex symbol. THE WORLD sells sex, THE KINGDOM SHOULD PROMOTE JESUS.” Woods went on to claim that Christians are supposed to “compel men to come through our love for Jesus, but when we wear things that are

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distracting, the message is somehow lost and it becomes about US and not about HIM." \(^\text{102}\) But Campbell believes that the backlash is evidence of the need for dialogue about the relationship between Christianity and sexuality: “This is about confidence and realizing that God made you and that you are beautiful just the way you are. I think that young girls shouldn’t only get sexy images from people who are not proclaiming Jesus. But I am. And I’m cute too.” \(^\text{103}\) Campbell believes that her photo sends a message to young girls that it is possible to be sexy while simultaneously having a genuine relationship with Christ. The proclamation of the gospel, according to Campbell, is not predicated upon the disavowal of sexuality.

Because this image is the cover for her breakout solo debut after having sung for over a decade with her sister Tina as part of the gospel duo Mary Mary, this photo does professional work for Campbell by recreating her self-image and establishing her as a new solo artist. The provocative nature of the picture also demonstrates the ways in which flirtations with the sexual have heavy economic implications, as the sexual overtones of the picture alone doubtlessly attracted the attention of potential consumers. This picture represents a professional rebranding—no longer is she simply singing alongside her sister, but she is now the “new and improved” solo artist who has the freedom and creative leverage to alter her gospel persona. Campbell spoke of the new level of confidence that she felt while shooting the photo: “When we took the picture I felt beautiful, I felt confident, I felt sexy, and I felt strong.” \(^\text{104}\) Her words reveal that she was not merely the passive victim of a marketing strategy over which she had no control. Rather, this quote suggests that she exercised agency in her own self-representation. This photo enables Campbell to disrupt conventional norms of female subjectivity within the gospel industry and to redefine the terms of holiness and acceptable sexuality from a woman of God. Through


\(^{104}\) Ibid.
her visual construction, Campbell exposes the semiotic connections between eroticism and religious experience that have been tacitly and underhandedly communicated throughout gospel music history. By intentionally and overtly drawing upon sexual imagery in this photo, she markets a new kind of spirituality: one that does not sacrifice the beauty of the body at the altar of holiness.

Campbell’s use of sexual imagery to market spiritual goods is reflective of a new shift within the gospel music industry that more overtly intersects faith with sex. Although Dorsey, Tharpe, BeBe and CeCe employed certain musical and performative techniques that caused churchgoers to accuse them of being too sexual, these artists were not trying to be overtly sexual. By contrast, love albums reflect the desires of gospel artist to confront sex head on. Rather than using innuendo and indirect connotations as gospel artists have often done in the past, contemporary artists are directly and overtly addressing sex in ways that heretofore have been foreign to many black evangelical churchgoers. The musical and lyrical content of their songs and their discourses attempt to remove veiled references to sex, addressing sex more openly, and challenging traditional definitions of spirituality. The following discourses reveal the preoccupations of gospel artists with debunking supposed myths about sexual desire and their determination to unite sex with spirituality.

**Gospel Artists And Their Sexual Discourses**

Two different conversations that aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network best exemplify how gospel artists negotiate contested understandings of sex and how their understandings of sex intersect with their spirituality. These conversations reveal how artists discursively resist traditional beliefs within the church that contribute to the mystification and

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105 Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 164. McClary claims that throughout the history of black gospel music, the “semiotic connections between religious and sexual ecstasy are most consistently apparent.” She goes on to substantiate this claim by asserting that gospel has often borrowed musical and poetic styles from secular music forms.
demonization of sex. Code words and phrases with hidden meanings along with mimicry are deployed as rhetorical strategies that enable these artists to distance themselves from traditional dogma, to redefine the self, and ultimately to convey a nuanced understanding of spirituality.

The first conversation is between CeCe Winans and Smokie Norful (b. 1975). Smokie Norful catapulted onto the gospel scene with his debut chart topping single “I Need You Now” in 2002. As a result of the extraordinary success of his debut project, Norful has become one of the premiere artists in the gospel music industry. Norful is also pastor of Victory Cathedral Worship Center in Bolinbrook, Illinois. In this exchange, CeCe asks Norful to divulge more information about a prior exchange that they had about sexuality. Norful then goes on to reveal how he has recently become more candid in his discussions about sexuality with the young people at his church:

CECE: You shared with me backstage that it was something else that you had been teaching on for the young people. Share that with me a little bit, just a little bit of that.

NORFUL: Well you know, at my church I’ve had the privilege and opportunity of really pouring into the lives of both the young men and the young women. And one of the hot topics, which is a hot topic everywhere you look now, in magazines, television, whatever you do, whatever you see we’re bombarded with images of sexuality. You know, and so, it has been my privilege, my honor, to be able to pour into them according to the Word of God because everybody else is pouring into them. And you know it’s amazing that as a church community . . . churches don’t broach that and really get deep with it. And so what happens is they get the deep stuff, quote unquote, from the world. You know, and I got into the Song of Solomon and started, you know, reading Song of Solomon. And I did it as if I was reading poetry . . . : “Her lips,” and how it gives the description, and even: “Your breasts are like. . . .” And it was over the top for them, and they were like: “Oh my God, our pastor has snapped and lost his mind [laughs]. . . .” And then when I said, “I have just read to you according to the Word of God, Song of Solomon,” it opened a door and gave me an opportunity to really minister to them and show them that their body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that they need to guard it as such. . . . The things that they are doing are so averse to the Word of God, the will of God, that ultimately they can never be successful totally in doing the work of God.106

In another conversation that aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network, gospel singing duo BeBe and CeCe Winans were presiding as hosts and invited Bishop Paul S. Morton (b. 1950) on as their guest. Bishop Paul S. Morton is the senior pastor of Changing A Generation Full Gospel Baptist Church, a megachurch in Atlanta, Georgia. He is the founder and presiding bishop of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International, a conglomerate of churches that embraces the operation of spiritual gifts. Morton is also a prolific gospel music recording artist, known for songs such as “I’m Still Standing” (2006) and “Cry Your Last Tears” (2008). Because of the controversial nature of BeBe and CeCe’s music, as previously discussed, and because it was often not well received by conservative churchgoers, CeCe asks Morton to clarify and defend their music for the viewers. This then leads to a discussion about how church people often deny the reality of sexual desire and are uncomfortable when romance is expressed through song:

CECE: We get accused a lot of times of not being people in the church because of what our music has done, and because of the style of our music. So I kinda wanted you to kinda speak on that and kind of give me your take on what you feel God is doing or what He’s able to do with our ministry. Being different, because everybody’s not the same.

MORTON: I really believe that that’s what God is calling for in, as the old folks say, “These last and evil days.” He that winneth souls is wise. . . . The message that you’re giving to the world is so important, so I think that that’s the key. . . . But I’ve experienced that in my own life, when God told me to do something different from the traditional. And I just don’t believe that God has called us to be traditional. In fact, the Bible says, “Tradition destroys.” You gotta be careful with certain traditions that you hold on to that will block you from your destiny. So, I wanna thank both of you for not being traditional to say, hey, this is what God has given to us. And look at the impact that you’re making on the world, still.

107 Morton believed that many traditional Baptist churches did not allow or operate in the gifts of the Spirit. This realization became the motivation for him to create a space where the gifts could be freely experienced within the church. For more information on the Full Gospel Baptist Church, see http://www.fullgospelbaptist.org/.


109 “Tradition destroys” is most likely a reference to one of two scriptures: Mark 7:13 or 2 Corinthians 3:6. In Mark 7:13, Jesus is recorded as saying: “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” (NIV). And in 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul states: “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Both of these scriptures are often quoted to emphasize the importance of not allowing certain religious traditions and legalistic interpretations of Scripture to be an impediment to the move of the Spirit. Morton is thus commending BeBe and CeCe for defying church tradition and doing what God instructed them to do.
CECE: ‘Cause you know, again, we grew up in Church of God in Christ and BeBe started writing and of course we grew up with Andrae Crouch, always was around contemporary music. And you know, the style of the tracks, it’s like, okay, wait a minute, we’re gonna get kicked out for this one. You know, but a lot of it is about love and intimacy and relationship and that’s what God is to me, though. You know? I know him in an intimate way. And even the Bible when he tells the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church. I think a lot of times we forget, that is the main ingredient, love.

Morton: Yes.

CECE: You know?

Morton: And that’s why I really stood by my son P. J. and that was a stage that he went through because he said: “Daddy, if God is love, why can’t I sing about love, if it’s clean?”

CECE: If it’s clean. That’s right. Pure.

Morton: That’s right, it’s gotta be clean.

CECE: Right

Morton: And in the Bible that’s why it has a label “Songs of Solomon.” I mean it’s biblical, it’s right. . . . Even with the God love songs, they can make a difference. I mean I’ve been married in December 33 years, and I’m saved, sanctified, filled with the Holy Ghost. But when me and my wife are together and holding each other, I don’t wanna hear at that particular time, [sings mockingly] “I will trust in the Lord.” [audience laughs] I’m sorry! I’m sorry! Forgive me y’all! Forgive me. Forgive me.

BeBe Winans, the brother of CeCe Winans, then enters the conversation and commends Morton for his honesty and transparency in talking more candidly about sex and love songs openly. As he praises Morton for his courage, BeBe discusses how sex is a sensitive topic that is often ignored within the culture of the church:

BeBe: The thing I love about that is that you have the boldness to speak about it. I think for a long time, it was taboo

Morton: Right, right.

BeBe: for us to talk about things that we were supposed to talk about.

Morton: Exactly, exactly.
CECE: Yeah. But we really have to talk about them.

MORTON: And we were really hypocrites though. We were really hypocrites.

BEBE: Like you never heard of Gladys Knight. [audience laughs] Gladys who? Who?

CECE: But I wanna talk about it because God is holy and He’s not compromising that for nobody. We must be holy. We must be pure. We must be clean. But like you said, love is what God is, He created it. He wants us to have great relationships with our husbands, with our brothers, our sisters, you know. And so it’s real important that we understand there’s a difference between love and lust. Right? [audience applauds] There’s a major difference between that. Because I think we’ll free some people up.

MORTON: . . . But you know, you’ve been so used to people thinking that everything gotta be bad. And that’s the way it was in the church, “Lord, if this is making me feel good, this got to be sin. [laughs] Loose here Satan! [laughs]” But you can have fun in the body of Christ. And that’s what it’s all about. We’ve gotta enjoy ourselves. [audience applauds] Just keep it holy.

CECE: Keep it holy.

MORTON: Keep it holy.

CECE: It has to be holy.

MORTON: Gotta be.110

These two discourses—the first between CeCe and Norful, and the second between BeBe, CeCe and Morton—bear striking similarities with respect to the kind of rhetoric that is used. Both conversations put forth critiques about the church and challenge traditions that silence conversations about sex. In the first conversation, Norful shares his disdain for the church’s sexual negligence. Churches, according to Norful, fail to engage in frank conversations about sex, which causes churchgoers to learn about sex from cultural sources outside of the church, or in his words, “the world.” Considering the degree to which we are all “bombarded with images of sexuality” in culture, Norful believes that the church should take part in the conversation

110 BeBe Winans, CeCe Winans, Bishop Paul S. Morton, interview by BeBe Winans and CeCe Winans, Praise the Lord, TBN, October 6, 2009, http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/3oOTR4MjpQk493vKwOQX-3rnwLyjLwFn.
about sex so that the church can have more of an influence in shaping the minds of young women and men.

The second conversation begins by CeCe asking Morton to defend the integrity of their music. Considering Morton’s place of prominence and status within conservative black churches, this is a strategic and opportunistic move by CeCe, as Morton’s affirmation of their stylistic approach could potentially ingratiate BeBe and CeCe with their detractors. Morton defends their music by resisting traditional conceptions of spirituality that do not allow for a variety of stylistic approaches in gospel music. Morton declares that traditions serve as destructive forces that can potentially impede one’s “destiny.” Within this context, the word “destiny” is code for the fulfillment of God’s purpose in one’s life. In other words, traditional dogma can potentially inhibit one from becoming the individual that God desires.

CeCe further engages Morton’s critique of traditional restrictions within the church by discussing the stricures of the Church of God in Christ. She reveals that the style of her music challenged COGIC ethics of respectability and therefore increased the chances of her and BeBe being excommunicated from the denomination. She links romantic love to spirituality by referencing Ephesians 5:25, a New Testament scripture that instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. She believes that this scripture proves that God affirms the expression of love between a man and a woman. Morton further affirms the validity of CeCe’s statement by referencing the Song of Solomon. Morton’s reference to the Song of Solomon makes his understanding of sexual love as a component of spirituality “right” because it is “biblical.”

Bishop Morton’s discussion of his son P. J. Morton (b. 1981) is also significant in understanding the full meaning of this conversation. P. J. Morton is a singer, producer, and a
songwriter for both the gospel and R&B music industries and is also currently the keyboardist for the American pop rock band, Maroon 5. In 2009, he published a book entitled, *Why Can’t I Sing About Love?: The Truth About The “Church” Against “Secular” Music*. In this book, P. J. expresses his frustration with the church’s antagonism toward romantic love and argues that both sacred and secular love songs can come from God. The church’s position against love songs, for him, is a direct contradiction to biblical truth because it ignores the existence of the Song of Solomon. He believes that this artificial binary perpetuated by the church also contributes to high divorce rates: “It’s no wonder why divorce rates are as high as they are. We have left natural love and love songs out of the church,” he argues. “Why in the world would a Christian who believes in the BIBLE say secular or love songs were out of the will of God, when they are in fact BIBLICAL?” He later concludes that “it is possible for your secular songs to be for and from Him.” Bishop Morton’s discussion of his son is therefore pertinent to the conversation because it further emphasizes how contemporary gospel artists are attempting to dismantle traditional doctrines and promote a theology that they believe is more conducive to varying expressions of love through music.

In addition, there is an evangelistic impulse that predominates. In typical Neo-Pentecostal fashion, Morton quotes the scripture “He that winneth souls is wise” in order to communicate that evangelizing to non-Christians and winning souls to Christ take precedence over loyalty to conventional standards of piety. According to Morton, the nontraditional approach of BeBe and CeCe’s music was necessary in order to make an impact on “the world” and attract


113 Ibid., 33. Morton has challenged the church’s traditional norms through song as well. P. J. Morton collaborated with gospel artist Israel Houghton in 2013 on a song entitled “Sunday Kind of Love,” which was the lead single for the movie *I’m In Love With A Church Girl*. Although this song is about romantic love between a man and a woman, it received a significant amount of airplay on gospel radio stations.

114 This scripture is found in Proverbs 11:30. Morton quotes from the King James Version (KJV).
audiences beyond the church to the gospel message. This same evangelistic impulse is embedded in Norful’s response. When Norful read the Song of Solomon to his congregation, it gave him an “opportunity to really minister to them.” The eroticism found in the Song of Solomon arrested the attention of his congregation and consequently enabled him to use that moment to point them toward God. The use of sexual language provided a method to teach about sex in ways that he believes are more in alignment with the “Word of God” and the “will of God.”

As they critique the church, they deploy mimicry as a rhetorical device to resist the church’s archaic theology. The use of mimicry gives the impression that they are less traditional than other conservative churchgoers and more willing to discuss real issues without hiding behind a veneer of piety. Once Norful begins to quote phrases from the Song of Solomon—“Her lips. . . . Your breasts are like”—he mimics the young people’s reactions of discomfort and embarrassment upon hearing his use of erotic language. By imitating their surprised reactions (“Oh my God, our pastor has snapped and lost his mind.”), he further emphasizes the extent to which sex is taboo within black church culture. His use of mimicry also highlights how his discussion about sex with the young people at his church enabled the disclosure of his identity. Their surprised reactions imply that Norful was revealing an aspect of his identity that remained undisclosed prior to this event. His use of erotic language facilitated the construction of a more comprehensive subjectivity—not only is he a gospel artist and a pastor, but he is also a sexual being.

Morton mimics traditional churchgoers by invoking “I Will Trust In The Lord,” a well-known traditional black gospel song. His request for the audience to “forgive him” reveals that the audience is not prepared for his representation of self that includes sexual candor. Morton employs mimicry to portray himself in a less self-righteous manner and to give the audience a
glimpse of his real, “uncensored” humanity. The shock that came as a result of Morton’s identity disclosure provoked laughter, as the audience did not expect a conservative bishop to discuss sex as openly. BeBe then enters the conversation and adds to Morton’s mimicry. His sarcastic question (“Gladys who?”) critiques those who self-righteously purport to lack knowledge of love music by secular artists. Toward the end of the exchange, Morton then once again mocks the sanctimonious tendencies of conservative churchgoers who often demonize the pleasures of the body. By imitating how Christians often ascribe bodily pleasure to Satan (“Loose here Satan!”), Morton critiques overly pious conservatives and portrays himself as one who is no longer restricted by the confines of traditionalism.

Despite their attempts to dismantle the walls of tradition that decouple sex from spirituality, there remain inconsistencies and ambiguities in their discourses. The ambiguities become most obvious when they use certain code words and phrases to describe the proper manner in which they feel sexuality should be embodied. “The world,” “temple of the Holy Spirit,” “holy,” “pure,” “clean,” “love,” and “lust” are all rhetorical codes that imply a prescribed embodiment of sexuality that they believe conforms to biblical standards. Such codes can be historically grounded in the mores of the sanctified Pentecostal church. These terms are usually invoked within conservative contexts to signify the prohibition of certain “ungodly” behaviors and practices. Smoking, drinking, sexual promiscuity, immodest dress, and the use of profanity are among the transgressions that individuals commit who are of “the world,” and therefore “impure,” “unholy,” and “unclean.” By contrast, refraining from such activities constitutes a sanctified life, a life that is pure, clean, and pleasing to God.

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115 Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, 47 and 75-86. In her work, Butler lays out the specific behaviors that the sanctified Pentecostal church has historically condemned. Butler indicates that “conquering desires to engage in ungodly practices like snuff dipping, smoking, drinking, fornication (sex outside of marriage), and wearing immodest dress provided the outward hallmark of the sanctified life.” Although Butler’s book covers the years 1911-1965, such coded words imply the same meanings in the contemporary moment.

116 Ibid.
These coded terms, which are not clearly defined in either conversation, reify the very strictures that each artist purports to deconstruct. While they are critiquing the church for adhering to rigid dichotomies that create anxieties about sex, they are simultaneously constructing dichotomies by reinscribing a distinction between the church and “the world,” “holy” and “unholy,” “clean” and “unclean.” Their deployment of such codes suggests that there is a “right” and a “wrong” way to be sexual. In Norful’s response, he claims that the young people only get “the deep stuff from the world.” Therefore, he believes that it is his responsibility to “pour into them [young people] according to the Word of God because everybody else [the world] is pouring into them.” His desire to pour into them according to the word of God implies his capitulation to a rigid, conservative binary that separates biblical principles from worldly ones, “holy” sexuality from “unholy” sexuality.

This demarcation that he constructs between “right” and “wrong” sexuality becomes all the more evident when he compares the body to “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” This scripture, found in 1 Corinthians 6:19, is often invoked in conservative faith communities to suggest that one should remain sexually abstinent in singleness and that sexual fulfillment should only be expressed within the confines of a monogamous heterosexual marriage. Therefore, Norful’s use of this scripture is significant in helping him to articulate his prescription for acceptable sexual behavior—sexuality is not harmful as long as it is embodied within the traditional paradigm of heterosexual marriage. His response reflects standard neo-Pentecostal theology: a theology that engages culture and taboo issues while maintaining traditional standards of

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asceticism and a belief in the authority of scripture.\textsuperscript{118}

This same discrepancy is found in the second conversation as well. Morton and CeCe’s use of the words “holy,” “pure,” and “clean” imply that romantic music is acceptable as long as it does not include some of the specific prohibitions outlined above. Whenever music condones the use of profanity, sexual activity outside the confines of traditional marriage, or any other promiscuous behavior that they deem as a transgression of biblical standards, then for Morton and CeCe, this is not acceptable music. CeCe’s statement that God wants “the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church” and her admonishment that Christians must recognize the difference between “love and lust” imply that expressions of “love” are limited to traditional marriage, while “lust” is designated for all sexual relationships that do not conform to this model.

Their use of coded terms thus complicates and obscures their intentions. Although they are attempting to transcend conservative ethics of piety, they simultaneously conform to those same ethics, undermining their attempts to be more liberal. Because they fail to clearly define what these codes mean, the terms for what constitutes acceptable music and acceptable sexuality seem to be merely subjective. Their rules for acceptable sexuality become all the more problematic when considering the degree to which BeBe and CeCe transgressed accepted norms of “proper” gospel music etiquette by flirting with the romantic regularly through their music. To be sure, many considered the music of BeBe and CeCe to be “unholy,” “unclean,” and “impure” due to the ambiguous lyrical content of their music, the infusion of secular music styles, and the “worldly” contexts in which their music was often played. Nevertheless, CeCe and Bishop Morton’s injunction that we must “keep it holy,” implies that they not only adhere to strict binaries concerning what constitutes acceptable sexual expression, but that they also know how to properly discern the difference between what is acceptable music and what is unacceptable.

\textsuperscript{118} Lee, T.D. Jakes, 5.
music. The underlying presumption in both conversations is that sexual desire is only a
component of spirituality insofar as one’s expression of desire aligns with their conservative
biblical understanding of how desire should be embodied.

Despite what may appear to be blatant contradictions and an imposition of subjective
standards in their discourses, these gospel artists believe that they are transcending longstanding
 taboo issues within the church and within the gospel industry. Their discourses reveal a
frustration with the established order and a desire to challenge conventional ideologies that reify
that order. By discussing sex and desire in an open forum, they believe that they are being
authentic about sexual desire and relationships without violating biblical principles. These
discourses not only reveal their commitment to discussing the connection between romance and
spirituality, but also the theological presumptions that undergird their commitments. A
discussion of the love album practice will further reveal the ways in which particular theological
commitments inform the musical creations of these gospel artists. In all four albums – *Sacred
Love Songs* and *Sacred Love Songs 2* by T.D. Jakes, *The Love Album* by Kim Burrell, and *God,
Love and Romance* by Fred Hammond – many of these same theological commitments will
resurface as motivational factors for their musical explorations. A discussion of each album will
reveal how gospel artists are using their love albums to demonstrate their commitment to
demystifying sex and debunking the myth that sex and spirituality are antagonists.

**Bishop T.D. Jakes: Sacred Love Songs**

Bishop Thomas Dexter Jakes (b. 1957) is the pastor of The Potter’s House, a megachurch
in Dallas, Texas, and is known nationally and internationally as a prolific preacher and orator.
After being invited as a keynote speaker at Carlton Pearson’s AZUSA Conference, Bishop Jakes
was propelled into national stardom.\textsuperscript{119} Due to his surge in popularity in the mid-nineties, Jakes continues to attract hundreds of thousands of individuals to his annual conferences.\textsuperscript{120} Jakes’s annual Woman Thou Art Loosed and Manpower conferences have filled stadiums, such as the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, Georgia, to maximum capacity.\textsuperscript{121} In 2004, Jakes began Mega Fest, a conference that combines both Manpower and Woman Thou Art Loosed. The first Mega Fest attracted more than 130,000 people and included preaching, business seminars, music concerts, fashion shows, and even comedy performances.\textsuperscript{122} Additionally, Jakes has sold millions of books, often landing him at the top of multiple bestsellers lists.\textsuperscript{123} Due to his unprecedented success as a preacher, writer, and entrepreneur, scholars have recognized him as arguably the most influential preacher of the neo-Pentecostal era.\textsuperscript{124}

Bishop Jakes’s tendency to engage cultural issues that are not normally discussed within church contexts and his adeptness at providing “saintly alternatives” for otherwise “worldly” activities are among the manifold reasons as to why he is regarded as the quintessential personification of the neo-Pentecostal movement. As part of his strategy to contextualize Christianity with contemporary cultural issues, Jakes often discusses sex openly within religious contexts. In his study of T.D. Jakes, Shayne Lee states that a part of Jakes’s appeal lies in his ability to broach issues that are considered to be taboo. “Jakes knows that sex sells even in

\textsuperscript{119} Lee, \textit{T.D. Jakes}, 65. Carlton Pearson is a well-known African American preacher. Under the tutelage of popular Pentecostal televangelist Oral Roberts, Pearson became one of the most popular televangelists from the eighties until the mid-nineties. Pearson played a pivotal role in serving as a bridge between black and white Pentecostal traditions and communities. He was the first African American to be a host on predominantly white religious networks - he was a guest host on Praise The Lord Network (PTL), owned by Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, and was the first African American to host his own show on Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), owned by Paul and Jan Crouch. Because of his access to these networks, Pearson was able to introduce many other black Pentecostals, including Bishop Jakes, to the Bakkers and the Crouches, giving black Pentecostals a larger and more diverse platform. The AZUSA Fellowship was formed by Pearson in the eighties in order to build a network of predominantly black, but also interracial, neo-Pentecostal churches. The title of the fellowship was inspired by the Azusa Revival of 1906, which was the beginning of the rise of Pentecostalism in America. Shayne Lee writes that the AZUSA Fellowship “was an attempt to revisit the fervor and power of the early Pentecostal revival through a network of like-minded Christians from all over the country.” One of the most significant aspects of the fellowship was the annual Azusa Conference, which attracted thousands every year to hear the most prominent preachers and gospel musicians. See Lee, \textit{T.D. Jakes}, 38-44. Also see Walton, \textit{Watch This}, 83-86.

\textsuperscript{120} Lee, \textit{T.D. Jakes}, 81.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 75. Woman Thou Art Loosed and Manpower are conferences founded by Bishop Jakes in the mid-nineties in order to address issues that are gender-specific from a biblical perspective. See Walton, \textit{Watch This}, 106.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 73-74.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 2.
Christendom,” he claims. Lee then goes on to state that “because many churches eschew sexual talk, Jakes profits from an untapped market of Christians who are hungry to explore and appraise sexual energy in a godly context.”

One of the ways in which Jakes has reached that untapped market that desires to discuss sex from a godly perspective is through the release of love song albums. Released in 1999, Sacred Love Songs shows Bishop Jakes attempting to promote a more comprehensive spirituality that incorporates sexual desire. On the cover of the album are red satin sheets, which reflect the sexual undertones embedded in the lyrical content throughout the album (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Cover photo for Sacred Love Songs.

Sacred Love Songs was marketed mainly to women as evidenced by the very last page of the CD liner notes written by Bishop Jakes: “I am so honored to have the chance to share my Sacred Love Songs. I hope that it inspires the very best of relationships for The Lady, Her Lover, And Her Lord.” “The Lady, Her Lover, And Lord” is the title of one of the more popular songs from the album and is also the title of his bestselling book published in 1998. Moreover, this same

125 Ibid., 88.
126 Jakes even has his own gospel music record label entitled Dexterity Sounds and has released multiple music projects that have made significant imprints in the gospel industry.
127 Lee, T.D. Jakes, 73.
title was the theme of his Woman Thou Art Loosed conference in 1998.\textsuperscript{128} The release of this album was therefore a constitutive component of a larger thematic series spearheaded by Jakes and served as another channel through which Jakes could posture himself as a voice for black women. Throughout the album, Jakes includes songs that empower women and that promote messages of restoration through intimate relationships and healing from unhealthy relationships. Jakes partners predominately with secular artists—Tamar Braxton, Shirley Murdock, and Jesse Campbell are among the artists who sing songs about love, sex, romance, and the complexities of relationships.

Bishop Jakes balances the music with relationship advice and also incorporates a romantic dialogue between him and his wife, Serita Jakes. Most striking about the album are his sexually tinged monologues that are interspersed during and in between songs and the ways in which he uses his sultry bass-baritone voice as a medium to construct sexual desire.\textsuperscript{129} By using his baritonal timbre, Jakes appears to draw upon conventional sonic codes from popular music that signify sex, evoking the vocal techniques of both Isaac Hayes and Barry White, and reworks them within a sacred context. Jakes thus appropriates sonic representations of masculine virility and sexual prowess from popular culture, presenting both a new kind of gospel and a new kind of preacher.

During the decade of the seventies, Isaac Hayes and Barry White were both sex icons, not only because of their imposing physique, but most notably, because of their resonant, baritone voices. From an early age, Hayes’s ability to reach down into the lower extremities of his vocal registration often elicited pandemonium from his female fan base.\textsuperscript{130} Hayes is probably most associated with the Oscar Award winning song, “Theme from Shaft” from the 1971

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Walton, \textit{Watch This}, 82. Walton briefly discusses Jakes’s love albums and refers to him as a “sanctified Barry White.”
blaxploitation film *Shaft*, in which he uses his deep voice to give the music a sexual flair. Even more so than Hayes, Barry White’s voice epitomized sexual virility throughout the seventies. Infamous for his low, bass monologues injected at the beginning and throughout the duration of his songs, White’s voice was known for possessing an infectious sex appeal. Both of his 1974 number one hits “Can’t Get Enough of Your Love, Babe” and “You’re the First, the Last, My Everything” begin with sexual monologues, in which White swoons his significant other, expressing his love and sexual passion for her. For example, at the beginning of “Can’t Get Enough of Your Love, Babe” White begins the song with a narrative in which he uses his deep voice as a hypnotic device to lure in the listener: “I’ve heard people say that too much of anything is not good for you, baby. But, I don’t know about that. As many times as we’ve loved and we’ve shared love and made love it doesn’t seem to me like it’s enough. It’s just not enough, baby. It’s just not enough.” As White soared to the top of the charts during the seventies, his voice began to establish a new precedent for sonic embodiments of masculine sexuality within popular culture.

The way in which White used his baritone voice as a sonic mechanism of arousal is strikingly parallel to how Jakes uses his voice to construct sexual desire. Jakes’s preference for musical representations of sexual romance from the 1970s becomes evident when examining the musical content of *Sacred Love Songs 2*, his sequel to *Sacred Love Songs*. On this album, songs like “Let’s Stay Together” (1972) and “Inseparable” (1975) are sung by R&B artist Ledisi and gospel singer Karen Clark-Sheard respectively. Furthermore, in an interview that aired on TBN (discussed more in detail later), Jakes openly acknowledges his preference for seventies love music, citing songs like “If Loving You Is Wrong” by Al Green as ideal representations of “real”
love music. \(^{131}\) His preoccupation with the seventies yields credence to the notion that Jakes’s guttural semiotic codes of sexual desire heard throughout *Sacred Love Songs* may have in fact been directly influenced by the sonic representations of masculine sexuality propagated by Barry White during the seventies.

Even if Jakes did not intentionally model his vocal approach after White, the popularity of White’s vocal approach nevertheless makes Jakes’s guttural encodings immediately recognizable, instantly communicating to the listener the sexual effect that Jakes is attempting to convey. Throughout his love album, Jakes deploys the same guttural codes often used by White as devices to induce arousal and sexual hypnosis. In fact, the similarities between Jakes and White are so striking that religion scholar Jonathan Walton referred to Bishop Jakes as “a sanctified Barry White.” \(^{132}\) His vocal simulations of bodies in motion deconstruct the image of the chaste bishop and transform him into an individual with sex appeal. His first spoken monologue on the album does the work of preparing his followers for what is to come: a new, sexual Bishop Jakes.

Immediately prior to the entrance of Jakes, the roar of ocean waves can be heard followed by the sound of string instruments. The two-part string melody begins on E♭5, then moves in contrasting melodic motion, and then in descending minor tenths. In this descending motion both string parts gesture toward F, while the upper string part creates a temporary suspension on G, before finally resolving on F. The sound of the ocean waves and the contrasting and descending melodic string pattern create a romantic effect, setting the scene for the entrance of Jakes’s breathy, baritonal, “Barry White-esque” monologue. As the strings continue to play, Jakes begins:

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\(^{132}\) Walton, *Watch This*, 89.
And the word said, “Husbands love your wives as Christ hath loved the church and gave himself for it.” Now there’s a real lover. You see my friend a good lover is more than hips, lips, and fingertips. It is the ability to hold the cold wind of life in your hot hands until the wind warms under your loving touch. It is standing by the bed until the light goes out in my eyes and you kiss my face one final time. It is the ability to stay with me until the machines stop and the ventilator ceases to pump air into my lungs. And I speak one last time or squeeze your hand. If you ever have to fight a real storm, you will need a lover.

Jakes’s opening monologue, which speaks of the power of unconditional love between two lovers, sets the tone for the entire album. It immediately informs the listener that this is a different presentation of subjectivity from Jakes that includes the erotic—a subjectivity that many of his conservative followers are unaccustomed to within a religious context. In the event that his followers might question his spiritual integrity, Jakes makes the same rhetorical move as CeCe in the previously mentioned interview by invoking Ephesians 5:25 (“Husbands love your wives as Christ hath loved the church....”) as biblical justification for discussing sex. These words also serve as a segue into the next song, as the following song speaks of the power of enduring love and romance.

After Jakes finishes his monologue, the first song that is heard is “The Lady, Her Lover and Lord” featuring R&B singer, Shirley Murdock. The sound of chimes and the electric guitar open the song. The serenity of the electric guitar undergirds Murdock’s vocal improvisations, which are sung in a breathy falsetto tone on nonsense vowel sounds. Underneath her improvisations, Jakes deeply mutters: “Who can find a virtuous woman,” a scripture taken from Proverbs 31:10. After this brief section of improvisation, the downbeat signals the entrance of the chorus. The background vocals then sing the chorus: “She found herself, she found her lover for life / Then the two of them joined together in the Lord / Now she’s complete, A three-fold woman, one accord / The Lady, Her Lover and Lord.” This chorus is supported by a consistent bass backbeat that is evocative of R&B/Hip-Hop music, which musically and rhythmically
energizes the romantic lyrical content. The main message of this song is about a woman who has experienced a great amount of grief in her past. This grief, however, is healed through meeting her husband, who, according to verse one, “glued the pieces of her broken dreams” and loved “back her self-esteem.”

From the outset of the song, Bishop Jakes begins interweaving guttural, sexual moans and groans into the melodic and lyrical fabric of the song. As soon as the chorus sings the first line, Jakes utters a deep “mmm” that signifies erotic pleasure. After Murdock finishes the first verse, Jakes then reenters with a quiet and passionate “oh yeeeeaaah,” right before the background singers reenter to sing the chorus. As the second utterance of the chorus proceeds, Jakes echoes the background singers, passionately repeating their sung words with spoken words, as though narrating the text.

The second utterance of the chorus transitions into another monologue in which Jakes further animates the song by using his voice as a desire mechanism: “She searched and wondered and tried to find herself some peace. After man after man she couldn’t find no real relief. She’d like to died and there was sometimes she broke down and cried. But she kept reminding herself that the Lord was on her side-aaahhh.” Jakes strategically adds on the “aaahhh” as a kind of playful, erotic suffix to intensify arousal. This juxtaposition of sacred lyrics with erotic vocal inflections reaches its culmination at the end of the bridge. The words to the bridge portray the man as the “knight in shining armor” who sweeps his lover off of her feet and helps her to start life anew. As Murdock sings the lyrics to the bridge—“He pulled her life together, kissed and made her better / The missing part in her is now complete / What God has joined together, it’s bound to last forever….”—Jakes simultaneously mutters marriage vows underneath her vocals: “Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?” At this point, the music begins
gradually to build in intensity leading to the climax at the end of the bridge. Jakes uses this musically climactic moment to simulate sexual climax, intoning what sounds like an orgasmic release: “You’ve gotta have her and hold her every day of your life! Aahh Yeeaaaah!!!” The collision of musical and sexual climax is signified by a half step modulation, from F-sharp major to G major. This modulation is followed by a dramatic break in the music, at which Jakes’s “Aaahh Yeeaaaah!!” is vigorously uttered, serving as the culmination of the entire song.

Such simulations of ejaculation are most evocative of the verbal releases heard in some of Barry White’s music. One such example is his 1973 chart topping song “Never, Never Gonna Give You Up.” At the very beginning of this song, various guttural sounds are incorporated into his musical soundscape, simulating pleasure and climax—deep inhalations and exhalations, sighs of erotic bliss and release comprise the first minute and a half before the song settles into a relaxed dance groove. However, in contrast to White, Jakes consistently uses language throughout this song that is unequivocally sacred while simultaneously using a vocal inflection that is highly erotic. By integrating theological language with guttural codes of signification, he strategically reconciles the sexual with the spiritual. His deeply intoned narrations interwoven between the sung lyrics of the chorus heighten the sexual intensity of the sacred text and enable the maintenance of a consistent aura of desire throughout the song. A far cry from his Sunday morning preacher-like cadence, his deep, sonorous vocal texture defies traditional vocational prescriptions for what is possible for a prominent conservative bishop.

The lyrics to “The Lady, Her Lover, and Lord,” reflects Jakes’s overall ministerial preoccupation with women’s issues. Jakes’s image and popularity have been largely defined by his efforts to target what he believes to be the major concerns impacting women. Issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse are among the regularly invoked topics that Jakes employs in
his conferences and Sunday morning messages to appeal to women.\textsuperscript{133} In contrast to many of his male pastoral colleagues, Jakes has unquestionably supported female preachers and pastors, often allowing the likes of Juanita Bynum, Paula White, and Claudette Copeland to grace the stage and preach at some of his conferences. Moreover, Jakes also allows women to occupy leadership positions on his ministerial staff.\textsuperscript{134} Bestselling books like \textit{Woman, Thou Art Loosed!} (1993), \textit{The Lady, Her Lover, and Her Lord} (1998), \textit{God’s Leading Lady} (2002) all demonstrate his commitment to encourage women to maximize their potential and realize their identity.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, the message of this song, which portrays the woman as the “damsel in distress” in desperate need of emancipation, embodies the essence of Jakes’s market brand.

Despite Jakes’s repeated attempts to speak for women and position himself as an advocate for gender equality, many critiques have been leveled against Jakes claiming that he capitalizes off of the vulnerability of black women and reifies gender inequality. Indeed, the lyrics to this song undoubtedly capitulate to a stereotypical narrative that disempowers the woman and portrays her as utterly hopeless without the guidance of her man. Lines such as “He pulled her life together, kissed her, made her better” postures the woman as being at the mercy of the man and totally dependent on him for restoration. Jakes has often spoken of women as the “weaker vessels” while providing the caveat that weakness does not imply inferiority. Rather, for Jakes, weakness means that she is more soft and delicate, “strength in silk wrappings” as it were.\textsuperscript{136} These kinds of lyrics therefore reinforce Jakes’s propensity to conform to gender essentialisms, in which the woman is the weaker sex whose success is primarily contingent upon the heroic, salvific power of a man.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{133}Walton, \textit{Watch This}, 118.
\textsuperscript{134}Lee, \textit{T.D. Jakes}, 129.
\textsuperscript{135}Ibid., 126-135.
\textsuperscript{136}Ibid., 132.
This same rhetoric of female dependency is present within the dialogue that takes place at the end of the album between Bishop Jakes and his wife Serita. During this dialogue, entitled “Pillow Talk,” Jakes and Serita discuss the emotional pain that she has been experiencing. Bishop Jakes then reveals his desire to help her through her pain and his frustration with his inability to do so. In the background can be heard the same melody and bass backbeat from “The Lady, Her Lover, and Lord.” Before the dialogue begins, another muscular “mmm” is muttered by Jakes. His deep vocal tone again serves as a medium to construct desire. The conversation ends with a double entendre that has both spiritual and sexual connotations:

**BISHOP JAKES:** I have to tell you that I love you and when I see you going through changes and in pain it bothers me. I feel like I’m a man, I’m supposed to be able to do something. I’ve tried to do many things but I know, I know, I know you’re still hurting.

*SERITA:* Yeah, it’s kind of hard to explain how I really feel. I really appreciate everything that you’ve done. The flowers and the trips, and everything’s been so nice.

**BISHOP JAKES:** You like that?

*SERITA:* Yeah. But you know what? The one thing that really, really helps me when my heart is broken, is to hear you minister the word of the Lord. I found life in it. And that’s when the healing really, really began.

**BISHOP JAKES:** Well if I can do, I mean, I wanna be a part of the healing process. You tell me what you need and I’ll be there for you.

*SERITA:* I believe that. My usher.

**BISHOP JAKES:** Yeah.

*SERITA:* You’re my lover, I’m your lady. Usher me into the presence of the Lord.

**BISHOP JAKES:** Come on and go with me.

Serita’s request to be ushered “into the presence of the Lord” is a double entendre—a spiritual and a sexual invitation. The implication is that Bishop Jakes has the supernatural ability to heal her from her emotional infirmities through both spiritual counsel and sexual gratification.
But the dialogue also portrays Serita as if her healing is solely predicated upon the assistance and sexual satisfaction of a man. Though Jakes often encourages women not to simply “wait around for Prince Charming to sweep them off their feet,” this dialogue certainly reinscribes the “Prince Charming” myth as Jakes attempts to rescue Serita from her emotional distress. This album reflects the tensions embedded in Jakes’s theology—at the same time that he seeks to empower women, he frustrates his own liberating aims by conforming to traditional gender distinctions.

Jakes nonetheless believes that *Sacred Love Songs* helps to destigmatize conversations about sex within the church. The channeling of Barry White’s vocal tone to manipulate desire aids Jakes in placing both sexual desire and spirituality in conversation. While Jakes consistently conforms to traditional gender constructions, his vocal delivery and overall message undoubtedly deviate from conventional norms. A message in the CD liner notes best reflects Jakes’s desire to reconcile desire and spirituality:

> In an endeavor to reach the base needs of the family and to provide biblical answers to marital ills, T.D. Jakes has comprised these medicinal lyrics and the healing balm of music. These songs address the need to make Christ the center of our personal relationships. It is our hope that they will heal marriages, inspire singles, and bless those of us who enjoy or admire godly relationships. We are praying that couples all across the nation will experience the positive message and be healed. This project has been called the twenty-first century’s Song of Solomon. . . . Our nation has been bombarded with decadence, the destruction of morality and increasing divorce. We choose to light a candle rather than to scream at the darkness. . . . At last spiritual sensitivity to our sensual lives.

The liner notes suggest that Jakes conceives *Sacred Love Songs* not only as a method to unite sensuality and spirituality but also as a strategy to address what he perceives as the destruction of morality and increasing divorce. *Sacred Love Songs* ultimately presents another angle of

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138 Ibid., 129.
139 Ibid., 134. Because of Jakes’s efforts to advocate for female leaders within the church as well as his tendency to conform to conventional gender norms, Lee describes Jakes’s theological platform as embodying a feminist/anti-feminist duality.
spirituality that Bishop Jakes believes is more real and inclusive in that it addresses the realities with which Christians are daily confronted—realities such as relationships and sexual intimacy.

*Sacred Love Songs 2*

Before releasing *Sacred Love Songs 2*, his follow up to *Sacred Love Songs*, Bishop Jakes appeared on the Trinity Broadcasting Network to advertise his CD. With platinum selling gospel artist Donnie McClurkin (b. 1959) as the interviewer, Jakes discusses his reasons for recording another album of sacred love songs and critiques the church’s reaction and discomfort with his new approach to music making. During this interview, Jakes and McClurkin mock the sanctimonious tendencies of pious churchgoers who resist expressions of desire through music:

McCLURKIN: Music is changing. Bishop, you have a new CD that’s out called *Sacred Love Songs 2*. Now, tell us about the sacred love songs, which we really don’t get in the religious world, because, you know, our songs are “Nearer My God To Thee,” [audience laughs] while you’re walking down the aisle to get married, you know [Jakes laughs]. So tell us about your sacred love songs.

JAKES: Well, I did one, so they shouldn't be quite so shocked with two as they were with one. [Exhales sarcastically and laughs. Audience then laughs.] I did *Sacred Love Songs* and it was amazing, you know. It was amazing. [Audience claps] And people used it in their weddings, they used it in their marriages, they used it in their relationships, and it was wonderful. My wife and I did segments on it. We talked a little bit, you know, that other side that people don’t see,

McCLURKIN: Hey, hey!! [laughs] I’m sorry.

JAKES: but must exist, because if you got a children’s church, you gotta have an other side somewhere. [laughs] But it’s funny because sometimes, and I’m not saying this defensively because frankly so far nobody’s really come out and fought but they will in a minute. That’s part of it. But isn’t it funny that we have a Bible with the Song of Solomon in it…

McCLURKIN: And nobody ever talks about it.

JAKES: And we’re really cool with that.

McCLURKIN: Yeah.

JAKES: The Song of Solomon doesn’t say nothin’ about God in the whole book. It’s
talkin’ about breast and thighs and all this stuff. [audience laughs and claps] Well it is! It is sayin’ it! Don’t get mad at me! . . . And here is the problem: the church has given the responsibility of teaching what love is to the world. And the world has started teaching our children that it’s about sex. Okay, so we grew up in a time . . . we would sing, “Once, Twice, Three Times a Lady,” stuff like that. “If Loving You Is Wrong I Don’t Wanna Be Right.” And, you know, “Colour My World” and all that kinda stuff. Some other stuff, I won’t go into all of it. [laughs] You know, but we sung [sic] about love. These kids talkin’ ‘bout: “Do you want it over here, do you want it over there.” It’s all about sex, okay. Now, we’re wondering why we’re losing marriages, why we’re losing relationships, why we’re losing everything else. It’s because we’re not talking about love. So we wanna bring sacred love songs back and we’ve got a bunch of artists. . . . They’re all committed to doing this project to bring love back in style.\textsuperscript{140}

McClurkin begins the exchange by mimicking those in the “religious world” through his invocation of a nineteenth century traditional hymn, “Nearer My God To Thee.” Jakes then adds to the mimicry with his exaggerated exhalation, which was intended to communicate his frustration with traditionally minded Christians who demonize sex. Jakes once more invokes the Song of Solomon as his justification for discussing sex and uses the Hebrew Bible narrative as a gateway to link the natural with the supernatural. Jakes’s discussion about “breast and thighs” induces laughter from the audience and mumblings of discomfort to which Jakes retorts defensively (“Well it is!”). The eruption of laughter from the audience takes place not only because the conversation is about sex, but also because of his ecclesial position as a bishop. Because of the level of reverence and respect often bestowed upon bishops, Jakes’s transparency about sex resists the assumption that bishops are asexual and disrupts accepted norms of clergy subjectivity. In fact, his statement that his \textit{Sacred Love Songs} album divulges the “other side that people don’t see” further reveals the ways in which his transparency about sex facilitates the refashioning of the self. That is to say, his sexual discourse fosters the recreation of his self-presentation by positioning him as a fully sexual being.

\textsuperscript{140} Jakes, “TD Jakes & Paula White on TBN with Donnie McClurkin May 13, 2011 Part 3 of 3,” YouTube video, \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIPi_5K-sdZU}. 
However, reminiscent of Norful and CeCe, while attempting to eradicate the partition between desire and spirituality, he simultaneously creates a distinction between the church and the world. Although Jakes mocks hyper-conservatism, his remark that the church has the responsibility to rescue sex from its perverted, “worldly” state and teach about love the “right” way imposes a conservative standard on the manner in which sexual desire should be expressed. Moreover, as referenced earlier, his nostalgic rendering of what music used to be and what it has become is undoubtedly a romanticization of the seventies, which for Jakes represents the “good ol’ days.” Jakes’s predilection for the seventies becomes most evident when he invokes songs like “Colour My World” (1970), “If Loving You Is Wrong” (1972), and “Three Times a Lady” (1978), all of which are chart-topping hits from the seventies. Jakes therefore idealizes musical representations of love and romance from the seventies and posits them as exemplars for what contemporary music should embody.

To be sure, songs from the past were also marred with salacious content and were often interpreted by conservative churchgoers as being antithetical to their understandings of spirituality. In the song, “If Loving You Is Wrong,” the soloist sings about and even defends an adulterous relationship, a relationship that conservative Christians during both the seventies and the twenty-first century would unhesitatingly condemn. Despite his glamorization of the past, Jakes maintains that marriages are being lost because love has been neglected. By discussing the decline of marriage in the church, as referenced in the aforementioned statistics on divorce, Jakes articulates his belief that his project is a practical strategy toward addressing the Christian anxiety concerning increasing divorce.

Jakes’s reference to the success of his first love album, Sacred Love Songs, may also suggest that the creation of Sacred Love Songs 2 was not only spiritually motivated, but also

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economically driven. *Sacred Love Songs* peaked at number two on the Top Gospel Albums Billboard chart, doubtlessly providing enough incentive for a sequel. Although he openly acknowledged the commercial success of the first love album, Jakes yet maintains that his true motivation is to posit a more real and complete definition of spirituality that calls into question conventional perceptions of sex and sexual desire.

*Sacred Love Songs 2* was released in 2011 under Jakes’s record label, Dexterity Sounds. Unlike *Sacred Love Songs*, which involved mainly secular artists, Jakes utilizes more well-known gospel artists such as Karen-Clark Sheard, Fred Hammond, Micah Stampley, and Bishop Paul S. Morton. Jakes’s incorporation of famous gospel artists seems to be both intentional and strategic. The inclusion of A-list gospel artists helps to sanctify the romantic content of the lyrics and disarms churchgoers who may have otherwise been resistant to such lyrics. This is a significant move, especially considering that the vast majority of songs on this album do not reference God and several of the songs are rearrangements of popular secular songs from the seventies and the nineties. *Sacred Love Songs 2* is essentially a compilation of older songs mixed with newer songs that are strategically marketed to the church and designed to offer Christians a different perspective through which to understand their spirituality.

One of the songs on this album entitled “Inseparable,” originally released by Natalie Cole in 1975, is covered by gospel great Karen Clark-Sheard. Considering that Sheard is one of the members of the legendary gospel group, The Clark Sisters, and is known for having grown up in the conservative Church of God in Christ denomination, Sheard’s performance of a love song definitely defies her usual gospel persona and resists the conservative standards of sexual

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142 “TD Jakes Sacred Love Songs—Awards,” AllMusic, accessed October 21, 2014, [http://www.allmusic.com/album/sacred-love-songs-mw0000602607/awards](http://www.allmusic.com/album/sacred-love-songs-mw0000602607/awards). Although there are websites that indicate the chart history of Jakes’s albums, there are no public documents that reveal the exact number of sales for either of his sacred love song albums.
propriety that are often associated with her Pentecostal roots. Moreover, the fact that Sheard is currently the wife of Bishop J. Drew Sheard, a prominent pastor and bishop who serves on the General Board of the Church of God in Christ, makes her appearance on this album all the more unique. Contrary to Cole’s version, which uses the piano as the main instrument in the introduction, the instrument of choice in the introduction of Sheard’s version is the saxophone. The use of the saxophone gives the song a more sexually seductive allure before the entrance of Sheard’s vocals. The saxophone is deployed as an instrumental code of desire that helps to intensify the sexual intensity of the song. In order to understand the full significance of using the saxophone in this context as an instrumental code of desire, it is first necessary to discuss the cultural and historical import of the saxophone.

**The Reception History of the Saxophone**

In one of the only full-length scholarly studies on the saxophone, Stephen Cottrell traces in detail the reception history of the saxophone and underscores the degree to which it has historically signified sex. In the early part of the twentieth century, the saxophone was often perceived by moralists as being responsible for the moral decadence of society due to its ability to induce sexually suggestive dancing. Because the saxophone was commonly associated with dance music in the twenties and thirties and with jazz clubs, a context that was often understood to involve lasciviousness and promiscuity, the saxophone was perceived as precipitating the decline of social values and the dissolution of youth culture.

The conflation of the saxophone with lewdness can also be attributed to the gendered implications of its morphology. The structure of the saxophone has often been understood to

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144 “The General Board,” COGIC, accessed March 26, 2015, [http://www.cogic.org/administration/executive-branch/the-general-board](http://www.cogic.org/administration/executive-branch/the-general-board). Bishop J. Drew Sheard is currently a member of the General Board of the Church of God In Christ. The official website of the Church of God in Christ indicates that the General Board is comprised of the leaders of the church and “is responsible for establishing and executing policies for the membership, as well as sustaining and perpetuating spiritual order within the Church.”
145 Stephen Cottrell, *The Saxophone* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 312-313. Cottrell discusses dance moves like the turkey trot and the bunny hop that were considered degenerate by the more conservative members of American society.
resemble both male and female genitalia. While the soprano saxophone in particular has been characterized as resembling an erect phallus, the bell end of many S-shape models has also been interpreted as possessing feminine characteristics: “The bell end, with its flared opening held at the level of the hips and parallel to the groin, appears more suggestive of female genitalia than the male phallus.”\textsuperscript{146} The sexual and gendered meanings that are ascribed to the saxophone are reinforced by the position of the saxophone when it is played, as it is often played in between the legs.\textsuperscript{147}

The association of the saxophone with sex is also due to its ability to emulate the human voice. The saxophone’s ability to embrace a variety of timbral effects enables simulations of vocal expressivity that are unique and idiomatic to the instrument. Cottrell explains how through embouchure manipulation, saxophones are able to simulate vocal wails and moans that “provoke comparisons with the modulations of the human voice, and makes the saxophone for many an especially evocative instrument.”\textsuperscript{148} The word “moan” has broad implications that often include sex. As demonstrated earlier through Jakes’s Barry White intonations, moaning is “deeply suggestive sound” that “accompanies physical intimacy and particularly lovemaking.”\textsuperscript{149} Because moaning is often evocative of erotic activity, the saxophone has easily been interpreted as connoting sex. This moaning quality thus anthropomorphizes the saxophone, endowing it with a kind of physical, sexual energy that continues to impact popular cultural representations of this instrument.

Such popular representations that sexualize the saxophone are endless. Gil Ventura and Fausto Papetti were popular Italian saxophonists in the seventies who often conflated the sax with sex. Mostly known for covering popular songs and rearranging them in an “easy listening”

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 333.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 338.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 340.
style, their album covers often showed female nudity or would simply display the word “sax.” This kind of word play that emphasizes the homophonic relationship between “sax” and “sex” has been exploited by a variety of artists like pop saxophonist Candy Dulfer who used the title *Sexuality* for her 1990 album. The sexualization of the saxophone has also been ubiquitous in film. Movies such as *Casino Royale* (1967) and *Blade Runner* (1990) are two of the countless films that use the saxophone to signify sexual activity.

Because the saxophone has been historically depicted as encoding sexual intimacy, it is a fitting addition for Sheard’s cover version of “Inseparable.” However, not only is its inclusion ideal as a code for sex, but it is also ideal because it has often been perceived as a conventional signifier of resistance. The timbre of the saxophone has been historically perceived as non-conformist because it resists accommodation to the sonic tapestry of the traditional symphony orchestra, for its sound quality has been “felt to mask the musical details of the other woodwinds.” The variety of timbral effects that are available to the saxophone, from breathy to raspy, do not conform to the pure, pristine aesthetic that is often expected of European classical music. Furthermore, in addition to the saxophone being construed as an instrument of sonic resistance, during the first half of the twentieth century it also came to be interpreted as an instrument of social resistance. The saxophone served as an instrumental conduit through which African Americans could express social progress—“the instrument’s modernist associations connoted a more progressive image than that offered by the banjo and the blues.” Thus in the face of racial discrimination, the saxophone became a symbol of black agency, an instrumental sign of upward social mobility that resisted dominant narratives about the social depravity and

150 Ibid., 335.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 340.
153 Ibid., 229.
154 Ibid., 342.
155 Ibid., 320
primitivism of African Americans. Cottrell states it best when he asserts that “jazz in general, and the saxophone in particular, can be seen as cultural mechanisms by which resistance was offered and change sought.”

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I have taken the time to discuss the reception history of the saxophone because it informs how I analytically interpret “Inseparable.” A discussion of the sax’s history illumines the significance of the sax’s inclusion in this song as both an instrumental code of desire and defiance within the love album context. Similarly, I interpret Sheard’s use of her voice, particularly her use of the melisma, as a mechanism to express desire and to challenge a traditional conservative theology that often marginalizes sex. Due to the saxophone’s reception history as a signifier of both sex and resistance, it makes for an ideal musical companion to Sheard’s vocal performance of “Inseparable.” Throughout this piece, I interpret the interplay between Sheard’s voice and the saxophone as a kind of desire-driven conversation that articulates both sexual longing and defiance against traditional notions of spiritual propriety.

In Natalie Cole’s version, which is in A-flat, the introduction is played by the piano (Example 1.1).

![Example 1.1](image)

Example 1.1 — (I have only transcribed the right hand, which contains the main melody.)

During the introduction of Sheard’s version, however, the saxophone replaces the piano and is harnessed as an instrumental device to encode sexual longing. In the saxophone intro (Example 1.2), the rhythmic pulse also changes significantly. Rather than playing in the consistent simple

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156 Ibid., 317.
meter that is heard in Cole’s version, Sheard’s version changes the rhythmic pulse to compound meter, in which each beat becomes subdivided into three small beats. It is also sung a half step lower in G major.

The change to compound meter creates a more relaxed, romantic groove, as the overall tempo of the song is slightly slower than Cole’s version. In Cole’s version, we hear temporary moments of compound meter in the piano during the instrumental transition between the first verse and the second verse, and between the second verse leading into the chorus. However, in Sheard’s version, the compound meter has far more of a lasting thematic presence, as it is sustained throughout the majority of the song. The slowed, relaxed pace of the song created by the change to compound meter, along with the moans and wails of the saxophone, participate in the intensification of passion.

After the instrumental introduction concludes, Sheard softly and subduedly sings:

“Inseparable / That’s how we’ll always be / Inseparable / Just you and me / It’s so wonderful / To know you’ll always be around me.” Sheard’s bright vocal timbre and her light vibrato create a romantic vibe that compliments the emotionally stirring introductory solo of the saxophone.

The beginning of the song is emblematic of the ongoing, flirtatious interplay that takes place throughout this ballad between the saxophone and Sheard that is both complementary and conversational.

This romantic interplay between Sheard and the saxophone continues throughout verse two. Although the piece begins with a compound metrical feel in the saxophone introduction, it is not until the second verse that the compound meter begins to consume the rhythmic pulse of
the entire song. As Sheard begins the second verse, “Incredible / That’s what you are to me / Incredible,” the saxophonist teasingly interjects improvisatory melodies of four to five notes, which color and ornament the main melody sung by Sheard. This romantic interplay continues throughout the bridge (“We’re like a flower to a tree / like words to a melody of love…”) and during the reiteration of the first verse. The end of the reiteration of the first verse marks the entrance of the saxophone solo interlude. At this point, the use of the saxophone as a semiotic code to construct desire becomes most apparent. In Cole’s version, she only sings the bridge (“We’re like a flower to a tree…”) once and then ends the song after reiterating the first verse (“Inseperable, that’s what you are to me...”). However, the ending of the song in Cole’s version marks the beginning of the solo interlude for the saxophone in Sheard’s version. The saxophone thus does the work of lengthening the song and expanding the duration of sexual passion that is felt throughout the song.

The deployment of the saxophone to expand and intensify the duration of passion is accentuated by a half-step modulation from G major to A-flat major, which signifies the beginning of the saxophone solo interlude. For eight measures, as the saxophonist takes lead, Sheard uses her hushed and breathy falsetto to playfully embellish the melody by interpolating florid melismas. Thus the flirtatious interplay is temporarily inverted, as the saxophone now becomes the main instrument driving the melody, while Sheard vocally supports it with light ornamentations. The harmonic modulation up a half step and the saxophone solo interlude reveal the importance of the saxophone’s role in this arrangement and the degree to which the overall effect of the piece is reliant upon the perception of the saxophone as a sonic signifier of eroticism.
After the eight bars of the saxophone solo interlude, the interplay is inverted once more as Sheard takes over the melody and repeats the bridge: “We’re like a flower to a tree / Like words to a melody of love / There’s no way we can break up / No words that can make us blow our thing.” Her repetition of the bridge leads to the climax of the song. At this pivotal juncture, the flirtatious interplay that takes place throughout the song, which can be interpreted as a type of musical foreplay, reaches its culmination, as both Sheard and the saxophonist climax simultaneously on the word “love” (Example 1.3).

In order to imbue the word “love” with seductive meaning, the saxophonist sits on E♭5, while Sheard sings “love” on C5. Sheard then showcases the vocal flexibility and virtuosity that she is well known for among gospel music audiences. At this point in the song, I interpret Sheard’s employment of the melisma as a vocal mechanism to intensify desire. She reaches up to the extremities of her range to A♭5, and then interjects a florid melisma that spans for over an octave down to F4, before resolving on A♭4. As Sheard increases her volume, embellishing the melody and showcasing her expansive range, the saxophonist simultaneously crescendos with her in a moment of mutual ecstasy. Sheard’s use of the melisma and the gradual crescendo of the saxophone encode sexual climax and intensify the meaning of the word “love” by coloring it with an erotic, seductive allure.
After the climax, the melisma is deployed once more, but this time for a different purpose as the song approaches its end. After we have experienced the ultimate musical climax during the repetition of the bridge, I interpret her final melismatic gesture, which lowers in pitch and intensity, as a musical simulation of the gradual subsiding of sexual excitement (Example 1.4).

The melisma therefore functions as a musical tool both to reflect escalating intensity and abating passion. During the final moments of the song, the melisma is a transitional device to transport the listener from climax to “pillow talk”—a four bar free improvisation, in which she playfully ad-libs, inserting lyrics that are not traditionally a part of the song. She sings, “Can’t do without you, hope you can’t do without me. You and me, me and you, together forever. That’s how it’s gonna be.” Once she finishes, the saxophonist then reenters for the final time to respond to Sheard’s improvisatory gesture and to conclude the song, ending the song on the leading tone, G.

My interpretation of the melisma as a desire mechanism is by no means an isolated moment in music history. Scholars have discussed how elaborate vocal ornamentations have been deployed as far back as the dawning of tonality to express desire. Susan McClary discusses how Renaissance and Baroque composers included the melisma to simulate erotic activity. McClary designates the ornamental flurries in Luzzaschi’s madrigal “Non sa che sia dolore” as part of the “gestures of desire” that characterize the piece. She even claims that the ornamental embellishments in Monteverdi’s “Duo seraphim” from his *Marian Vespers of 1610* evoke

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158 Ibid., 86-87.
“virtual bodies rubbing up against each other in erotic bliss.” The eroticism that saturated the virtuosic displays of Franz Liszt have also been explained by numerous scholars who have discussed the degree to which his compositional technique and performance persona were imbued with sexual passion. In a practice called the “circle,” high-ranking, aristocratic women would sit on stage around the piano as Liszt would display his virtuosic feats. McClary has compared Liszt to popular music icons like Elvis and David Lee Roth citing that their virtuosic personas and musical styles had the power to manipulate audiences through their “enactments of sexual power and desire.”

Indeed the use of the melisma as a mechanism of sexual power and desire is undeniably a common technique in popular music. Luther Vandross commonly used this technique as a seductive mechanism and was especially known for how he used his mellow voice to sing an ascending melismatic scale to musically construct erotic desire. This ascending configuration would consistently provoke an ecstatic response from his admirers. In songs like “A House Is Not a Home” (Luther Vandross, 1981), musicologist Richard Rischar argues that the repeated chorus at the end of the song gave Vandross “a great deal of time in which to persuade and seduce the listener with his vocal talents.” The melisma can also be heard regularly as a desire enhancing configuration in the music of pop divas like Mariah Carey in “Vision of Love” (Mariah Carey, 1990) and Whitney Houston in “I Will Always Love You” (Bodyguard, 1992), in which Houston bellows out multiple strings of melismatic notes on the words “I” and “you” repeatedly throughout the entirety of the song. Because the ballad is unquestionably a genre whose “power resides in its ability to conserve romantic feelings,” Vandross, Carey, and

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159 Ibid., 94.
161 McClary, Feminine Endings, 151.
Houston’s use of the melisma heightened the level of sexual energy that is already present in the musical construction of the ballad. Current chart-topping diva Beyoncé Knowles also regularly employs this device in songs like “Halo” (I Am…Sasha Fierce, 2008) and “1 + 1” (4, 2011). I suggest that my interpretation of Sheard’s use of the melisma in “Inseparable” is therefore compatible with its use in both classical and popular music as a device to intensify the erotic undertones of the music and lyrics. To be clear, I am not advocating for the universal imputation of a sexual essence onto the melisma, nor am I claiming that this is the only way to interpret Sheard’s vocal technique. But I do believe that by interpreting the melisma as a code of desire in this context, our experience of the music can be enriched, granting us deeper insight into the theological agendas embedded in gospel love albums.

The seductive interplay that characterizes this arrangement of “Inseparable” offers a nuanced self-representation of Sheard as a gospel music artist. The sexual interaction between the saxophone and Sheard and the breadth of virtuosity that is expressed through her vocal technique during pivotal climactic moments display a more romantic side of Sheard that betrays her traditional COGIC upbringing. Due to its ability to intone vocal expression through moaning and wailing, the saxophone is a fitting conversational partner for Sheard’s sexual vocal inflections. Together, the saxophone and Sheard participate in a musical act of defiance by expanding conventional conceptions of acceptable sexual behavior within a conservative religious context.

Through both sacred love albums, Jakes challenges traditional standards of piety and church etiquette by marketing sexually charged lyrics to conservative church people. However, this liberating sexual ethic that he is purporting to be espousing is not without its limitations and restrictions. While transcending conservative standards of sexual respectability by simply

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163 Ibid., 409.
broaching the issue and discussing sex openly, throughout both albums he also conforms to restrictive, conservative standards by romanticizing and idealizing heterosexual marriage. In his critique of the black church’s sexual politics, E. Patrick Johnson argues that whenever the church addresses sexuality, “it does so by exhorting the glories of sexual expression between heterosexuals within the institution of marriage.”

Indeed, Johnson’s observation rings true with regard to Jakes’s sacred love song albums. Two moments during *Sacred Love Songs*, which have been referenced earlier, yield credence to Johnson’s claim: Jakes’s quotation of Ephesians 5:25 (“Husbands love your wives as Christ hath loved the church.”) and his utterance of traditional marriage vows during “Her Lady, her Lover, and Lord.” This same glorification of heterosexual marriage is also evident in *Sacred Love Songs 2*, which begins with Bishop Jakes uttering marriage vows at the very beginning of the CD: “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the sight of God and in the face of this company to celebrate the joyful union of this man and this woman in the holy matrimony, which is honorable, just, and instituted by God himself, signifying the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church.” After this opening statement, Jakes then leads the groom in reciting his marriage vows to his soon to be wife. Jakes also includes a homily later in the album and speaks about what he believes to be the meaning and purpose of marriage. This homily is introduced by Richard Wagner’s “Bridal Chorus,” the traditional wedding song that signifies the entrance of the bride.

A reference to the liner notes of *Sacred Love Songs* provides an explanation for Jakes’s preoccupation with marriage. Jakes is portrayed as having an earnest concern for what he

believes to be the preponderance of marital dysfunction, the increase in divorce, and the overall decline in morality:

In an endeavor to reach the base needs of the family and to provide biblical answers to marital ills, T.D. Jakes has comprised these medicinal lyrics and the healing balm of music. . . . As you listen to this music project know that it was birthed through prayer and meant to provide strength by understanding that marriage is a ministry and children a precious gift. . . . Our nation has been bombarded with decadence, the destruction of morality and increasing divorce. We choose to light a candle rather than to scream at the darkness. May the light of this music light up your home and warm your hearts as you share in the presence of God the benefits of holy matrimony.

Jakes discusses the institution of marriage as being in a state of emergency, citing divorce as one of the societal “ills” that he feels compelled to address. This statement conforms to the popular evangelical narrative that portrays marriage and the family as nearing a crisis. Jakes believes that his idealization of heterosexual marriage functions as a potential antidote to the perceived decline of the family and a progressive step toward rebuilding the Victorian ideal.

Rather than the glorification of heterosexual marriage functioning as the antidote to societal ills, some scholars argue that it actually serves to increase societal ills by stigmatizing those whose family structures and expressions of sexuality do not conform to the traditional, Victorian model. In the anthology Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection, Marvin M. Ellison argues that “traditionalists espouse the notion that the only acceptable sexual expression is heterosexual, marital, and procreative. According to conventional Christian mores, respectable people marry and restrain their sexuality by ‘settling down,’ thereby establishing themselves as responsible adults. In this schema, sexually active singles and especially gay men and lesbians are defined as ‘out of control’ because they live and love outside the marriage zone.”

Ellison therefore declares that the normalization of heterosexual marriage tacitly condemns unmarried heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals, labeling them as inferior and

substandard. Consequently, a deafening silence and a profound invisibility with regard to homosexuality and all other expressions of human sexuality remain the norm.

This silence and invisibility, according to ethicist Traci C. West, is exacerbated by the church’s tendency to idealize the “first family” as the prototypical family model for the church. She further explains that clergy “use their power and authority to protect this model as a representation of normative, ideal sexuality and make attempts to regulate the sexual practices of church members accordingly.” West might then interpret the romantic interplay between Bishop Jakes, the pastor, and his wife Serita, the first lady, as conforming to this typical “first family” model, while excluding other family structures that deviate from this traditional prototype. Thus, while Jakes is attempting to challenge the church’s sexual silence, his emphasis on heterosexual marriage as the normative template makes his silence about nontraditional sexual relationships even louder.

The normalization of heterosexuality in the church can also lead to the normalization of heterosexual sexual misconduct. Again, the work of E. Patrick Johnson provides further clarification concerning this dilemma. Johnson claims that even when the sexual transgressions of heterosexuals in the church are exposed, particularly male heterosexuals, their offense “is tempered by the fact that the sex in which they engage is still heterosexual.” He goes on to say that “indeed, a certain amount of heterosexual loose play is accepted as a normal part of the church community—even, or especially, among its anointed.” Heterosexuals are not “asked to leave the church” for their transgressions, but their homosexual counterparts are routinely excommunicated. The stigmatization of gays in the church is a result of what Michael Eric

167 E. Patrick Johnson, “Feeling the Spirit in the Dark,” 90.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 92.
Dyson calls erotic dishonesty: the denial of sexual expression and same-sex attraction for fear of reprisal and rejection.\textsuperscript{170} The lack of sexual honesty and transparency also inhibits the need to address concerns that are impacting the black community, such as HIV-AIDS, because of the stigma that remains attached to it as a gay disease.\textsuperscript{171} Dyson therefore argues that erotic dishonesty serves as an impediment to the union between the sexual and the spiritual because it is rooted in the belief that spirituality does not include a variety of erotic expressions.\textsuperscript{172}

Despite scholarly critiques that would portray Bishop Jakes’s definition of sexuality as myopic and culturally retrogressive, Jakes’s music and discussions reveal that he believes that being more transparent about heterosexual sexuality still presents a challenge to conservative church cultures that desire to silence conversations about sex altogether. Although he privileges heterosexual marriage as the goal to which one should aspire, Jakes’s attempt to reveal his more sexual side nevertheless transgresses conventional standards of what is expected for a man of the cloth in the conservative church. He transcends traditional standards of sexual propriety and redefines what is sexually acceptable for a prominent, ordained bishop. However, the very fact that Bishop Jakes believes that his transparency about heterosexual sexuality is a challenge to conservative church culture reveals the extent to which all forms of sexual expression within the black church remain taboo.

\textit{Kim Burrell: The Love Album}

Kim Burrell (b. 1972) is highly regarded as one of the most popular and celebrated solo artists in the gospel music industry today. Similar to most gospel artists, Kim Burrell grew up in the conservative Church of God in Christ under her father who was a pastor within the

\textsuperscript{170} Michael Eric Dyson, “When You Divide Body and Soul, Problems Multiply: The Black Church and Sex,” in \textit{Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality}, eds., Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 324-325; Also
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.; Also see Marla F. Frederick, \textit{Between Sundays}, 208.
\textsuperscript{172} Dyson, “When You Divide Body and Soul, Problems Multiply,” 318, 322.
denomination. In 2010, following in the footsteps of her father, Burrell became the founder and pastor of the Love and Liberty Fellowship Church based in Houston, Texas. Despite her recent emergence as a woman of the cloth, Burrell is best known for her exceptional vocal talent. After the release of her second album *Everlasting Life* in 1998, for which she won a Gospel Stellar Award for Contemporary Female Vocalist of the Year in 2000, Burrell became a mainstay in the world of gospel music. Despite her modest record sales that have not managed to compete with some of her platinum-selling contemporaries like Donnie McClurkin and Kirk Franklin, Burrell has still managed to maintain as much, if not more, popularity as her contemporaries because of her musically innovative vocal approach. Her raspy timbre combined with her innate ability to sing extraordinarily complex melismatic passages skillfully and effortlessly set her apart from most gospel and secular artists. Her vocal technique often incorporates intricate chromaticisms, dissonances, and unconventional scale patterns that are evocative of a jazz aesthetic, leading many fans and music critics to label her as “this generation’s Ella Fitzgerald.” Kim Burrell’s uncanny virtuosic abilities have led to multiple recording collaborations with a broad spectrum of music artists such as Harry Connick, Jr., Marvin Winans, Hezekiah Walker, Byron Cage, George Clinton, Richard Smallwood, Tye Tribbett, R. Kelly, and Stevie Wonder, among others.

A gospel special that aired on MTV, entitled “From the Church to the Charts,” revealed the degree to which Kim Burrell is revered, emulated, and often imitated among the most popular music artists, both gospel and secular. In this special, R&B celebrities such as Beyoncé,
Kelly Rowland, Pharrell Williams, Jessica Simpson, and Ginuwine all credited Kim Burrell with influencing their craft. In this tribute to Burrell, Kelly Rowland discussed the breadth of Burrell’s influence: “She’s influenced so many artists. She’s influenced my music. Of course she’s influenced Destiny’s Child. Brandy, Whitney, Mariah, everybody loves her! She’s gospel.”

Later in the broadcast, Beyoncé revealed how Burrell’s innovative vocal style has influenced the ways in which artists approach their music stylistically: “All of the real [emphasis hers] singers listen to Kim Burrell. All the real R&B singers, we all trying to do her ad-libs, we all trying to do her runs.” As further testament to Burrell’s popularity and influence, during the 2010 BET Awards, R&B songstress Alicia Keys invited Kim Burrell on the stage with her in a surprise appearance to sing a “gospelized” version of “If I Ain’t Got You.” Because Burrell is both a gospel singer and pastor, in this performance the word “Jesus” was substituted for the word “baby.” As evidenced by multiple glowing reviews and musical collaborations, Kim Burrell’s infectious influence has helped to shape and redefine what it means to be a singer. She has, in essence, created a new vocal standard.

Because of the magnitude of Burrell’s influence, her love album release made far more of a significant impact on the church than what the average gospel artist might have achieved. The 2011 release of The Love Album came soon after Burrell shed over one hundred pounds after having experienced three heart attacks. In an interview for Essence magazine, Burrell explains how The Love Album was the result of her accepting her new life after the weight loss and the product of expanding her definition of what it means to be religious: “The Love Album is

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179 Ibid.
probably the result of me allowing myself to live after the weight loss. It's also the result of me going into life a little bit further as a single woman who was once married, and not so religious that I forget I'm a woman and that I will eventually date and probably marry again.\textsuperscript{182} In this interview, Burrell confesses that prior to her weight loss, she had not fully reconciled her faith with her sexuality. By acknowledging her own struggle to reconcile both realities, she challenges the traditional presumption that a woman, especially a divorced and single woman, cannot simultaneously be religious while fully embracing her sexuality. Her weight loss and the creation of The Love Album thus both participate in the construction of a new feminine subjectivity in which Burrell reconciles and reconceptualizes both her spiritual and sexual selves.

In November 2013, in a musical series at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. entitled “American Voices,” hosted and curated by renowned opera soprano Renée Fleming, Burrell further explained why she chose to release an album about sexual love. After receiving a question from the audience about how she reconciles her spirituality with music about romance on her love album, Burrell offered a bold and straightforward answer:

\begin{quote}
BURRELL: Well, I concluded one day that I think that the charismatic black church has not given much of a platform to a mixture of the real world and church being intertwined. A balance. Everything is “hallelujah” all the time, almost until we’ll scare you and want you to be too religious at times. . . . And so when I decided to do The Love Album, my recent album, is because I wanted to tell the world, you can sing about God. But how do you sing about God and not sing about love? How do you sing about Jesus and not sing about love? And not just love, the unconditional love that sent him to the cross and the message that we know and believe. But, Christians have sex too. [\textit{audience laughs}] Did I just say that? Okay. Christians make love. They have children. And personally, as much as I love “Amazing Grace” I won’t get a baby on “Amazing Grace.” [\textit{audience laughs and applauds}] So, as amazing as grace is, that won’t be the sweet sound I get a baby to. So I decided as a Christian to sing songs that reflected the message from Earth, Wind, and Fire, Debarge. Different people that I was familiar with because it was very, very, \\
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid; It should be noted that Burrell also participated in a few secular projects that helped to set the stage for the release of her 2011 love album. In 2008, she collaborated with George Clinton in a song entitled “Mathematics of Love,” in which she sings about romantic love using mathematical terminology; She also released a Valentine’s Day YouTube video in 2010 with singer, model, actor Krishnar Lewis, in dedication to intimate, committed relationships. Throughout the video Burrell and Lewis engage in a flirtatious, musical duet, using both physical and musical gestures to emphasize romantic interplay: Kim Burrell, “Kim Burrell Valentines Day Video 2010,” YouTube video, 1:40, posted by “Tory McGriff,” June 28, 2010, \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ur-PSr_GOGL}.  

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very small listenings in our home. Our parents didn’t really let us listen to R&B music. They didn’t want us to engage in the message and we were very young. . . . Christians, chill out. Let’s not just sing about God thinking that’s the only kind of love we can sing about. Let’s sing about loving each other and getting married one day, and really [emphasis hers] loving each other.¹⁸³

Burrell critiques the conservative black church for its hyper-pietistic tendencies and its perpetuation of a dualistic paradigm that imposes a false binary between the spiritual realm and “the real world.” To emphasize her point, she uses mimicry twice during her response to critique the sanctimonious behavior of church people. Toward the beginning of her statement, she mimics church people by imitating religious terminology (“hallelujah”) and what she believes to be a pietistic façade. Also, much in the same way that Bishop Morton invoked “I Will Trust In The Lord,” and Donnie McClurkin invoked “Nearer My God To Thee,” Kim Burrell uses mimicry through her invocation of the well-known eighteenth century hymn “Amazing Grace.” Burrell is essentially asserting that Christians probably do not use songs from the traditional sacred canon as their background music for lovemaking. In other words, she is critiquing hypercritical Christians whose public performances of piety betray private reality and challenging traditional customs that deny the reality of erotic, sexual relationships. In order to expose and dismantle the false dichotomy that separates the body from the spirit, Burrell boldly proclaims: “Christians have sex too.” She therefore urges Christians to expand their definition of spirituality by challenging them to perceive their erotic, sexual desires as an extension of their private love for God: “How can you sing about God and not sing about love?” she asks. “How can you sing about Jesus and not sing about love?” Her rhetorical question is a call for conservative Christians to reconsider their understanding of God’s love and to conceive that love

as not only revealed through what Jesus did on the cross, but also through how humans relate to one another romantically and sexually.

Burrell also critiques and resists hyper-conservatism by referencing her strict, Pentecostal upbringing. Growing up in a COGIC environment under her father’s pastoral leadership, Burrell reveals that she could not listen to certain kinds of secular music. Her admonition for Christians to “chill out” is a statement against conservative Pentecostal strictures that resist sexual expression through music and that seek to bifurcate the realm of the metaphysical from the physical. However, similar to Bishop Jakes, her seemingly liberal approach to discussing sex is tempered by her conservative privileging of marriage as the relational, institutional model to which Christians should strive. This relational model is a necessary prerequisite for Burrell, particularly if two people really desire to love each other, which is code language for sex. Nevertheless, Burrell’s frank response transcends the conservative sexual ethics of black church culture and respectability. As corroborated by another interview, Burrell is urging Christians to show “love toward one another and take the mask off” and to “be real and just love genuinely.”

Throughout the entire construct of *The Love Album*, Burrell uses various visual images and musical gestures to destabilize accepted norms of subjectivity and sexuality for a single female and a pastor within a conservative religious community. The visual images found in the CD booklet and in her video, along with the melodic and harmonic nuances of her music, articulate a new kind of feminine subject position. The cover for Burrell’s love album immediately reveals a new presentation of self, which shows Burrell fashionably posing on top of the word “love” (Figure 1.3).

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Burrell sports a black jacket dress, white button up blouse, a fuchsia crinoline skirt, and black platform stilettos, signifying a new, sexy Kim Burrell and a new kind of spirituality. The picture in the middle of the CD booklet shows a more sassy and chic side of Burrell, with her hand stylishly placed on her right hip as a statement of newfound confidence and freedom in her womanhood (Figure 1.4).

The song “Sweeter” was released as the first and only single from *The Love Album*. The music video for “Sweeter” is set in Manzanillo, Mexico along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. The first shot of the video shows the ocean view with the sun and mountains glistening in the shadow of the horizon. Soon thereafter, is a shot of a nine million dollar mansion elevated on a mountain
that is positioned on the oceanfront.\textsuperscript{185} Once Burrell begins to sing the first words, “Today is another day,” she is seen lying in bed. While in bed, she is donned in a white, sleeveless lingerie nightgown trimmed in lace, with a matching overlaid white robe. On the nightstand next to the bed are lit, white candles, adding to the romantic ambience of the setting.

With her sultry and slightly raspy alto timbre, Burrell sings about the joys of being in an intimate relationship with a higher power and how that relationship becomes sweeter with each new day. Burrell begins: “Today is another day, new mercies I see / Lord, I’m in your hands, I know you’ll comfort me / It gets a little rough at times, don’t know what to do / Lord, I know you will help me make it through.” The chorus then sings: “Every day is sweeter.” As the same words are repeatedly sung in the chorus, Burrell ad-libs, interjecting phrases in between each choral utterance: “Sweeter than the day before, learning how to love you more.” The lyrics are accompanied by poly-textural percussive beats, resembling the sounds of bongos and cymbals. The light percussive patterns help to further accentuate the romantic tone of the setting and the staging. Although these lyrics sung by Burrell are explicitly religious, with overt references to God, the sexual ambience of the scenery and the sensual tone of the percussive beats present a nuanced understanding of God that resists conservative religious mores and engages the romantic.

In a radio interview with former gospel radio show host Cory “CoCo Brother” Condrey, which occurred not long after the release of the video “Sweeter,” Condrey discussed with Burrell the controversy that her sexual presentation was stirring among her church followers, especially in light of Burrell’s position as a pastor. In this conversation, Burrell expresses confidence in her sexiness, and even alludes to how her followers often interpret her singing in sexual terms: “I

think I’m sexy and sensual when I walk, when I talk. Even some people told me when I’m singing the gospel that they feel that from me. Maybe it’s a part of my personality.”

In a Valentine’s Day campaign ad that she released on YouTube in February 2010 one year before the release of “Sweeter,” Burrell performs a duet with Krishnar Lewis, who was also the director for her video “Sweeter.” During this video, Burrell uses her skillful singing technique—her ability to scat and construct complex melismas—as a musical strategy to evoke sexiness and to flirt with Lewis. In this video, it is clear that Burrell is using her facility to sing melismas and dissonant, chromatic tones as mechanisms to construct desire. This video was also perhaps a strategy to help Burrell prepare her conservative audience for her more sexual side that would soon be revealed to a wider audience through *The Love Album*.

Using the Valentine’s Day video and the conversation with “CoCo Brother” as a point of departure for analysis, I attempt to unpack certain musical semiotic codes in Burrell’s vocal approach throughout “Sweeter” that I believe might signify both defiance and desire. I musically interpret Burrell’s critique of hyper-conservatism by discussing her incorporation of dissonant notes. Her employment of dissonant notes refuses conformity and deviates from conventional harmonic expectations within solo gospel music. This is not to say that Burrell is the only gospel artist who uses dissonances in her music, as artists like Daryl Coley and Karen Clark-Sheard have also deployed the same technique in their music. However, the degree to which Burrell includes dissonant tones in her music in general, and in “Sweeter” in particular, and the level of specificity with which they are articulated are unconventional. Many of the dissonant iterations within this song are strategically couched within complex melismas. I interpret the dissonances and the intricate melismas as complicit in Burrell’s theological agenda to defy traditionalism and

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to reconcile desire with spirituality; that is to say, the dissonant deviations and melismatic ornamentations become semiotic codes of both defiance and desire. These chromatic tones are also at times dramatized by particular visual images and physical gestures that help to accentuate her dissonant deviations.

Burrell’s deviation from traditional norms is harmonically realized during the second utterance of the chorus when the song transitions from F-sharp minor to A major. At this point, Burrell sits on the lowered seventh (G♮), as she sings, “Every day,” creating a temporary dissonance (Example 1.5).

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\begin{align*}
\text{Voice} & \quad \text{R} \quad \text{R} \\
\text{E} & \quad \text{every} \quad \text{d} \quad \text{a} \quad \text{y}
\end{align*}
\]

Example 1.5 (A Major)

While singing the dissonance, the video briefly goes into slow motion, at which point Burrell is seen on top of a boat smiling joyously as her chiffon wrap sensually blows in the wind. The gradual reduction in the speed of the video at this point accentuates the sexual tension and passion that are felt in Burrell’s usage of a dissonance.

Particularly during the vamp, she interweaves dissonant tones into the melody while singing intricate melismas. Burrell sings: “You’re good on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, you’re getting sweeter. Every day makes me wanna add another day to my week, ‘cause you’re so sweet.” Once the background singers enter and repeat the days of the week, Burrell sings a complex melisma on the word “day” that incorporates a raised third (A♯), a raised sixth (D♯), and a lowered seventh (E♭) (Example 1.6).
Later in the vamp, right before the song fades out, Burrell again strategically alters the notes within the F-sharp minor scale, articulating her challenge to conventional norms. In an intricate nine-note melisma that spans an octave from C♯5 to C♯4, on the word “sweeter,” Burrell inserts a raised third (A♯) and a lowered second (G♮), as she cascades effortlessly down the scale (Example 1.7). As Burrell sings this melisma she playfully and flirtatiously sashays with her dress, gesturally capturing the allure embedded within this dissonant melismatic passage.

Burrell’s seamless and fluid interpolations of chromatic tones in her melismas, coupled with the visual gestures of seduction, perhaps expose the sexual eroticism and the message of defiance that are latent underneath the sacred content of the lyrics. These kinds of strategic harmonic deviations are extremely rare in gospel solo singing, which makes Burrell’s dissonant tones all the more effective.

Her act of defiance is further manifested through the consistent harmonic fluctuations heard throughout “Sweeter.” In McClary’s reading of Madonna’s 1986 ballad “Live to Tell,” McClary discusses how the pop icon fluctuated between the keys of D minor and F major. McClary interprets this fluctuation as a resistance mechanism against masculine cadential
endings that have dominated the history of Western European and pop music alike. McClary conceives Madonna’s nonconformity to traditional tonal expectations and techniques of harmonic closure as a kind of resistance against patriarchal domination, which assists Madonna in asserting her own feminine identity. By musically resisting a stable key center and tonal closure, McClary argues that Madonna maintains “flexibility in identity” and refuses definition.

This same oscillating harmonic schema is at work in Burrell’s musical construction. The song begins in F-sharp minor during the verse, but toys with its relative major, A major, in a conversational exchange throughout the song. Both verses dwell on F-sharp minor while the choruses consistently tend to stray toward its relative major. The oscillation of harmonies is also evident during the vamp, which seems to be harmonically indecisive with regard to the key center, as it flirts with both F-sharp minor and A major. Burrell thus resists harmonic expectations, as the song never settles in either key for an extended period of time. The song also refuses proper closure, as it ends in a fade out, rather than a strong cadential ending. Similarly, McClary points out that Madonna’s “Live To Tell” ends in a fade out, which McClary interprets as Madonna redefining feminine identity by not conforming to the expected cadential ending. The destabilization of a key center, the fade out, and the subversion of tonal harmonic expectations throughout “Sweeter” can likewise be interpreted as Burrell’s refusal to conform to traditional norms of female and vocational subjectivity. As she resists the terms of proper musical procedure, her defiance against conventional religious norms that repudiate sexual expression becomes increasingly evident.

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188 McClary, Feminine Endings, 159-160.
189 Ibid, 160.
190 Ibid. McClary states that Madonna ends “Live to Tell” with a fade out. She claims that the fade is a statement of resistance against musical conventions that emphasize strong cadential endings.
There are other pertinent moments in this video in which Burrell uses gesture to articulate a new subjectivity that are worth mentioning. By using certain gestural codes, Burrell expresses her newfound confidence with her slimmer physique. While the lyrical content is unequivocally sacred, her sensual gestural encodings might cause one to question who is actually the object of her affection, as her gestures obscure and complicate what is purportedly a religious message. In one particular scene, Burrell is standing outside on the balcony of the mansion wearing the same white, lingerie nightgown, while flirtatiously stroking her hair through her fingers as a male groundskeeper below takes notice. This conventional gestural signifier encodes sexual flirtation and implies her romantic interest in the groundskeeper. The fact that this motion is shown in slow motion, similar to the previously stated moment when she is on the boat, further accentuates the erotic undertones of this gesture. In another scene during the iteration of the chorus right before the beginning of the vamp, Burrell incorporates a gesture that looks as though she has suddenly been enraptured in erotic bliss to the point of forgetting that the camera is watching her. While the background singers continue to sing the chorus, Burrell interjects an erotic “ooh” as she turns her head and closes her eyes, signifying sexual gratification.

To see a single woman who is also a pastor present herself in this manner is without question a provocative statement according to the strictures of conservative denominations like the Church of God in Christ. Most conservative church followers would be more apt to approve of such erotic expressions if Burrell were married and portrayed herself as the object of her husband’s affection, as marriage is often understood as the “safe space” within which sexuality should be exclusively expressed.  

Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, 86. Butler discusses how unmarried women within COGIC are often suspected of sexual impropriety and are often “pressed to marry.” Marriage is often understood as the exclusive context in which one should freely express sexuality.
“Brother” when he asks Burrell: “Are you single? And do you have a man? Or are you married?”

However, Burrell’s video signifies a power inversion in which Burrell’s expression of sexuality is detached from the sexual dominance of a man. While Burrell postures herself as an object of desire, particularly during the balcony scene when she sensually strokes her hair as the groundskeeper watches, she does not reduce herself to this image. Because the groundskeeper does not appear in any other part of the video as a potential love interest, in contrast to other secular videos in which the male is an active love interest throughout the video, it is clear that Burrell is not simply an object of the voyeuristic male gaze. But rather, despite her gestural flirtations, Burrell maintains her single status throughout the video, unencumbered by the constrictions of proper relational protocol. For Burrell to posture herself as an object of desire as a single woman is without question a radical move for a conservative pastor associated with COGIC, as single women within such communities have a higher chance of being suspected of sexual promiscuity. The seductiveness of her vocal dexterity, combined with the visual images of feminine liberation on her CD cover and in her video, create an allure that counters conventional standards of propriety for what is expected of a female gospel singer and a pastor.

It was precisely these images and gestural codes of seduction, however, that proved too risqué for her conservative followers. In the YouTube comments for the “Sweeter” video, several of Burrell’s followers communicated their unequivocal disapproval of her apparent transgression of biblical morals. One user (“Lydia Pernier”) firmly expressed disdain for Burrell’s apparent misrepresentation of God:

193 Ibid., 162. McClary talks about Madonna’s video for “Open Your Heart” as demonstrating a power inversion in which Madonna asserts control over her own sexuality. Through various visual constructions, McClary claims that Madonna destabilizes the relationships between the voyeuristic male gaze and the object.
194 Ibid.
195 Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, 86.
As a Christian, this video is highly disturbing. This has NOTHING to do about JESUS CHRIST. This [is] all about Kim Burrell. The opening shots she is in lingerie and touching her shoulder like she is in heat. OH NO! She is standing on her balcony looking over the man doing work like she is checking him out. Her facial expressions and body language are all seductive and ungodly. She is parading on a boat with a short skirt. I’m sorry this is sickening.196

Another user (“FEELING HAPPY!!!”) commented on the incongruity between the lyrics and Burrell’s gestures, implying that Burrell’s visual constructions were far too erotic for a gospel video: “If you turn down the sound and squint she looks just like any other secular singer singing to some man about the session last night!”197 Also, during the radio interview with “CoCo Brother,” a follower of Burrell called in while the interview was taking place and expressed her disapproval of Burrell’s sexual presentation:

I’m not sure how your congregation would view you now having seen you in lingerie as you deliver the Word. . . . I just think it would be a hindrance. And the Word clearly says, “Do not let your good be evil be spoken of.”198 I mean, it’s like if my pastor were to come to church in a speedo or do a video on YouTube in a speedo. It’s just something that I think is more private. You know, it’d be different if it was a candid shot on a beach or something. . . . I just didn’t think it was appropriate.199

The uproar that followed the release of the album and the video led to the involvement of the Church of God in Christ national body. Because Burrell had just recently accepted the prestigious position as the Vice President of the COGIC International Music Department, there were claims made regarding the incompatibility of her video with traditional, COGIC ethics of piety.200 Some were also uncomfortable with the use of the word “secular” by Burrell’s staff to promote the album, as the word “secular” for many churchgoers inherently implied a

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197 Ibid.
198 This scripture is taken from the New Testament Bible—Romans 14:16.
200 “IMD Vice Presidents,” Church of God in Christ International Music Department, accessed June 8, 2014, http://www.cogic.org/imd/about-us/vice-presidents/. The International Music Department of the Church of God in Christ has produced and cultivated some of the greatest gospel music artists of all time. During the COGIC annual convocations in November and the Auxiliaries in Ministry (AIM) Conference during the summer, the music department’s late night musicals have often provided a platform for well-known gospel artists as well as emerging artists. Among its products are the Clark Sisters (their mother Dr. Mattie Moss-Clark was the President of the department for over two decades), the Hawkins Family (Edwin, Walter, and Tramaine), Rance Allen, Vanessa Bell-Armstrong, LaShun Pace, Andrae Crouch, Sandra Crouch and many others; See Horace Clarence Boyer, How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel (Washington, D.C.: Elliot & Clark Publishing, 1995), 125-127; Also see Kernodle, “Work the Works,” 89-109.
transgression of biblical mores. In an officially written and signed open letter by Judith McAllister, the President of the COGIC International Music Department, McAllister exonerates Burrell’s album and her video by publically expressing affirmation and approval of Burrell’s artistic endeavors.  

This document also contains statements made by Burrell during a conference call to the Executive Staff of the International Music Department, explaining her motivations and the evangelistic impulse that undergirds her project.

McAllister begins the open letter with a brief introduction to prepare the reader for Burrell’s statement: “As you may know, a recent use of the word ‘secular’ has brought concern regarding the career path of our dear sister, Vice President Kim Burrell. Please allow me to give you access to Evangelist Burrell’s thoughts concerning this, in her own words and with her permission, as spoken to members of the Executive Staff of the International Music Department, by way of conference call.” In this statement, Burrell defends the spiritual integrity of her album and explains that her underlying motive is to evangelize:

I want to say thank you to Dr. McAllister for this opportunity to speak with you, and for having a heart of concern for all parties involved that are interested in knowing. . . . Unfortunately, a lot of people that don’t sing gospel, that are involved in the music industry, don’t feel welcome in our church circle because they feel condemned or judged. Before they can come over and receive Christ, we’ve already killed them.

After implying that her motivation for the album is to attract individuals to the gospel message who feel excluded from the church, Burrell then responds to claims that she has a “secular” album. She reassures the Church of God in Christ that her music does not violate the ethical standards of the denomination:


202 Ibid.
And with that in mind, with us being soul winners, I’m not choosing the word “secular. . . .” As I’ve said before in different media outlets by way of internet and so on, people have taken what my people have said and stretched it and kind of made it what it is, whatever secular may mean especially to the church world. . . . I’m dedicated to the International Music Department. I’m dedicated to Dr. McAllister. I’m dedicated to the vision of God on this church. I’m dedicated to Bishop Blake.203 I’ve already heard from our national leadership, just so you all will know. I’ve gotten their push. They’ve seen thoroughly, read thoroughly what it is that people are referring to as secular and they understand definitely that it is not what people are trying to make it to be. . . . I love you all so much and hopefully this will suffice for whatever or whoever needs it.204

Burrell’s response reiterates the neo-Pentecostal impulse that informs the work of gospel artists, an impulse that engages culture while maintaining a conservative biblical standard. Burrell believes that by transcending the traditional customs of the church, she is promulgating a message that is more relevant and palatable to culture, thereby increasing her chances of converting them. Her use of the term “soul winner” reinforces the notion that there is an evangelistic current undergirding her project. The need for McAllister and Burrell to clarify the meaning of the word “secular” exposes the hostility that church people often harbor toward secular culture and the extent to which the church demonizes music outside the gospel tradition. Because of the negative presumptions held by churchgoers about secular music, Burrell clarifies that the use of the word “secular” by her “people” does not entail a violation of biblical principles. As a way to further convince them of her commitment to the church, she mentions her dedication to the church, the music department, the bishop, and the national leaders under whom she serves.

Following Burrell’s statement, McAllister adds her own words of support in solidarity with Burrell’s response:

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Please allow me now to express my own thoughts – My support of Vice President Burrell’s endeavor is based primarily on the character and integrity she has consistently and unequivocally displayed over the years. As far as I am personally aware, Vice President Burrell has always maintained a testimony and lifestyle consistent with the Biblical standard of Holiness. I have observed nothing in her statement and/or activities, which have been in opposition to scriptural principles; and I am fully confident in her ability to maintain a Christian witness in this endeavor. . . . “The harvest is truly plenteous. . . .” (Matthew 9:37 KJV) and we should rejoice that God has entrusted our dear sister, Vice President Kim Burrell, with an assignment in a new vineyard. I encourage all IMD constituents to cover her with prayer, asking God to anoint her with productivity and effectiveness as she points new souls toward the Kingdom of God. Light shines it’s brightest in darkness. Let each of us fulfill the words of Jesus and truly be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-15), in the areas where we each have been assigned. 

In an effort to bolster Burrell’s statement, McAllister counters attacks against Burrell’s character by portraying Burrell as the exact opposite of what her detractors believe her to be. She reassures the church of Burrell’s “character and integrity” and states that Burrell has consistently lived in a manner that is consistent with a “Biblical standard of Holiness.” McAllister’s emphasis on holiness resonates with a long history of COGIC standards of piety. Traditionally, an adherence to a standard of holiness and strict piety has often been the pathway for women to attain and maintain power within COGIC. Following conservative strictures can potentially afford one “social capital,” while straying from such constrictions can cause one to risk losing their status within the denomination. McAllister’s emphasis on holiness thus affirms Burrell’s spiritual credibility and reassures Burrell’s followers that she is equipped to maintain her position of power as Vice President.

The reference to Matthew 9:37 (“The harvest is plenteous. . .”) and Matthew 5:13-15 (“salt of the earth. . . light of the world. . .”) are direct quotes from the words of Christ. Both scriptures emphasize the Christian responsibility to proselytize and to exemplify Christian

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205 Ibid. IMD—International Music Department
206 As referenced in the earlier part of the chapter, a lifestyle of holiness often implies refraining from ungodly practices. Such practices include, but are not limited to, drinking, profanity, smoking, immodest dress, and any kind of sexual promiscuity. See Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, 44-47 and 76.
207 Ibid.
principles among those who are still “in the world.” Her appropriation of these scriptures thus bolsters Burrell’s claim that her endeavor is motivated by an evangelistic impulse. Instead of demonizing Burrell as a deviant, McAllister portrays Burrell as a mature Christian, who possesses the spiritual stamina and integrity to be entrusted by God with a task in “a new vineyard.” For McAllister, Burrell’s album is not evidence of her spiritual weakness, but evidence of her spiritual strength and her capacity to maintain her Christian witness even while engaging secular culture.

Although Burrell’s video reflects a temporary inversion of power, in which a single woman is in control of her sexual subjectivity, Burrell’s statement reinforces the power structure of COGIC and reveals a capitulation to normal power relations—a return to business as usual. By stating that she is “dedicated to Bishop Blake,” who is the Presiding Bishop of COGIC, and that she has the support of the “national leadership,” which is comprised of all men, Burrell is essentially forced to capitulate to the strictures of COGIC patriarchy. The culture of the black Pentecostal church often requires women to submit to a “covering” which is usually code language for submitting to the authority of a man. Despite the fact that black women comprise over seventy percent of the church’s population and form the backbone of the church community, black men still predominate in positions of leadership and authority. Marla Frederick notes that “religious doctrine often encourages women to submit to pastors and husbands, who are understood as having religious authority over them.” Burrell’s deference to male authority perhaps reveals that the subsequent uproar provoked by the video is not just about a woman being sensual in a video, but also about the potential impending threat of the usurpation

208 “National leadership” most likely refers to the General Board of COGIC, which is comprised of twelve male bishops who have been selected to lead the church. See http://www.cogic.org/administration/executive-branch/the-general-board/.


211 Frederick, *Between Sundays*, 8.
of male authority and the subversion of institutional power. The requirement for Burrell to formally respond and the nature of her response expose the hierarchical and patriarchal power dynamic that remains firmly embedded within the infrastructure of the Church of God in Christ.

Considering Burrell’s relational status as a single female, one wonders if such a formal response would have been necessary and if such uproar would have ensued had she been married at the time of shooting the video. As referenced earlier, marriage within COGIC is interpreted as a “safe space” within which one can express sexuality. Consequently, any sexual expression outside of the traditional confines of marriage is often viewed with suspicion. Her response therefore is an attempt to indicate that she “knows her place” and that despite the unorthodoxy of her video, she is properly “submitted” to male headship. Thus, while Burrell subverts traditional notions of female and vocational subjectivity through music and gesture, she simultaneously acquiesces to the cultural norms of proper COGIC etiquette.

The controversy surrounding Burrell’s love album not only reveals the level of sexual repression in the church, but also the discomfort with expressions of female sexuality in particular. The work of Kelly Brown Douglas provides historical context for the church’s anxieties and apprehensions concerning female sexuality. Douglas explains that women have historically been associated with the “body, passion, and the irrational,” while men have often been associated with the “soul, reason, and rationality.”212 Therefore, the tendency to conform to what Douglas calls a sacred dualistic ideology, in which the body and the spirit are oppositional, will inevitably have sexist implications. Moreover, biblical stories, such as the story about Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis and Samson and Delilah in the book of Judges, have been interpreted in ways that only perpetuate the sexist myth that women are inherently salacious and...

212 Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, 27.
Eve is often perceived as the one who tempted Adam, leading to humanity’s fall into sin and its separation from God, while Delilah is understood to be the one who sexually wooed Samson in order to take his strength.

Although women in general have been historically stereotyped and caricatured as innately lascivious, the consequences for black women are complicated by not only their gendered experience, but also by their racial reality. One of the most degrading stereotypes of black women is the image of the Jezebel. Jezebel, known biblically as the controlling and manipulative wife of Israelite king Ahab, has often been used as the image to caricature black women as lewd and wanton. She is known as being totally controlled by her libido and having a sexual appetite that is virtually unquenchable. While the Jezebel stereotype was used by whites during slavery in order to justify the sexual abuse of black women and to validate their inferiority, Douglas claims that these stereotypes have gravely impacted the ways in which blacks interact and perceive one another.

As mentioned earlier, Douglas argues that black people have adopted a standard of hyper-proper sexuality as a strategy to avoid fulfilling white cultural stereotypes about black sexuality and to ultimately be accepted by the dominant culture. This hyper-proper standard of conduct, however, is often disproportionately applied to black women in ways that are not applied to black men. Black church culture, in particular, has become hyperaware of black women’s sexuality, while often minimizing and even ignoring the sexuality of black men. Within the culture of various black churches, Douglas explains that this double standard is often revealed through the mandate that requires women to use cloths or handkerchiefs in church in order to

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213 Ibid., 28.
214 The story of the fall of man is found in Genesis 3 and the story of Samson and Delilah is found in Judges 16.
215 Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 36; The story of Jezebel can be found in 1 Kings between the 16th and 22nd chapters.
216 Ibid., 56-57.
217 Ibid., 58.
cover their legs for fear that their sexuality will be exposed and function as a “stumbling block” to tempt men.\textsuperscript{218} Also, within black church culture black women are often asked to publically repent for their sexual indiscretions and to “sit down” for a designated amount of time, while the men are exonerated from culpability.\textsuperscript{219} Douglas believes that these practices prove that black church culture, in an effort to overcompensate for cultural stereotypes about black sexuality, has bought into the stereotype of the jezebel image. The church has particularly policed the sexuality of “inherently deviant” black women while absolving their male counterparts from the same conservative standards of sexual propriety.

The inequitable application of hyper-proper standards of sexuality thus becomes most evident in the responses to Burrell’s video by both laypeople and church leaders. The reaction to Burrell’s video can therefore be interpreted as but another manifestation of the sexual biases that the black church has historically expressed against black females. Because of the history of black female oppression within the church, Burrell’s video for “Sweeter” and her entire love album challenge the black church’s sexual standards in ways that a music project released by a black male gospel artist would not.

Kim Burrell’s love album redefines what is acceptable for a gospel artist, and more specifically, what is acceptable for a female gospel artist within the conservative ethos of the Church of God in Christ. Particularly in her video for “Sweeter,” she demonstrates that it is possible for female sexuality to be expressed freely without the participation of a man. For Burrell, however, her sexuality is simply an extension of her spirituality. Her sexual expressions and seductive vocal charm are all statements of her relationship with the divine. Despite Burrell’s innovative approach to redefining spirituality, the negative reactions to Burrell’s love

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{219} West, “Ethical Black Ministerial Practices,” 37; Frederick, \textit{Between Sundays}, 202. “Sit down” is an expression often used in the black church to describe the cessation of churchly duties and activities due to a moral indiscretion. “Sitting down” usually entails a season of reflection and repentance before one reassumes his/her responsibilities within the church.
album prove that while women are usually the gatekeepers of conservative biblical standards within the church, they are also usually the most vulnerable to them.

**Fred Hammond: God, Love & Romance**

As a vocalist, producer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist, Fred Hammond (b. 1960) has made a tremendous impact on the gospel music industry. In the early 1980s, during the incipient years of his gospel music career, Hammond played bass guitar and sang with the legendary gospel group The Winans. Later in the same decade, he became one of the founding members of the urban gospel group Commissioned. Hammond released multiple albums with Commissioned, often writing, arranging, and leading songs with the group throughout the eighties and early nineties. Commissioned is known for unforgettable songs such as “Running Back To You” (*Go Tell Somebody*, 1986) and “Ordinary Just Won’t Do” (*Ordinary Just Won’t Do*, 1989).

After having sung with Commissioned for over a decade, Hammond became a solo artist and founded the renowned ensemble Radical for Christ during the early to mid nineties. With this group, Hammond released three top selling projects: *The Spirit of David* (1997), *Pages of Life: Chapters 1 & 2* (1998), and *Purpose By Design* (2000). Each of these albums went gold, double platinum, and gold respectively, an unusual accomplishment for a gospel artist. His 2004 release, *Somethin’ ‘Bout Love*, also went gold and reached the top spot on both the “Gospel

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Albums” and “Christian Albums” Billboard charts. Although Hammond’s 2006 release *Free to Worship* did not sell as well as his previous four albums, it earned him a Grammy Award in 2007 for Best Contemporary R&B Gospel Album and granted him a top spot again on the “Gospel Albums” and “Christian Albums” Billboard charts. Many of the songs on these albums have become classics within the black church community and have helped to catapult Hammond to the status of gospel superstardom. Songs such as “No Weapon,” “Glory To Glory To Glory,” “We’re Blessed,” “Jesus Is All,” “You Are The Living Word,” and “Celebrate (He Lives)” have all become signature tunes within the musical landscape of the black church.

Hammond’s chart topping albums and songs have helped to position him as one of the pioneers in ushering in the praise and worship phenomenon into the black church.

In 2012 Fred Hammond released a double disc entitled *God, Love & Romance*. Disc one is full of romantic love songs, while disc two contains more of the style that took him to the top of the gospel charts and includes all worship songs. After having been married for seventeen years, Hammond’s marriage ended in 2003. As a divorcee, Hammond believes that God has given him the responsibility to sing about romantic love as a way to mend and bring healing to marital relationships. Although Kim Burrell is also a divorcee, the content and motivation behind Hammond’s love album is more inspired by his own past marital struggles and the desire to help others endure relational hardships. Many conservative black churches still have strict

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226 “About,” on Fred Hammond’s official Facebook fan page, [https://www.facebook.com/therealfredhammondfanpage/info](https://www.facebook.com/therealfredhammondfanpage/info); The praise and worship phenomenon is explained in detail in the chapter on global identity in gospel music.


228 Ibid.
policies relating to divorcees, often denying them status and positions of power in the church. By choosing to be transparent about his divorce, Hammond boldly overcomes the stain of divorce that is often embedded within church culture. Instead of being forced into silence because of the stigma attached to divorce, Hammond uses his divorce as a strategy to recreate his image and redefine his subjectivity.

In order to defend the integrity of his love album, Hammond often discusses what he believes to be the preponderance of broken relationships and the onslaught of divorce among Christians. Apparently aware of recent studies and apprehensions about divorce statistics within the church, Hammond has declared in multiple interviews that divorce has become prevalent in the church because relational love has been overlooked. Similar to the critique made by Burrell, Hammond believes that focusing on love for God has often taken place at the expense of focusing on love for one another.

In one interview, Hammond critiques hyper-spirituality and claims that the church has focused disproportionately on otherworldly phenomena, while neglecting the everyday, practical realities of life. He believes that this has impacted the divorce rates within the church. “One of the things that I found out,” he says, “is that while we’re real spiritual, fifty percent of all first time marriages end in divorce. We puttin’ money on the altar, we readin’ scripture, we fastin’, and we prayin’, and we end up in a divorce. So, somethin’ ain’t right.”

In another interview, Hammond states, “the divorce rate is higher, forty percent higher amongst believers, than

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229 Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, 91-92. Butler states that this practice of denying power has been present in the traditional practices of COGIC. She states that Mason, the founder, often required marriage as a prerequisite in order for men to be active in the ministry. “Divorce permanently prohibited a person from ministry.” This practice still takes place within many conservative black Pentecostal churches.


nonbelievers. And so, something is wrong." In these interviews, Hammond critiques the church’s definition of spirituality and explains how understandings of spirituality are often reduced to devotional activities that focus exclusively on our relationship with God, while neglecting human relationships. For Hammond, the prevalence of divorce in the church is an indication that this embodiment of spirituality is incomplete and not “right.” His response is intended to challenge the church to reassess the meaning of spirituality and the role that spirituality should play in the cultivation of healthy intimate relationships.

Similar to the aforementioned artists, Hammond frequently invokes the Song of Solomon as the biblical motivation for his love song album. He also repeatedly claims that the church is often too suspicious about discussing romance and believes that his love album is a potential answer to this dilemma:

What should a Christian man say to a woman when he sees her? Are you just gon’ talk in tongues every time we talk? No. I wanna talk about what I feel. It’s amazing to me because one of the things I scratch my head over, over the last several years of my life, maybe ten, fifteen, twenty years is, why do we skip the Songs of Solomon? Nobody ever preaches from that. We act like it don’t exist, but God thought it important enough to say it. And it’s some pretty racy stuff in there. God ain’t afraid. He ain’t ashamed. But we, as church folk, we scared. But I’m not scared. . . . And I’m [not] filling it up with a bunch of, you know, to make everybody feel comfortable, you know, [sings mockingly] “In Jesus we’re anointed.” Nah, I’m not doing that. Ain’t nobody gon’ listen to that. Y’all not gon’ even buy it. So, let me say what I feel. And maybe it’ll give a couple a chance to heal.

Hammond mimics overly pious Christians and critiques traditional Pentecostal culture by referencing the Pentecostal practice of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. He references this practice in order to expose the ways in which churchgoers use hyper-spirituality as a strategy to ignore practical issues related to sex. For Hammond, the presence of the Song of Solomon in the

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232 Hammond, “Fred Hammond interview God, Love and Romance,” YouTube video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kqsNeo srQ. Hammond never states the source of the statistical data that he quotes, which raises questions about the credibility of these figures. The percentages that he quotes, however, still reflect the increasing anxieties that churchgoers have about the instability of marriage in the church.

Bible is enough evidence to believe that God is not against Christians expressing desire and enough proof to affirm that spirituality and desire are not binary opposites. The existence of the Song of Solomon makes the shame and fear that Christians possess with regard to sexual desire all the more puzzling and nonsensical. Instead of invoking an actual hymn, as Morton, McClurkin, and Burrell did, Hammond spontaneously creates his own tune as a way to mimic traditionalists when he mockingly sings, “In Jesus we’re anointed.” This kind of religious rhetoric for Hammond is superficial and does not fully capture the real problems that individuals face in relationships. His attempt to dismantle spiritual guises is essentially for the purposes of establishing relational reconciliation and giving “a couple a chance to heal.”

Despite his claims that his album is solely motivated by the desire to help couples, Hammond also implies that there are economic dividends that are at stake. He insinuates that by using overly pious language in his music, he will not be taken seriously by the wider public, which will in turn impact record sales. His comment “y’all not gon’ even buy it” perhaps grants us insight into Hammond’s desire to use this album to expand his market base and brand beyond the gospel community. Although this love album did not fare as well with regard to sales and awards as his previous gold and platinum selling projects, Hammond nevertheless made a more radical statement with this album than with any other previous album because of its provocative, romantic content.234

In addition to Hammond expanding and departing from his own traditional style, he also claims that God, Love, and Romance is a deviation from what other gospel artists have done in the past to have secular appeal. To foreground his intention to be more sexually transparent, Hammond stated that his love songs do not have an ambiguous meaning as heard in the music of

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234. The exact financial figures that God, Love, and Romance generated are not available to the public. However, on the website riaa.com, a website that indicates gold and platinum sales, Hammond’s love album is not listed as an album that reached gold or platinum status.
BeBe and CeCe Winans and in the lyrical content of “you songs.” Instead, he says that his love songs are straightforward and clearly communicate that a woman is the object of his affection. In a discussion on the John Hannah Morning Show, a popular gospel radio show based in Chicago, Illinois, Hammond asserted that he had no intention of duplicating the lyrical strategies of previous gospel artists:235

I’ve seen, you know, the backlash to come out against my brother and sister, BeBe and CeCe, when they kinda, you know, that middle of the road, “I.O.U. Me.” Well, who are you talking about? “Oh, I’m talking about the Lord.” The Kirk backlash. But I’m just comin’ straight wit’ it. I am talking about a woman. Don’t get it twisted. [audience laughs] Don’t get it confused. This ain’t the Lord’s side.236

Hammond’s reference to BeBe, CeCe, and Kirk Franklin is an indication that he is aware of the potentially negative criticism that he could receive as a consequence of releasing this album. Although Hammond makes his point comically, he clearly communicates that he is unwilling to allow the backlash experienced by previous gospel artists to stifle the message that he desires to convey. Hammond’s desire to be totally transparent about romantic love without traditional limitations is best corroborated by a comment that he made on another gospel radio show based in Atlanta, Georgia. After reiterating what he believes to be dismal divorce statistics in the church, Hammond makes a call for churchgoers to be more real: “I think that we just need to be real. Come clean and be real. This is the generation, they coined it a few years ago, called the ‘keep it real generation.’ ”237 God, Love & Romance thus represents Hammond’s effort to “keep it real” and to broach an issue within the gospel industry and the church that remains taboo.

There are striking similarities shared between Hammond’s love album and the love albums released by Bishop Jakes. After Hammond’s divorce, he moved to Dallas, Texas and soon began to attend The Potter’s House where Bishop Jakes is the pastor. Hammond claims that Jakes’s sermons helped him to heal emotionally after his divorce was finalized and even refers to Jakes as his mentor and life coach. Thus, the similarities shared between the projects could possibly be attributed to Jakes’s spiritual influence and the impression that his ministry made on Hammond. Among the similarities shared between Bishop Jakes’s sacred love song albums and Hammond’s *God, Love & Romance* are the interspersed monologues and dialogues. Strategically interwoven between various songs, these monologues and dialogues focus on the complexities and hardships of romantic relationships. Some of these monologues include scriptural readings from both the Song of Solomon and the book of Proverbs. Also, similar to Jakes’s love albums, *God, Love & Romance* begins with spoken words, instead of music, as a way to prepare the audience for a new self-representation of Hammond and a nuanced portrayal of spirituality.

On the very first track the first voice heard is the emcee, who speaks consistently throughout the album. His voice helps to present each song on the album as a constitutive component of a live concert, with him functioning as the host. The entrance of his voice with the sounds of a crowd in the background establishes a mood that is more informal and evokes the ambience of a nightclub scene. After his voice is heard on the first track, multiple voices begin to enter the conversation sporadically, overlaying on top of each other. As different voices interject, they each make a request for Hammond to write music for them pertaining to their relational concerns. Each voice articulates their marital frustrations and how to cope emotionally after a

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239 Ibid.
divorce. At one point, a group of voices enters to discuss their marital problems: “We’re married, been married for a while,” they claim. “But we’ve been having some trouble lately.” One female voice even challenges the notion that one cannot embrace one’s sexiness and remain a devout Christian: “And you know we sexy,” she says. “And I love the Lord.” This brief narration between multiple voices is intended to expose the dearth of music that expresses relational concerns from a Christian perspective and Hammond’s intention to fill that void.

In the song, “You Are My Love Come True,” Hammond sings about the durability of love and the joys that one experiences after having found true love. Immediately prior to the beginning of the song, Hammond includes a reading from Song of Solomon 8:7: “Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.” This reading is intended to function as an introduction to the theme of the song, which focuses on the endurance of love. In one line of the song, Hammond sings about the importance of enduring through difficulties in a relationship, which can perhaps be interpreted as Hammond remorsefully expressing a standard that his marriage failed to meet. Hammond lightly sings: “You stood right by my side, through my storms and my darkest night / And you are still loving me, I don’t know what I did to deserve you.”

Given that these lyrics can be interpreted as having an ambiguous meaning, as the word “you” can be understood as signifying God or a romantic interest, Hammond is sure to communicate from the beginning that he is in fact singing about a woman. In order to emphasize his strategy to be more overt about romance than his gospel music colleagues who often used ambiguous lyrics, Hammond uses the term “baby” to lyrically encode romantic intimacy. The very first words of the song clearly convey the object of his affection: “My life is now complete because you are here with me / Girl, you are my heart, let me say that it’s all about you, baby.”

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240 This passage is quoted from the New International Version.
Thus his appropriation of the lyrical code “baby” clearly conveys that the “you” in this song is not intended to be a veiled reference to God, but rather an unequivocal reference to a woman. Hammond stated in an interview that his emphasis on affectionate words was strategic, as it served to resist the apprehensions that churchgoers often have with the inclusion of terms of endearment to communicate affection toward someone other than God. “We’re afraid to say it in a certain way,” he avers. “We’re afraid to use certain terms like ‘darling’ or ‘baby’ or ‘honey’ or ‘sweetie’ or ‘you are my baby.’ You know, we don’t wanna say that because if we say it, we gon’ put it in a church way: ‘That God gave you to me and the anointing will. . .’ Man listen, that’s not how we talk when we datin’.”\footnote{Hammond, “Fred Hammond interview God, Love and Romance,” YouTube video, \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_kpsNEosrQ}.}

The extent to which Hammond incorporates this lyrical code reinforces his strategy to denounce sanctimonious facades and to challenge churchgoers to be more real with regard to their expressions of romantic love. The affectionate term “baby” is used by Hammond at the end of almost every musical phrase throughout the entire song and is sung twelve different times. Hammond’s interjection of the term “baby” as a strategy to bring closure to each musical phrase is further emphasized by his incorporation of a chordal harmony on the word. Almost every time that “baby” is sung, it is accentuated by either an octave or a three-part harmony sung by the background vocals. This interjection of chordal harmonies on the word “baby” stands out because of the dominant tone that Hammond employs vocally throughout the song. Hammond sings the entire song in a quiet, subdued tone. In contrast to the other songs on the album, this song contains no clear musical climax, as Hammond maintains an almost whisper-like timbre throughout the duration of the song. Hammond’s incorporation of a breathy vocal quality along with his occasional use of straight tone establishes a mood that is almost sexually hypnotic.
Because of the consistency of a sober tone displayed during the song, the sudden chordal harmonies on the word “baby” become especially prevalent.

The constant reiteration of this musical strategy reinforces his defiance against the dominant narrative of the church, which according to Hammond, ignores affectionate terminology in exchange for overly pious verbiage. Although his use of overtly affectionate terminology that removes any hint of lyrical ambiguity is a radical gesture for a gospel artist, his liberal transparency is occasionally mitigated by his conformity to a conservative understanding of sexuality. Evocative of CeCe Winans’s previous comments, Hammond is intentional about conveying that his album is about a message of “love,” not “lust.” In a conversation about his love album, Hammond states: “And I am talking from a love perspective, not a lust perspective.”

Drawing the same binary that Winans drew, Hammond constructs a dichotomy between “love” and “lust” as a strategy to uphold the integrity of his music and to set it apart from other sexually charged musical expressions that he deems transgressive. Although Hammond does not fully unpack the meaning of his differentiation between “love” and “lust,” it remains clear that his employment of these terms indicates his belief in a “right” and “wrong” way to express one’s sexuality. Furthermore, it reveals his belief that his approach to singing about romance is indeed the “right” way.

Hammond’s transparency about sexually intimate relationships is also tempered by his belief in the union between one man and one woman as the ideal relational model. In the same conversation about his love album, while sharing his experiences about love and relationships, Hammond states: “I know that God created union between a man and a woman. And it’s not

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good for man to be alone for a lot of reasons. I’m a Christian and I’m a brutha. I’m a real brutha. I don’t deal with the down low. I’m up real, real high [audience laughs].”  

“It’s not good for man to be alone” is a quote taken from Genesis 2:18. In this passage of scripture, God speaks these words immediately before God creates Eve as Adam’s companion. This scripture is commonly quoted within the culture of the conservative black church as a way for men to argue for the necessity of female companionship and for the legitimacy of heterosexual marriage in general. Hammond uses this scripture as both justification for his love album and also as a way to assure the audience of his heterosexuality. His next statement that he does not “deal with the down low,” further confirms his sexual orientation and suggests that he desires for his album to be interpreted exclusively through the lens of heterosexual love relationships. His confession that he is a Christian and a “real brutha” implies that non-heterosexual men do not qualify as “real bruthas,” thus irresponsibly linking heterosexuality to authentic male Christian embodiment. The linkage between heterosexuality and “real masculinity” or “real brotherhood” emasculates non-heterosexual men and further perpetuates the stigma that is attached to homosexuality within conservative churches. While his comedic statement, “I’m up real, real high,” elicited laughter from the audience, it also functioned to reinforce Hammond’s intentions. Even though his artistic approach is unconventional according to the church’s historical standards, Hammond still adheres to conventional strictures by implying that his love album is intended exclusively for heterosexual couples. His use of the word “love” therefore seems to be code for “heterosexual marriage” while “lust” encodes any sexual expression outside the confines of the heterosexual marital paradigm.

243 Ibid.
244 Boyd, Black Men Worshipping, 107. The phrase “authentic male Christian embodiment” was borrowed from Boyd’s discussion of Donnie McClurkin. In his discussion, Boyd records McClurkin declaring that he is now a “real” man because he no longer identifies as homosexual. Boyd then goes on to say that in doing so, McClurkin “links heterosexuality to masculinity and therefore to authentic male Christian embodiment.”
Ironically, some scholars claim that conforming to a heterosexual marital paradigm has negative ramifications for individuals, like Hammond, who are divorced. Biblical scholar Dale B. Martin argues that divorcees tend to be less involved in churches because of the idolization of the heterosexual family structure. He argues that “American churches have so identified themselves with the modern, heterosexual, nuclear family that people without such families feel less at home in most churches.” The glorification of heterosexual marriage causes divorcees to feel ostracized and excluded from their church communities, as many churches frown upon divorce. Hammond’s relational status as a divorcee, however, has not deterred him from the church nor discouraged him from upholding the heterosexual family unit as the ideal. Rather, Hammond’s status as a divorcee becomes a source of empowerment—it enables the portrayal of a new self-image and the repudiation of the assumption that a gospel artist cannot sing about sexual love. *God, Love & Romance* thus transcends traditional expectations while also conforming to traditional standards of what constitutes acceptable sexuality.

**Conclusion**

Gospel love albums challenge the traditional standards of the church and are a musical critique of the perceived boundaries that separate sex and desire from spirituality. The sexual discourses of contemporary gospel artists, as well as the music released by Bishop T.D. Jakes, Kim Burrell, and Fred Hammond, function as intentional strategies toward rescuing sex from its taboo space. By using various rhetorical strategies and semiotic codes in their discourses and music, these artists resist the traditional notion that sex and spirituality are irreconcilable. Instead, these artists believe that it is their responsibility to portray sexual desire as an actual extension of their spirituality, constructing a new subjectivity in the process. Their efforts to

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246 Ibid.
demystify sex are motivated by their frustration with the church’s history of sexual repression and their desire to address the pragmatic, existential needs of their followers. They view social issues, such as divorce and non-traditional sexual relationships, as evidence of America’s moral decline and believe that their music serves as a potential antidote to these perceived societal ills.

While their strides toward propagating a more liberating sexual ethic are progressive within conservative black church culture, their understandings of sex and desire remain confined to their biblical understanding. As a consequence, sexual relationships and desires that are not compatible with a conservative biblical ethic are routinely excluded from their discourses and their music. Even though gospel artists and many within the church remain suspicious about varied and unconventional sexual expressions, perhaps love albums can be interpreted as a significant and progressive step toward cultivating a theological climate of sexual honesty and transparency.
Chapter Two
Thy Kingdom Come: From a Black Identity to a Global Identity

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV)

In addition to intersecting spirituality with sex, gospel artists have also expanded conceptions of spirituality through appropriating multicultural themes into their music. Within the last fifteen years, numerous artists have become increasingly invested in propagating a message of ethnic inclusion and encouraging their followers to adopt a theology that transcends racial distinctions. Although gospel music continues to articulate an African American identity, with emphasis on themes such as struggle, survival, and perseverance, several prominent gospel artists are attempting to expand the gospel message beyond the black community and black thematic tropes to include messages of ethnic solidarity. By claiming that racial inclusion reflects God’s divine will, they contest the racial exclusivism of the church and advocate a collective reconceptualization of spirituality that includes an ethic of global egalitarianism among all Christian believers. Gospel artists are thus encouraging a thematic shift in gospel music and are making the claim that their music is not just for black people, but for all people. Real spirituality in this chapter is therefore defined as racially and ethnically indiscriminate.

In order to legitimize their transition from a black identity to a global identity, gospel artists engage in various discursive strategies. Discourses of inclusivity are found in CD liner notes, in which vision statements and biblical scriptures that highlight God’s divine plan for racial reconciliation are used to validate an egalitarian ethic. This discourse is bolstered by visual representations of inclusivity that display the racial diversity of the musicians involved in the
recording. Gospel artists also engage in an eschatological discourse.\textsuperscript{247} This kind of discourse focuses on the kingdom of heaven as an imagined future egalitarian community. By emphasizing that there will be no ethnic divides in heaven, gospel artists imagine an ideal system of social relations on earth. The use of kingdom rhetoric within this discourse encourages their followers to interpret social interactions on earth as a dress rehearsal for what interactions will be like in heaven at the end of time.\textsuperscript{248} The invocation of the eschaton thus provides a future exemplar for how they believe real spirituality should be embodied in the present.

Gospel artists also engage a variety of musical practices that signify otherness in order to musically construct a transcultural identity. Ralph Locke’s typology of stylistic markers of otherness provides an instructive interpretive framework to analyze how gospel artists construct alterity. In \textit{Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections}, Locke proposes a comprehensive typology of musical, stylistic devices that have encoded the exotic throughout Western music history: repeated ostinato rhythms, polyrhythmic complexity, altered tones and chromaticisms, cries, screams or hollers, alterations in vocal timbre and production, and the employment of foreign instruments (“or Western ones that are used in ways that make them sound foreign”) are among the stylistic devices described by Locke that have been conventionally deployed by Western classical composers to identify with distant peoples.\textsuperscript{249} These devices, however, are not unique to classical music. As we will see, gospel artists also appropriate each of these techniques to transform cultural identities and to construct a global community through their music. In addition to these exotic signifiers outlined by Locke, gospel artists also incorporate foreign

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., 266. Ingalls uses the concept of a “rehearsal” for heaven to interpret the rhetoric that is often used at evangelical conferences.
\end{thebibliography}
languages into their lyrics and often engage in unity chants as a statement of inclusion. Unity chants involve sung declarations of solidarity and interracial cooperation. Often sung on the word “hallelujah,” as this word is understood to have the same universal meaning in every language, unity chants transform music into a universal language and encourage the formation of global Christian identities. “Hallelujah” thus functions as a lyrical semiotic code to signify transnational unity and cooperation.

In analyzing the musical constructions of alterity, the ethical ramifications of cultural appropriation are also considered. Though the cultural representations of gospel artists appear on the surface to be sincere attempts at racial reconciliation, there are often underlying ethical issues that go unnoticed. Issues regarding agency and subjectivity, representation in liner notes, asymmetrical relationships of power, the conflation of exoticism and authenticity, and the exaltation of individualism over a systems analysis are among the ethical implications that must be taken into account when analyzing the appropriative and representational practices of gospel artists. Do these multiculturalist practices deconstruct racial division, or do they reify existing prejudices and inequalities? Essentially, the ethical ramifications of cultural appropriation are investigated against the professed intentions and motives of gospel artists.

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Four contemporary gospel artists have released albums that exemplify the transition to a global identity—Kirk Franklin, Israel Houghton, Kurt Carr, and Donnie McClurkin are gold and platinum selling artists who have composed multicultural music. Never before have this many a-list gospel artists released music in such close temporal proximity (each multicultural project was released within the twenty-first century) that represents the same theme of Christian universal oneness. The consistent propagation of a central message of egalitarianism is therefore an anomaly in gospel history. Because these artists have achieved unprecedented record sales and extraordinary success in garnering secular appeal, their message of ethnic solidarity has a more profound impact on the gospel industry and gospel music consumers than less popular artists. The unusual success of these four artists has therefore granted them the leverage to be pacesetters in constructing a new global identity.

The music and discourses surrounding each musical project work together to construct an imagined community of global egalitarian solidarity. The appropriative and representational practices of these artists stimulate renegotiations of intersubjectivity, forging new communal, interpersonal identities. The creation of a new intersubjective identity signifies a crucial transition in how gospel artists understand themselves in relation to the larger global Christian community. As gospel artists imagine a heavenly egalitarian community, a new model of spirituality is forged in which racial unity is portrayed as the fulfillment of God’s perfect will.

*Gospel Music and Its Articulation of Black Identity*

To underscore the cultural import of the transition to a global identity, it is first necessary to discuss the historical narratives that preceded and precipitated this transition. The historical trajectory of gospel music and its deliberate expression of a black identity in the twentieth century make the transition to a global identity all the more salient. The history of gospel music
is inextricably connected to the Great Migration and the Great Depression during the 1930s. During this time of social and economic unrest, blacks were moving from the south into northern urban communities. As migratory transition continually progressed, blacks used gospel music as a medium to express their deepest anxieties and hopes with respect to their new sociocultural surroundings.\textsuperscript{252} Songs such as “Precious Lord,” written by Thomas Dorsey in 1932, provided a means for blacks to transcend the quotidian realities of social disillusionment and economic deprivation.\textsuperscript{253} Although the song was initially inspired by the death of Dorsey’s wife and child during childbirth, the lyrics resonated with the contemporary social exigencies of black life, reassuring blacks that although they were “tired,” “weak,” and “worn,” God would still comfort them and “take their hand.”\textsuperscript{254}

In the forties and fifties, black quartets and quintets became a cultural phenomenon. These groups presented an alternative to derogatory stereotypes about black men perpetuated by the American mass media, which often depicted them as indolent, hypersexual, and inherently violent villains.\textsuperscript{255} “Impeccable hairstyles, matching suits, polished shoes, and choreographed motions” defined their onstage persona.\textsuperscript{256} Black male gospel groups conveyed a new conception of black male subjectivity and helped to portray black men as emblems of Afro-modernity during the mid-twentieth century.

National social movements such as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements influenced the gospel music soundtrack of the sixties and seventies. The Staple Singers’ album, \textit{Freedom Highway} (1965), was dedicated to the freedom marchers to commemorate their

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{255} Carrie A. Allen, “‘When We Send up the Praise’: Race, Identity, and Gospel Music in Augusta, Georgia,” \textit{Black Music Research Journal} 27, no. 7 (2007): 84.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid.
tenacity and courage in the face of racist oppression. The lyrics to the title track embody the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement by critiquing the lack of equal rights for all people. A few years after the release of *Freedom Highway*, Aretha Franklin recorded her platinum selling gospel album, *Amazing Grace* (1972). The images on the cover and throughout the CD booklet, in which Franklin is donned in full African garb, function as statements of black identity and solidarity.

In the 1980s, gospel groups like the Clark Sisters began to rise in popularity singing songs like “Is My Living In Vain.” By emphasizing staple themes of black sacred music, like perseverance and the justice of God, this song promised believers that eternal life in heaven was the reward for struggles and hardships endured in this life. As the end of the century approached, artists like Kirk Franklin emerged who had a passion to reach African American youth. Franklin believes that it is his calling to evangelize to nontraditional audiences, particularly to black youth in and outside of the church. To reach the “unchurched,” Franklin incorporated hip hop into his music. During the song “Stomp,” from his platinum selling album *God’s Property From Kirk Franklin’s Nu Nation* (1997), Franklin collaborates with Salt from the nineties rap duo Salt ‘n’ Pepa. Salt enters toward the middle of the song and skillfully intertwines Christian principles with urban vernacular to appeal to a younger generation. Franklin’s crafty incorporation of hip-hop gave him urban credibility and enabled him to crossover into secular markets.

**Technological Advancements and the Emergence of World Music**

Gospel music’s long and rich history of expressing the existential concerns of black life helps to elucidate the significance of the shift to a global, egalitarian ethic. This transition away from an exclusive black identity also has technological and musical antecedents that have unquestionably influenced gospel music’s preoccupation with Christian universalism. Scholars

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argue that there were several developments in the 1980s that marked a significant shift in globalization—a term that describes increased interaction and interconnectedness that transcends beyond cultural, national, and geographical demarcations.\(^{258}\) During this time period, new technologies and media networks for musical production and dissemination were created that helped to enhance human communication.

Cassette technology provided faster dissemination of musical products throughout the world. According to Reebee Garofalo, “cassette technology provided for individualized reception anywhere in the world” and eventually “became the preferred configuration for music reception internationally in the mid-1980s.”\(^{259}\) Because the cassette was portable and not as expensive to mass-produce as records or compact discs, the cassette enabled the decentralization of music production and consumption and allowed local artists around the world to disseminate their own music. The cassette was therefore an ideal mass medium for diasporic subcultures to represent themselves. These migrant communities often possessed “self-consciousness as a group” and embraced “proclivities toward multiple identities and cultural syncretism.”\(^{260}\) The easy accessibility of the cassette thus encouraged the production and dissemination of local musics, as well as the creation of new modes of expression and self-identification within subcultural communities.\(^{261}\)

Advancements in satellite transmission and video technology also intensified global communication through the mass medium of MTV, developed in 1981. Though initially an avenue for the dissemination of American music videos throughout the global market, MTV was

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\(^{260}\) Manuel, “Popular Music,” *Grove Music Online*, 4-5.

eventually used for music video production in local markets around the world. This new satellite transmission created the possibility of instant national exposure for recording artists as well as the simultaneous broadcast of performances on a worldwide scale. This new satellite transmission created an international platform for charity rock, which included socially conscious mega-events and mass concerts. Such technologies provided charity songs and concerts, such as “We Are The World” and Live Aid, with international appeal. The worldwide popularity of these charity events coupled with the emergence of socially conscious artists in the eighties granted multinational record companies greater access to new international markets and consumers.

These developments in the eighties thus represented a vital shift in global communication networks. Because such new technologies allowed local populations around the world to create, produce, and disseminate their own musics, multinational corporations sought to contain decentralized independence. In 1987, representatives from eleven independent record companies met in a London pub, the Empress of Russia, to discuss how to control a market that was steadily developing outside the confines of the Anglo-American industry. They collectively agreed on the term “world music” to promote all non-Anglo-American pop music artists. Eventually appropriated by multinational labels, the world music label helped to accommodate the growing interest in “other” musics and was created as a marketable category for consumers to more easily identify international music in record stores. According to Jocelyne Guilbault, this category provided a single, unified rubric under which all new musics could be placed and therefore made it easier to control “a market that had so far remained

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262 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid., 22-23.
untapped and uncircumscribed by the dominant music industry.” As the “world music” label gained popularity, “world beat” also became a regular part of record industry discourse. The term “world beat” has had shifting meanings, but was often used to describe popular music from non-Western cultures marketed to Western consumers or the music of Western artists who appropriated non-Western elements. The world music phenomenon precipitated the creation of a world music category on the Billboard charts in May 1990. This was followed by the addition of a world music category for the Grammys in the summer of 1991. The emergence of both world music charts and awards categories thus reflects the historical developments in global communications and the surge of interests in non-Western musics.

*The Praise and Worship Movement*

One of the ways in which the growing interest in globalization and multiculturalism manifested in black church and gospel music culture was through the rise of the praise and worship movement. Today, the praise and worship movement is undoubtedly an intricate component of the black church experience and is now considered a subgenre of gospel music. While praise and worship music has become integral to the black worship experience, the stylistic contours of praise and worship have contributed to a new multicultural approach to worship. The participatory aspect of praise and worship appeals to the diversity of church congregations, as there is usually an emphasis on call and response as well as unison, congregational singing. The praise and worship leader is responsible for transforming the worship space into a space of inclusion by encouraging the congregation to participate in various

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269 See worship chapter for a detailed history on the emergence of the praise and worship movement.
expressions of adoration to God, such as singing, swaying, dancing, and lifting hands. The simple, uncomplicated melodies coupled with repetitive lyrics that characterize praise and worship music make it easy to learn, sing, and retain, increasing its multiethnic appeal. Moreover, because praise and worship lyrics are more vertically oriented, as they usually speak about God rather than human concerns, praise and worship attracts a diverse consumer base. The simple melodies and vertical lyrics are designed to stress intimacy and to reinforce an ethos of community among diverse people groups within the church.

The stylistic diversity of praise and worship music also appeals to broad audiences—rock, gospel, country, and pop are among the various genres that are appropriated within praise and worship music. Many of the leading gospel artists who specialize in praise and worship also often incorporate eclectic, multiethnic sounds into their songs—artists such as Judith McAllister, Kurt Carr, and Israel Houghton (the latter two will be discussed later) have included African, Asian, and Caribbean sounds into their music. The addition of multicultural sounds in praise and worship music has expanded gospel music’s reach to individuals of diverse races and encouraged collective worship that transcends racial and ethnic distinctions.

Deborah Smith Pollard discusses how the popularity of white praise and worship artists among black consumers is evidence that black churchgoers are becoming increasingly more accepting of this new wave of multiculturalism. As evidence for her argument, Pollard claims that there are “unprecedented numbers of black consumers…buying music recorded by white praise and worship leaders, such as Vicki Yohe, Judy Jacobs, Mary Alessi, and Martha

271 Ibid., 109-111. It should be noted, however, that many praise and worship songs among white Christian Contemporary artists tend to be extremely wordy. Although some songs tend to have many lyrics, churches often have screens with the words written on them so that the audience can participate.
272 Ibid; Pollard, When The Church Becomes Your Party, 34.
Munizzi.” Martha Munizzi has become a favorite among black consumers. Her 2003 release, *The Best Is Yet To Come*, reached number 2 on Billboard’s Gospel Albums Charts. The success of her CD led to her being the first white artist to win a Gospel Stellar Award in 2005 for Best New Artist.

Vicki Yohe has also recently become very popular among black audiences. In 2003, Yohe released her CD, *I Just Want You*, under Pure Springs Records owned by gospel singer CeCe Winans. This CD remained on the gospel charts for more than eighteen months, peaking at number 7. Moreover, Wes Morgan, a white male gospel artist, has also achieved popularity among black gospel audiences. His single “I Choose To Worship” (*Under an Open Heaven*, 2010) increased his popularity among black audiences and was highly requested on black gospel radio. The growing popularity of white artists in the gospel market and the acceptance of lyrics that depart from the standard gospel tradition suggest that black audiences are beginning to embrace an identity that transcends the traditional themes historically expressed within gospel music.

**Gospel Artists’ Appropriations of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM)**

The embracement of multiculturalism through the medium of praise and worship also parallels the emergence of an increasing number of black gospel artists who are releasing songs on their albums that are sonically akin to the white contemporary Christian music sound, which is often characterized by rock band instrumentation. “Free Indeed” by Sheri Jones Moffett (*Renewed*, 2009) and “Bless The Lord” by Tye Tribbet (*Stand Out*, 2008) are two examples in which gospel artists appropriate a rock-influenced, electric guitar-infused sound with heavy
emphasis on percussion. Each of these songs also contains the standard pop-rock form elements of verse, chorus, and bridge.²⁷⁸

In conjunction with gospel artists performing songs that are sonically akin to CCM is the practice of covering songs initially released within the CCM market. Gospel artists are increasingly appropriating popular, chart-topping CCM songs, often within the praise and worship genre, and (re)introducing them to black audiences. Among the recent gospel covers of CCM songs are “Our God” by Micah Stampley (Love Never Fails, 2013) originally performed by Chris Tomlin, “I Can Only Imagine” by Tamela Mann (Best Days: Deluxe Edition, 2013) originally performed by MercyMe, “Break Every Chain” by Tasha Cobbs (Grace, 2012) originally performed by Jesus Culture, “Indescribable” by Kierra Sheard (Free, 2011) originally performed by Laura Story and also covered by Chris Tomlin, and “Agnus Dei” performed by Donnie McClurkin (Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, 2004) originally performed by Michael W. Smith.²⁷⁹

These appropriations, however, also contain economic implications that inform the motives of gospel artists. During the 2012 Gospel Heritage Conference in Jacksonville, Florida that I attended, a panel that included gospel artists VaShawn Mitchell and Hezekiah Walker discussed how gospel artists appropriate the CCM sound to expand their market base beyond the black church.²⁸⁰ Their expansion efforts, however, often go unrealized, as black gospel artists commonly have difficulty crossing over into the realm of white contemporary Christian music due to the racial divide that exists between the gospel and CCM industries and allegations of


²⁷⁹ Johnson, “‘Oh, For A Thousand Tongues To Sing,’ ” 303. In her dissertation, Johnson also lists various songs that have been “gospelized” and rearranged for black congregations. Among some of the songs that she lists are: “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High” by Rick Founds, “As the Deer” by Martin Nystrom, and “Give Thanks” by Don Moen.

racism within the CCM industry. These appropriations of the CCM sound therefore speak not only to a passion for multiculturalism, but also to a desire to expand their economy and to become more commercially marketable as multicultural artists. Shayne Lee’s analysis of popular televangelists further substantiates this claim, as he discusses how having a multiethnic appeal in the religious marketplace can potentially expand one’s market share.

These practices in which gospel artists are appropriating the sonic dimensions and songs of the CCM industry reflect a recent surge of interest among gospel artists in multiculturalism. Such sounds are appropriated with the hope of expanding markets and gaining a more racially diverse consumer base. The praise and worship songs of gospel artists along with their appropriations of contemporary Christian music have and continue to be significant developments in advocating cross-cultural worship and in constructing a global identity. The preoccupation with a multicultural approach to worship, however, is just as much a consequence of technological and musical antecedents as it is a reflection of theological developments within the black church.

Theological Antecedents

Much of the preoccupation with the construction of a global community can be attributed to the theologies preached from church pulpits. The black church and the gospel music industry share a fluid, symbiotic relationship in which the theological discourses taking place in the pulpits and in gospel lyrics are mutually affecting. The theologies preached in pulpits thus often find their way into the theological discourses and musical constructs of gospel artists. One of the major theological movements impacting the egalitarian ethic of gospel artists is the Word of Faith Movement.


The Word of Faith Movement rests upon three fundamental principles: “the principle of knowing who you are in Christ; the practice of positive confession (which stems from a positive mental attitude); and a worldview that emphasizes material prosperity and physical health as the divine right of every Christian.” Word of Faith adherents are taught to give voice to a desired outcome, to “speak the same words about themselves that God has spoken about them in the Bible.” Because Word of Faith theology places a high premium on the power of words, this movement is often referred to as “the name it and claim it” movement. Followers of this movement have also strongly advocated racial reconciliation, as multiculturalism became a growing concern among evangelical Christians nationwide in the 1980s and early 1990s. In many Word of Faith churches, hanging international flags on the walls of the sanctuary to represent the diversity of individuals who comprise the church body is a common decorative motif. Word church leaders and attendees position themselves as being at the forefront of a multicultural movement that demonstrates “what the Bible really says about interracial interaction and reconciliation.”

The preoccupation with multiculturalism in gospel music is thus a symptom of a larger theological shift within the Word of Faith Movement. Through engaging in multicultural rhetoric and musical practices, gospel artists are expanding their market share by tapping into a religious economy that engages multiculturalist discourse. By including this rhetoric in their musical and lyrical content, gospel artists provide their followers with a musical correlate to the preached theologies that many of them are exposed to on Sunday morning.

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284 Ibid., 10.
285 Ibid. 82.
286 Ibid. 45.
287 Ibid., 102.
The aforementioned historical developments and practices have all precipitated the emergence of gospel albums that emphasize universal Christian oneness. Kirk Franklin, Israel Houghton, Kurt Carr and Donnie McClurkin have each used their albums to enforce an ethic of racial inclusion and to critique racial divisions that exist both in the church and in culture. Their music and discourses demonstrate how they negotiate difference and how they understand God’s work in deconstructing it. The remainder of the chapter engages how these artists are constructing imagined global communal identities and the ways such constructions best embody real spirituality.

**Kirk Franklin**

went gold.\textsuperscript{290} As referenced earlier, Franklin’s uncanny ability to mix the gospel message with an urban, hip-hop flair has granted him credibility on both sacred and secular platforms. His unprecedented record sales have positioned him as the highest selling gospel artist of all time.

At the dawning of the twenty-first century, Franklin felt a spiritual conviction to expand the thematic parameters of gospel music and to use his influence in the music industry to defy the racial barriers that he believes have become pervasive in the church. \textit{Kirk Franklin Presents One Nation Crew} (2000) was a musical manifestation of Franklin’s desire to confront this issue. One Nation Crew is a singing group comprised of individuals from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Throughout the CD booklet are visual representations of inclusivity in which the diversity of One Nation Crew is foregrounded. In one picture, they are linked together, holding one another’s arms as a sign of ethnic solidarity (Figure 2.1).

\textbf{Figure 2.1}: Racially diverse members of One Nation Crew stand with linked arms. (Photo from CD booklet)

Also in the CD booklet are liner notes that contain a discourse of inclusivity, in which Franklin decries the lack of progression and cultural diversity in the Christian community:

> When I look at the body of Christ, there are times I see regression more than progression. That tells me that it’s time for a change. Not in what we believe or whom we believe, but in how we believe. What about black and white people

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
being equal? What about religion should be replaced with relationship? What about it’s the message in gospel music that makes it gospel, not the music? What happened to that? I may not have all the answers, but one thing I know: that when you find HIM, the lesson is complete.²⁹¹

The appearance of this discourse on the very first page of the CD booklet sets the tone for a thematic and lyrical departure from his earlier musical projects. His denunciation of racial division among “the body of Christ” and his assertion that blacks and whites should be equal all undergird his advocacy for racial egalitarianism. This statement also reveals how Franklin is expanding traditional conceptions of intersubjectivity by challenging individuals within the Christian community to see themselves and their relationships with one another differently with regard to race relations. Moreover, by emphasizing that the message of gospel music is more important than the music itself, Franklin simultaneously addresses his critics and validates his commitment to a different kind of musical/lyrical expression. Placing priority on the message over the music defends him against conservative critics who condemned him for infusing the gospel message with the sonic dimensions of hip hop while it also serves to justify the various cultural appropriations and representational practices that define his new multicultural approach.²⁹²

In addition, this discourse also renders a redefinition of spirituality by implying that having a real experience with God should engender a transformation in how one understands difference. Franklin’s rhetorical question—“What about religion should be replaced with relationship?”—echoes a common aphorism within black church parlance: “I don’t have religion, I have relationship.”²⁹³ As referenced in the introduction, this saying suggests that “religion” is defined by banal traditional customs and redundant ritualistic practices that are without meaning.

²⁹¹ Kirk Franklin Presents One Nation Crew, CD liner notes.
²⁹³ See discussion of religion vs. relationship on p. 3 of introduction and footnotes.
and devoid of genuine concern for God; contrastingly, “relationship” implies a real spiritual engagement with God that is not simply about empty religious routine, but more about a process of maturation and genuine transformation in which one is continually conformed into the image of Christ. Franklin’s preference for relationship over religion thus implies that when one has a real spiritual encounter with God then that should transform how one perceives someone of another race. The last sentence of his statement, “when you find HIM, the lesson is complete,” solidifies his connection between racial harmony and real spirituality—in other words, finding God entails an authentically transformative experience that innately alters one’s perception of other ethnic groups. Although “finding God” is an overly simplistic solution to racial reconciliation, Franklin maintains that bigotry dissolves in the face of spiritual transformation. Ultimately for Franklin, real spirituality precludes racial bigotry.

The CD begins with a spoken interlude in which the singers from One Nation Crew participate in a rhetorical collage. Each singer speaks of various social ills that plague the world, producing an echo effect—wars, politics, discrimination, bigotry, bombs, crime, incest, greed, rape, drugs, murder, and racism are among the words uttered during this interlude. Franklin highlights these words in order to foreground common issues that often divide rather than unite. Franklin’s focus on unity is evident in the lyrical content heard throughout this CD, as an overwhelming majority of the songs focus mainly on the universal themes of love and pain. Various lyrical phrases demonstrate Franklin’s commitment to these universal themes: “Even though you’ve made mistakes God’s love will never change” is a line from the song “Donna”; and “I know the pain you feel inside and the tears you try to hide” is a line from “Free.” Because

294 Frederick, *Between Sundays*, 14-16. In her ethnography of a North Carolina religious community, Frederick discusses how the individuals who she interviewed often express a tension between religion and spirituality. Real spirituality, according to Frederick’s informants, is informed by an authentic relationship with God.
emotions like love and pain are experienced universally, such emotions transcend particular racial distinctions and speak to the existential realities of all people.

The songs “Unconditional” and “Be Like Him” incorporate what are intended to be musical influences from Latin America and South Africa respectively and are designed to encourage the construction of global egalitarianism. “Unconditional” begins with Sheila Ingram, a Latina member of One Nation Crew, encouraging the global community to praise God. While only the English translation is offered in the liner notes, Ingram speaks in Spanish: “I want everyone to stand up, help me praise the Lord. Yeah! I want to hear you!” After the first utterance of the chorus, Ingram again asks the entire global community to offer adulation to God: “If you didn’t hear me the first time, here goes one more time. I want everyone to stand up, the whole world, help me praise the Lord.”

Ingram’s voice is accompanied by a salsa-like groove, which is mainly comprised of an ostinato figure in D minor. The consistent ostinato pattern constitutes the main rhythmic and melodic material and undergoes variation and development throughout the song (Example 2.1).

![Example 2.1]

The figure fluctuates between the raised and lowered seventh as well as between the raised and lowered sixth. The ostinato figure along with chromatically altered tones are among the commonly used devices, according to Ralph Locke, that signify alterity. Franklin skillfully uses the ostinato pattern throughout “Unconditional” as a semiotic of alterity that sonically transports the listener into another culture.

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Franklin juxtaposes this ostinato figure with a hip hop sensibility, creating a salsa/hip hop hybrid. This becomes most evident when the ostinato figure that pervades the song morphs into a hip hop bass backbeat during the verse. In addition to the inclusion of a bass backbeat, Franklin also incorporates urban hip hop vernacular during the chorus to emphasize his message of global solidarity. The chorus reads: “All my people in the world holla back God’s love holla what unconditional / If you ain’t ashamed holla back God’s love holla what unconditional / 24/7 it won’t change, remember God’s love remains the same / All my people in the world holla back now holla what unconditional.”

Franklin’s inclusion of urban vernacular to promulgate a message of global inclusion, however, raises questions with regard to audience. His usage of hip hop rhetorical tropes, like “holla back” and “holla what,” may obfuscate his agenda. If this album is intended to be “all-inclusive,” then could using hip hop vernacular exclude some communities? Or is this album catered specifically to a black market to admonish black people to be more culturally inclusive? The intended audience is thus obscured by the hip hop rhetorical expressions that Franklin harnesses to communicate his agenda.296

Despite the ambiguity as it relates to audience, Franklin’s intermingling of this salsa-like ostinato figure and an urban stylistic approach is a musical manifestation of the type of ethnic intermingling and solidarity that he desires among Christians. His emphasis on the universal theme of unconditional love, as revealed through the title and lyrics of the song, further emphasizes this desire. The line, “24/7 it won’t change, remember God’s love remains the same” suggests that God’s love is not limited to particular ethnic groups. Implicit in this phrase is a reconceptualization of spirituality in which Franklin communicates what God thinks concerning

296 We will see in later examples that the use of black vernacular is a common rhetorical motif in the discursive and musical language of gospel artists.
race. Because God’s love is not biased toward a particular people group, God’s indiscriminate love should serve as an example for how Christians should interpret difference.

While “Unconditional” evokes musical influences from Latin America, “Be Like Him” is Franklin’s attempt to evoke a South African sound. The lyrics to the song emphasize the spiritual transformation that Christians believe will take place at the eschaton. The lyrics are sung first in the original language, “Kwaze Kwabonakila thina sofananaye,” which is then followed by the English translation, “When He comes I shall be like Him.” In the second verse, Franklin includes the universal theme of pain in his lyrics as One Nation Crew sings, “no more pain I shall be like him. See His face, I shall be like Him.” While the universal issue of pain transcends current cultural distinctions, the eschatological undertones of the lyrics point to a future imagined community in which similarities will outweigh differences. Franklin strategically foreshadows the eschaton in order to place precedence on the common spiritual identity that we all possess over the racial differences that often divide.

To musically signify alterity, Franklin employs a number of commonly used semiotic devices. The song is sung without instrumentation and is only accompanied by foot stomping, finger snapping, and handclapping. The percussive sounds of hands and feet create polyrhythmic complexity, which for Franklin function to signify South African musical culture. This musical culture is also signified by the variety of vocal production techniques heard throughout the song—cries, hollers, screams, and whistles comprise the timbral diversity heard in the background.\(^{297}\) Franklin thus uses “Be Like Him” to engage a wide range of vocal production techniques and to demonstrate the timbral and percussive variety that he believes often characterizes South African music.

\(^{297}\) Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 52-54. Locke discusses polyrhythmic complexity and “unusual styles of vocal production” as stylistic features used by composers to construct otherness.
Although Franklin’s cultural borrowings seem to be sincere attempts at racial reconciliation, Franklin fails to provide detailed information in the liner notes about the origins of this folksong or the particular tribe or region from which this song originated. The lack of information with regard to region or tribe decontextualizes the music from its original surrounding, reducing it merely to a prop for Franklin’s theological agenda. In *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*, Timothy Taylor discusses how Western presentations of non-Western cultural musics can leave such musics “so decontextualized and deritualized that they are evacuated of the meanings of their own surroundings.”298 Franklin’s omission of detailed descriptions enables the erasure of the original cultural meaning and imposes a meaning that detaches the song from its initial context.

Without substantive information provided in the liner notes with regard to cultural context, the calls and screams heard throughout the song raise questions: What do the calls and screams heard in “Be Like Him” signify? How exactly do they represent South African culture? Oftentimes when “Africaness” is appropriated, stereotypical tropes that depict Africans as “barbaric,” “primitive,” and “uncultivated” tend to predominate.299 Africa is often painted with a broad, generalized stroke without attention paid to cultural or regional particularities. The absence of explanation in the liner notes thus makes the screams sound more like a caricature of South African vocalizations rather than an accurate representation of South African culture. Because he does not describe what these calls mean, Franklin’s appropriations seem simply to draw from common beliefs about what the “African other” should sound like, constructing what Susan McClary calls the “aura of exoticism,” rather than an accurate portrayal of a particular

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The aura of exoticism relies on supposedly “original, untainted ways of musicking and sounding,” informed by common essentialisms associated with a particular culture. Franklin’s appropriations—his employment of ritualistic screams, cries, and polyrhythmic complexity—therefore seem to rely more on essentialist notions about African authenticity rather than critical cultural engagement and objective representation. Franklin’s representations thus expose the slippage that often exists between accurate representation and exoticism. We will later see the ways in which these same issues regarding the construction of “Africanness” manifest in the music of Israel Houghton.

Israel Houghton

Israel Houghton (b. 1971) is a gold-selling artist and five-time Grammy Award winner. His albums *Live From Another Level* (2004) and *Alive in South Africa* (2005), both of which are double discs, went gold, ranking Houghton among gospel’s top selling artists in the twenty-first century. Houghton’s commercial success can be largely attributed to the multicultural appeal of his music. Often referred to as the “architect of cross-cultural praise and worship,” Houghton has written songs that have become popular praise and worship anthems among both black and white audiences. Such songs include “Friend of God” (*Live From Another Level*, 2004), “Again I Say Rejoice” (*Live From Another Level*, 2004), “Not Forgotten” (*Alive In South Africa*, 2005), and “You Are Good” (*Alive In South Africa*, 2005).

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300 Susan McClary, “Structures of Identity and Difference in Bizet’s Carmen,” in *Reading Music: Selected Essays*, (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2007), 158. McClary used the term “aura of exoticism” to criticize Bizet’s cultural appropriation of gypsy culture. She claims that Bizet failed to critically engage the culture from which he appropriated and simply relied on popular stereotypes about gypsy culture.


302 Ibid. Frith, “The Discourse of World Music,” 308. In this article, Frith also problematizes the slippage between authenticity and exoticism. He traces the history of the musical equation of the exotic and the authentic to the 1950s.


The cross-cultural appeal of Houghton’s music is informed by his multiracial upbringing. As a self-described “black kid who grew up in a white family in a Hispanic neighborhood,” Houghton began negotiating race at a very early age. At the age of 17, Houghton’s white mother became pregnant by a black man. Because her family was not supportive of her pregnancy due to the social stigma attached to interracial relationships, her family gave her the option to either “have a back-alley abortion or be disowned.” The social rejection that Houghton’s mother experienced by her family and community caused her to relocate the family to California. Houghton’s feelings of social isolation were exacerbated by his identification as the only biracial child among all white siblings. In order to explain to friends of the family why Israel’s skin complexion was slightly darker, his siblings would say: “It’s because he’s the eldest.”

Houghton’s biracial identity helped to shape his interest in a wide range of eclectic musical styles. His multicultural appeal lies in his effortless ability to construct a sonic synthesis that engages a multiplicity of stylistic approaches borrowed from gospel, rock, pop, R&B, funk, and even bluegrass music, among others. “There were never any compartments for me growing up,” asserts Houghton. “I listened to the Beatles and I listened to Andrae Crouch and I listened to The Eagles and I listened to bluegrass music, and it was just all kind of one and the same. It was all music to me.”

Houghton’s interest in diverse musical styles, however, transcends the mere aesthetics of the music and entails wider social implications. Houghton’s ultimate desire is for his music to be

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307 Mike Rimmer, “Israel Houghton: Bridging the black/white worship music divide,” Cross Rhythms, October 2, 2009, http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/Israel_Houghton_Bridging_the_blackwhite_worship_music_divide/37411/p1/. Houghton also explains one traumatic experience in which he was pushed to the ground by his grandfather who refused to accept him because of his biracial identity.
used as a catalyst for eradicating cultural division in the church. Houghton founded the music
ensemble New Breed in 1995 with the aim of deconstructing racial and cultural divisions that
pervade the church. As a model of multicultural cooperation, New Breed was designed to
advocate racial unity and to intentionally resist cultural and stylistic categorization. “If you can
categorize something, you can cancel it at any time,” declares Houghton. “And so we’ve really
deliberately fought being categorized. . . . We’ll infuse just different styles and rhythms and
melodies and things like that on purpose.”\(^\text{309}\)

In another interview, Houghton averred that he is
“intentionally cross-cultural, intentionally cross-generational,” and “intentionally cross-
denominational.”\(^\text{310}\)

Although multiculturalism has become a marketing trend during the latter part of the
twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Houghton resists the notion that
he is conforming to any particular commercial pattern. Houghton has often accused industry
executives of telling him that his multicultural stylistic approach was not marketable because it
did not conform neatly to a black or white category. As his professional career began to flourish,
he discovered what he calls “segregated musical societies,” that encouraged him to produce
music that was either “all black or all white.”\(^\text{311}\)

By claiming that the industry initially rejected
his multicultural approach, Houghton opposes the claim that his cross-cultural style is
commercially opportunistic.

To further justify his multicultural approach, Houghton often invokes eschatological
imagery. In one interview, Houghton claims that the stylistic devices deployed in music should
reflect the diversity of the kingdom of heaven:


I love being able to say, we’re global. We’re not relegated to Houston. We’re not relegated to North Carolina. We’re not just North America. This is a global thing. Here’s my thought: the sound of heaven, what does that sound like? Is it a black sound? Is it a white sound? Is it a Latin American sound? No. It’s a world, global sound. There are melodies and instruments being used that we have yet to even discover. Our whole thing is, while we’re on earth, if we’re praying to “let your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” I believe there is a sound that accompanies the sound of His kingdom. I want to be a part of seeing that happen on earth.12

During this interview, Houghton stresses his desire to see the sonic ethos of heaven transposed onto the earth. In quoting the Lord’s Prayer, he asserts that multiculturalism is the divine will of God—a diverse mixture of sounds is the direct result of allowing God’s “kingdom to come” and God’s “will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.” By advocating a global approach to music-making, he believes that he is expressing the ethic of the immaterial world and is therefore demonstrating how to embody real spirituality.

In another interview, however, it becomes clear that his predilection for a diverse stylistic tapestry extends beyond the music alone and reflects his desire to see this same kind of multicultural mixture reflected among diverse people groups. Houghton declares: “If heaven doesn’t have sections in it, then why would we section things off here. . . . Let’s all come together. If we’re rehearsing for what’s going to happen eternally, then let’s bring all sounds, colors, skin tones, styles together.”13 In this interview, he engages in an eschatological discourse not only to challenge traditional conceptions of stylistic acceptability, but also to construct a new interpersonal identity. By asserting that the world should not be divided by race and that all “colors” and “skin tones” should be united, Houghton proposes a new conception of intersubjectivity, challenging the way Christians perceive “others.” The future heavenly community is used as an archetype to construct an imagined community of racial cooperation.

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here on earth. This present life, according to Houghton, should be interpreted as a dress rehearsal that prepares Christians for the egalitarian ethos of the coming kingdom.

Both of Houghton’s albums *Live From Another Level* and *Alive in South Africa* are instructive in demonstrating how he musically and lyrically enforces a global identity and presents a new definition of spirituality. Throughout *Live From Another Level*, Houghton advocates for a realized eschatology, in which the ideal multicultural ethos of God’s kingdom becomes actualized on earth. Moreover, many of the songs contain multiple calls for every nation to collectively praise God as one unified body.

On CD 1, “Come In From The Outside” and “All Around” possess Caribbean-tinged grooves with ethnically inclusive lyrics that admonish the international community to offer adoration to God. As the first song on the CD, “Come In From The Outside” establishes the thematic tone for the entire CD. In the chorus of the song, there is an inclusive invitation: “Everybody, everybody. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Everybody, everybody, praise.” The scripture “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord,” taken from Psalm 150:6, is invoked to emphasize the common obligation that all human beings have to praise God irrespective of race or ethnicity. Houghton’s commitment to stylistic diversity can be heard in the musical pulse throughout the song, which is evocative of a funk/rock stylistic conflation. After the second iteration of the chorus, the song transitions into a Caribbean groove. As the Caribbean groove becomes the main musical material, Houghton begins to sing with a Caribbean accent. In order to signify Caribbean vocality, Houghton uses a different vocal timbre and begins to sing with a gravelly vocal texture. As he rhythmically and vocally shifts to a Caribbean groove, the lyrics articulate a realized eschatology, in which Houghton calls for the coming of the kingdom

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and the establishment of God’s throne: “We’re the generation that will give you praise and adoration / Let your kingdom come, let your will be done / Establish now your throne, O my Lord.” The lyrics and the Caribbean pulse create an eschatological urgency, wherein Houghton envisions and anticipates a future community that is without division.

His desire to use his music to deconstruct racial division becomes most evident during “I Hear the Sound.” During a spoken interlude, Houghton declares: “What I love about this sound, it ain’t a black sound. It ain’t a white sound. It ain’t even about the color of your skin.” He then has the audience participate in a militaristic unity chant with lyrics that illustrate ethnic solidarity: “It ain’t a black thang, it ain’t a white thang, it ain’t a color thang, it’s a kingdom thang” *(Example 2.2).*

![Example 2.2](image)

Similar to Franklin, Houghton employs vernacular language to communicate an ethic of transcultural cooperation. The use of the words “ain’t” and “thang,” however, may be intended to be more relatable to Israel’s black consumer base. Though the vernacular could exclude particular ethnic communities, the invocation of the kingdom is intended to be all-inclusive. His use of kingdom rhetoric within this chant reinforces his mission to exemplify the ideal social ethic of heaven on earth and invites the audience to imagine a community devoid of such racial distinctions.

*On Alive In South Africa,* the theme of multiculturalism pervades the lyrical content of the majority of the album. The images in the liner notes are replete with representations of South African culture and worship scenes from the live recording *(Figure 2.2).*
Recorded live in Cape Town, South Africa, this project is designed to fulfill Houghton’s desire to use multi-ethnic worship as a conduit to establish global unity. Throughout the CD, congregational folksongs sung in the native language are intermittently dispersed between songs. The CD commences with the sounds of a large congregation singing the South African national anthem. As the voices fade, an instrumental intro begins that exhibits the stylistic diversity that is a staple of Houghton’s sound. Played by an African drumming ensemble, a rhythmically syncopated drumming pattern is heard at the beginning of the intro. The African drumming pattern quickly transitions to a militant repetitive note pattern in 3/4, which then shifts to a funk groove that sustains the majority of the song. The stylistic variety heard in the instrumental intro leads into the first song on the album, “Alive,” which contains universal, inclusive lyrics: “In every nation He is alive / In every language it’s the same, hallelujah / Hallelujah, hallelujah Jesus is alive / Alive, alive all over the world.” By asserting that “hallelujah” is pronounced the same in every language, Houghton strategically uses this universally inclusive word to communicate

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316 Israel Houghton, “ISRAEL HOUGHTON – ALIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA full concert,” YouTube video, 2:03:38, posted by Kings Media Productions, January 21, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0azzZfZUfO5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0azzZfZUfO5). The entire live recording has been posted to this YouTube page.
his multicultural theology. The use of the word “hallelujah” as a lyrical semiotic of unity sets the tone for the thematic content that permeates the remainder of the album.

The song “Come And Let Us Sing” featuring singer-songwriter and South African native Jonathan Butler is illustrative of the theme of global unity that characterizes this album. The title itself departs from traditional gospel rhetoric, as gospel lyrics commonly use the personal singular form as opposed to the more inclusive plural form. The usual personal, subjective pronoun “me” that often characterizes gospel lyrical content is replaced by the intersubjective pronoun “us” to suggest a new communal identity. This song is replete with invitations to the congregation to participate in various communal acts of worship. Each verse modulates up a half step—from C Major, to C# Major, to D Major—in order to introduce a different act of praise: the 1st verse begins with “come and let us sing,” followed by the 2nd verse, “come and let us shout,” and finally ending with the 3rd verse, “come and let us dance.”

At the end of the song, Butler employs “hallelujah” as part of a unity chant to communicate a global ethic. Butler sings “ha-la-la-lelujah,” a play on the word “hallelujah,” in call and response fashion and with a syncopated pulse (Example 2.3).

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Ha-la-la-lu-jah Ha-la-la-lu-jah Ha-la-la-lu-jah Ha-la-la-lu-jah
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Example 2.3

New Breed and the congregation then repeat after him, slightly varying the rhythm with an additional “la,” as Butler injects colorful melismas to embellish the melody. The use of the term “hallelujah” strategically encodes unity—it directs attention away from the individual and toward praising God, focusing more on commonalities instead of differences. Alive In South Africa essentially represents Houghton’s attempt to construct a global identity and to create a common worship language for an international community. The idea of engaging or changing the
entire world is also heard or implied in the lyrical content of “Not Forgotten,” “I Will,” “You Are Good,” and “Again I Say Rejoice.”

It is evident that Houghton feels that his subject position as a biracial American gives him the social leverage to address race. In “The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop,” Steven Feld critiques artists who assume that their African ancestry entitles them to engage and appropriate African culture. Feld claims that one’s subject position should not discourage ethical scrutiny and moral accountability. He goes on to state that particularly in a sphere “overtly marked by inspiration and musically coded as homage,” such scrutiny can be elided. In Houghton’s case, accountability can easily be neglected because of the spiritual and inspirational rhetoric that is attached to his agenda. However, despite Houghton’s genuine attempt to enact God’s will by constructing a new global identity, as informed by his biracial subject position, there remain ethical issues that arise from his engagement with South African culture.

Similar to Franklin, Houghton also neglects to include significant information in the liner notes to inform the listener about all of the musicians involved in the project. As mentioned briefly above, *Alive In South Africa* contains numerous musical interludes of African congregational singing. At the end of “Not Forgotten (reprise)” (CD 1) and “Friend of God” (CD 2) there is a soloist leading the congregation in song. Although the liner notes state, “Song congregation clips recorded LIVE at the Jabula Conference in Harere Zimbabwe,” translations of these songs and the names of the soloists are not given. Furthermore, the title and translations are not given for the very first song that is heard on CD 1, which is the South African national anthem. For those who may not recognize the anthem, a translation and explanation would be

318 Feld, “The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop,” in *Western Music and Its Others*, 270. Feld critiques Herbie Hancock’s appropriation of pygmy music and states that Hancock’s subject position as an African American should not afford him the privilege of sampling “other” music without acknowledging and paying those from whom he is borrowing. All four artists discussed in this chapter appropriate and engage African culture because of their subject positions as African Americans.
319 Ibid.
fitting in order to make a connection between the usage of the national anthem and Houghton’s overall theological agenda.

While the absence of translations and the names of soloists in liner notes may seem innocuous, Paul Théberge stresses how such omissions point to power differentials and disparities.\(^{320}\) The intermittent interjections of African congregational singing without any explanation regarding what these songs mean in their cultural context reinforce the agency and subject position of Houghton as well as the disempowered position of the “other.” The disempowered position of the African soloist and the congregation denies them any significant amount of agency with regard to discursive representation. Houghton, however, has the leverage to engage cultural others and control how they are portrayed. His subject position as an American recording artist grants him the power to travel to another country and record a live album, while promoting his own ideological agenda. While Houghton overtly promotes racial equality, the lack of citations reinforces the exoticism of the “other” and exposes the inequality that exists between Western artists and non-Western “others.”

Perhaps because South Africa has a history steeped in racial apartheid Houghton believed that it was fitting to record there and promote racial equality. However, the liner notes and interviews do not indicate any kind of social-political work that Houghton participated in while performing in South Africa.\(^{321}\) The absence of detailed explanations with regard to social work and the lack of information in the liner notes run the risk of reducing South Africa to a one-dimensional culture, readily available for Houghton’s cooptation and appropriation. The ethics of


\(^{321}\) It should be noted, however, that Israel Houghton has shown a commitment to social justice and activism. Houghton founded The Power of One Foundation, which “is a conglomerate of outreaches that strive to manifest the love of God through social justice and gracious activism.” This organization is designed to provide “financial, physical, and spiritual support” to those who are economically and socially disadvantaged. “The Foundation: Who We Are,” Power of One Foundation, accessed November 12, 2015, [http://powerofone.cc/foundation.shtml](http://powerofone.cc/foundation.shtml).
cultural representation are also discussed in relation to the music of Kurt Carr, who collaborates with multiple foreign artists in his multicultural project.

**Kurt Carr**

Kurt Carr (b. 1964) is a leading gospel music songwriter, arranger, producer, and instrumentalist. Carr’s musical abilities afforded him the opportunity to be hired by the legendary James Cleveland as his musical director until Cleveland’s passing in 1991. He was also the musical director for West Angeles Church of God In Christ, a megachurch in Los Angeles, California with approximately twenty thousand congregants. Together with his ensemble The Kurt Carr Singers founded in 1989, Carr has recorded eight number one songs on the gospel music charts. Most notably, his 2000 release *Awesome Wonder* was certified gold, selling over half a million copies. Among his most popular songs are “For Every Mountain” (*No One Else, 1997*), “In The Sanctuary” (*Awesome Wonder, 2000*), “I Almost Let Go” (*Awesome Wonder, 2000*), “The Presence of the Lord Is Here” (*Byron Cage: Live at New Birth Cathedral, 2003*), and “God Blocked It” (*One Church, 2005*).

Throughout his career he has also been mentored by iconic gospel figures like Richard Smallwood, who inspired Carr with his stylistic fluency in both gospel and classical music. It was his interaction with Andrae Crouch, however, that encouraged him to broaden his stylistic approach. Carr credits Crouch as one of the forerunners in generating multicultural worship, as

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324 Kurt Carr, interview by Matt and Laurie Crouch, *Praise The Lord*, TBN, February 11, 2010, [http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/MzeWdqMjgHoOAIXWoNA0QZY-W3w0TTM9q; Kurt Carr, interview by Jesse Duplantis, *Praise the Lord*, TBN, November 13, 2013, [http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/FycTY4aDrhLxGCI0j003a9JrIqRYP]; Gospo Centric Records, “Kurt Carr,” cbnmusic.com, accessed July 27, 2015, [http://www.cbn.com/cbnmusic/artists/carr_kurt.aspx; “Kurt Carr & The Kurt Carr Singers,” Amazon.com, accessed July 27, 2015, [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Kurt-Carr-The-Kurt-Carr-Singers/e/B003EGQ62L]. Carr stated in both of these interviews that he has recorded eight number one hits. These numbers however are not confirmed on the Billboard website. Also, while multiple websites state that *Awesome Wonder* was certified gold, this is also not indicated on the official RIAA website.

Crouch has written multiple songs that have become popular among both black and white audiences. After traveling abroad with Crouch for a few years, it was Crouch’s international ministry that motivated Carr to reach audiences outside the confines of the black church. Carr believes that it is a part of his calling “to tear down the walls that exist” between divergent ethnic communities.

After his song “In The Sanctuary” became an international success and was translated into twenty-four different languages, Carr stated that God gave him a mandate to make an album with a transnational appeal for all people. In a TBN interview, Carr describes a conversation he had with a friend that confirmed what God was calling him to do:

I was talking with my friend Tommy… and he said: “Kurt, there’s a scripture in the Bible where Jesus was praying to the Father that we would be one as he is one with the Father.” And Tommy said: “Do you realize that’s the one unanswered prayer that Jesus ever prayed.” And I was like, “whoa.” And it is. Martin Luther King said it best. He said: “10 am on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week.” And for the most part whites worship together, blacks worship together, Hispanics, Asians, etc. But there’s a day coming, and the day is now, that those walls are coming down. . . . And if we can’t worship the Lord together down here, what are we gonna do when we get to heaven? [audience applauds] And God told me to make an album and create music that reaches not just white and black, but other countries, other nationalities.

In this interview, Carr implies that his purpose is to provide an answer to the prayers of Jesus by inspiring various racial groups to worship collectively. Carr discusses multicultural worship as the manifestation of God’s perfect will and positions his music as a potential antidote to racial division. Transcultural worship reflects the social ethic of heaven and serves as preparation for

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326 Kurt Carr, interview by Jesse Duplantis, [http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/FycTY4aDrhLNzGC1t0jOU3a93J0qRYPJ](http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/FycTY4aDrhLNzGC1t0jOU3a93J0qRYPJ).

327 Kurt Carr, interview by Karen Wheaton, *Praise the Lord*, TBN, October 14, 2005, [http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/lsdm15NDp0LuTZCz9F4L5fbyNWwm7sT](http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/lsdm15NDp0LuTZCz9F4L5fbyNWwm7sT).

328 Kurt Carr, interview by Jesse Duplantis, [http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/FycTY4aDrhLNzGC1t0jOU3a93J0qRYPJ](http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/FycTY4aDrhLNzGC1t0jOU3a93J0qRYPJ).

the future eschatological community. Carr ultimately believes that the purpose of his ministry is “to bring unity to the body of Christ.”

One Church, a live recording created at West Angeles Church of God In Christ, was the musical manifestation of Carr’s advocacy for multiculturalism. The liner notes contain visual representations of inclusivity—the cover photo as well as other pages within the CD booklet contain images of children from multiple ethnic groups (Figure 2.3), while the rest of the CD booklet is replete with photos of foreign musicians with whom Carr collaborated.

The back of the CD booklet reads, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one church,” as taken from the New Testament book of Ephesians. Lyrically, One Church contains songs that reveal Carr’s eschatological imagination, that luxuriate in the eternal reign of God and humanity’s final reconciliation with God in God’s kingdom.

In the opening song “Reign,” the Kurt Carr Singers sing a majestic melody on a unison octave on “Ah” that evokes the realm of the supernatural and sets the tone for the eschatological implications in the lyrics. The homophonic unison structure of the melody contributes to the sense of ethereality that is further induced by the lyrical content. During the chorus, they sing:

331 Ephesians 4:5.
332 Ingalls, “Singing Heaven Down to Earth,” 256. Ingalls uses the term “eschatological imagination.”
“Reign, Jesus reign / Be thou glorified above this earthly plain / Son of God, and oh so good / In majesty Your kingdom will forever reign.” Toward the end of the second verse, is when Carr’s invocation of the eschaton becomes apparent: “Then may I soar beyond the sky / And see Your face with my own eyes / In my eternal home around the throne / I’ll offer up this song.”

Carr’s engagement with kingdom rhetoric and his invocation of the imagined future community reach a musical climax during the second chorus. At this juncture, Carr inserts a monologue as his singers sing about angels falling prostrate before God at the end of time. Carr boldly proclaims: “Let everything in heaven and on earth hail the power of Jesus’ name.” This monologue prepares us for the eschatological climax, which is signified by an abrupt modulation from F-sharp major to C major. Carr then transitions to the third chorus, which contains a series of modulations—from C major, to C sharp major, to D major—all on the word “Reign.” The successive modulations on the word “Reign” underscore the transcendence of God and help to musically anticipate the heavenly community. With each modulation, the earthly community becomes increasingly conjoined with the imagined social reality of heaven.

Carr ends the song with a tag (a reprise in the liner notes), using a homophonic choral melody on the word “hallelujah” (Example 2.4).

\[\text{Example 2.4}\]

333 This is taken from Psalm 150:6—“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”
The homophonic choral structure and the use of the universal word “hallelujah” signifies the theme of unification that Carr foregrounds throughout this project. This hallelujah chant is aesthetically similar to the “ah” melody that is sung at the beginning of “Reign,” as this melody is designed to evoke the transcendent, ethereal realm. Carr’s use of “hallelujah” enables the imaginary transition from the material realm into that which is immaterial.

Carr also collaborated with foreign musicians and employed instruments not normally associated with gospel music in order to musically construct difference. In one interview, Carr lists the various sounds that he experimented with to propagate a new global message: “I went and got influences from different nationalities, sounds. A sitar from India. I got an accordion on a gospel song. Whoever heard of such? Bagpipes and all kinds of things and different influences to bless the world.”

At the beginning of “Psalm 68 [Let Our God Arise],” Carr collaborates with Armenian accordionist Albert Armen to give the congregation a sample of Armenian culture. Carr begins the song with a brief spoken introduction to prepare the congregation for a stylistic and instrumental experience that is not common in gospel music: “I’m really excited about this next song. I’m trying something that I don’t know anybody [chuckles] has ever done before so, y’all pray for me [audience laughs and claps]. [Have] you ever seen an accordion in the church? This is Albert Armen and he is from Armenia. Play a little praise music on that.”

After Carr’s instruction to “play a little praise music” Armen begins playing a few measures of music on the accordion, which is portrayed as an authentic representation of musical expression from Armenian culture. The remainder of the song features Armen while Carr’s singers begin singing about the invincible power of God.

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The involvement of foreign instruments and musicians to construct alterity can also be heard on the songs “If I Tell God” and “They Didn’t Know.” In “If I Tell God” Carr incorporates an African drumming ensemble and addresses the song to all of his “friends in Africa and all around the world.” The African ensemble provides the percussive backdrop for the African chant that is heard during the instrumental introduction and sustains the rhythmic pulse throughout the remainder of the song. In “They Didn’t Know” Carr collaborates with John Allan, a Scottish bagpiper. Given that this song lyrically retells the story of the brutal death and crucifixion of Christ, the bagpipe is fitting, as it is often used to sonically encode death.

Carr’s efforts to challenge conventional notions of intersubjectivity and to construct a new collective identity are often complicated by the overt exoticism displayed throughout the project. Carr collaborates with multiple foreign musicians on this project who are supposedly authentic representations of their respective cultures. In numerous interviews, Carr expresses pride in his collaborative efforts with instrumentalists of different nationalities: “I had people from Armenia, a guy playing accordion. I had people from Russia, people from Japan, people from China. That’s what heaven is gonna be like.” His portrayal of these foreign musicians as authentic representations of their nations further exoticizes them and the nation that they represent—entire nations are reduced to one individual representative while the one individual is reduced to being a representative of his/her nation. Although Carr’s intentions are to pay respect to these artists and the cultures they represent, the complexities of the foreign musicians’ identities are denied in the process as they are reduced to one-dimensional beings. Such

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335 Kurt Carr, interview by Matt and Laurie Crouch, http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/ Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/MzeWd qMjq Ho QAIXWnNA0QZY-W3w0Tlm9.

336 Hesmondhalgh, “International Times,” in Western Music and Its Others, 283. Hesmondhalgh puts forth this same critique with regard to the sampling practices of music band Transglobal Underground.
collaborations therefore do not leave room for reciprocal subjectivities, as a variety of subject positions are available to Carr, while the foreign musicians are reduced to one.\footnote{Taylor, Global Pop, 21.}

These collaborative efforts also often include asymmetries with regard to economic rewards. Théberge discusses how foreign artists are commonly given a “one time only fee” and often relinquish other royalties that the Western artist receives from album sales.\footnote{Paul Théberge, “‘Ethnic Sounds’: The Economy and Discourse of World Music Sampling,” in Music and Technoculture, ed. René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, Jr (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 103; Hesmondhalgh, “International Times,” in Western Music and Its Others, 288; Feld, “The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop,” in Western Music and Its Others, 274.} Likewise, Steven Feld discusses how these musicians often play the role of “wage laborers” which reflects the ethics of “elite artistry.” According to the ethics of “elite artistry,” foreign musicians usually do not share ownership of the musical material as capitalist structures disproportionately favor and protect American subjects.\footnote{Feld, “Notes on World Beat,” 34; Taylor, Global Pop, 22.} The liner notes bolster Carr’s ownership of the music, as they clearly articulate: “All musical and vocal arrangements by Kurt Carr” (with the exception of “Be Grateful” written by Walter Hawkins). Despite the asymmetrical relationships of power that predominate, foreign musicians often willingly surrender control over royalties and subjective representation in exchange for visibility. According to Feld, Western artists “are in the strongest artistic and economic position in the world to freely appropriate what they like of human musical diversity, with full support from record companies and often with the outright gratitude of the musicians whose work now will appear under a new name.”\footnote{Feld, “Notes on World Beat,” 36-37.}

While Carr’s collaborations tend to exoticize foreigners as the “radical other,” it is apparent that Carr views such collaborations and appropriations as innocent exchanges between diverse cultures. Franklin, Houghton, and Carr evidently do not perceive their acts of appropriation as acts of exploitation, but as friendly transactions, “a form of cultural exchange

\footnotesize{337} Taylor, Global Pop, 21.
\footnotesize{339} Feld, “Notes on World Beat,” 34; Taylor, Global Pop, 22.
\footnotesize{340} Feld, “Notes on World Beat,” 36-37.
among equals.” Ultimately, they might assert that the message of global unity and the overall aesthetic experience take precedence over all other ethical concerns. The ethical concerns that arise in Carr’s music with regard to foreign collaborations do not arise in the music of Donnie McClurkin, whose project includes far less collaborations with foreign artists. Instead, McClurkin invests the bulk of his energy in incorporating foreign languages into his lyrical content and invoking the word “hallelujah” as a lyrical signifier of inclusion.

**Donnie McClurkin**

Donnie McClurkin (b. 1959) is the highest-selling male vocalist ever to grace the gospel music industry. McClurkin stepped onto the scene after his self-titled debut album *Donnie McClurkin* was released in 1996. Popular songs like “Speak To My Heart,” and especially “Stand,” contributed to the popularity of this album. After Oprah Winfrey held up the album on her show and announced that it was her favorite, the album catapulted to gold status within a month. After his debut release, McClurkin went on to release two platinum selling albums, *Donnie McClurkin: Live in London and More* (2000) and *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (2005). The single “We Fall Down” from *Live in London* was his most successful song from the album, topping the gospel charts and reaching the top 40 of Billboard’s R&B charts. He is the recipient of three Grammy awards, one of which was for “Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album” for *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. McClurkin also founded his own church in 2001 and

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341 Théberge, “‘Ethnic Sounds’” in *Music and Technoculture*, 104.
342 Ibid.
346 “Past Winners Search,” Grammy.com, accessed August 31, 2015, [http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist = %22 Donnie McClurkin %22&amp;field_nominee_work_value=&amp;year=All&amp;genre=All](http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist = %22 Donnie McClurkin %22&amp;field_nominee_work_value=&amp;year=All&amp;genre=All). Donnie’s other two Grammys were for “Best Soul Gospel Album” for his 2003 release *Donnie McClurkin Again* and for “Best Gospel Performance” for the song “Wait On The Lord,” a duet with Karen Clark-Sheard from his 2009 release *We All Are One*.
is the pastor of Perfecting Faith Church in Freeport, New York, which houses a congregation of approximately 3,000 people.\textsuperscript{347}

\textit{We All Are One: Live in Detroit} (2009) was McClurkin’s musical attempt at constructing a global identity. Stylistically, the album explores a broad tapestry of genres and approaches: “When You Love” transcends traditional gospel lyrical content and discusses romantic love; “Purple” has more of a classical approach and includes the sound of an orchestra; “I Choose To Be Dancing” incorporates a hard rock feel; and “The Great I Am” is a traditional gospel number that McClurkin describes as evocative of a Church of God in Christ “tambourine rais’ shoutin’ in the aisle song.”\textsuperscript{348} On this album, McClurkin was intentional about creating music that deviated from traditional gospel lyrics that focus on themes of black struggle and perseverance: “I didn’t want anything on my latest offering, \textit{We All Are One}, to reflect suffering or climbing up that mountain in the way to which traditional black gospel is accustomed,” stated McClurkin. “I wanted to luxuriate in and celebrate in the greatness of God.”\textsuperscript{349} McClurkin also claims that this album is not exclusively about racial egalitarianism, but also addresses political and denominational division. McClurkin explains: “Jesus said, ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand,’ yet we remain disconnected: Republicans and Democrats, Blacks, Whites, Yellows and Browns, Baptists and Methodists, Lutherans and Episcopalians....Where is the unity?”\textsuperscript{350} McClurkin’s essential message is that despite different ethnic, political and religious affiliations “we all are one, we’re one family.”\textsuperscript{351}

Before the release of \textit{We All Are One}, McClurkin occasionally flirted with alterity, foreshadowing the theme of transcultural unity that is heard throughout \textit{We All Are One}. On prior

\textsuperscript{347} “Church History,” Perfecting Faith Church, accessed August 31, 2015, \url{http://www.perfectingfaith.com/#church-history/c1j1a}.


\textsuperscript{349} “Donnie McClurkin Biography,” accessed August 31, 2015, \url{http://www.amazon.co.uk/Donnie-McClurkin/e/B000AQ1H1A}.

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid.
albums, McClurkin often evoked Caribbean culture. On *Live in London*, McClurkin sings what he calls a “Caribbean Medley” and on his 2003 release, *Donnie McClurkin Again*, the song “I’m Walking” also evokes Caribbean culture. In both instances, McClurkin alters his vocal timbre and begins to sing with a guttural growl coupled with a Caribbean accent to signify Caribbean culture and vocality.

On *Psalms, Hymns & Spiritual Songs*, McClurkin engages Caribbean culture once more but also moves beyond it to engage a wider range of cultures by incorporating foreign languages into the lyrical content. In the song “Awesome God,” originally a CCM song, McClurkin creates a Caribbean arrangement by employing the steel drum. Undergirded by a Caribbean syncopated rhythmic pulse created by the steel drum, Donnie begins to sing the chorus to “Awesome God” in different languages—first in Russian, then in German. His Caribbean, multi-linguistic version of “Awesome God” is then followed by the “Language Medley” also arranged by McClurkin. During the “Language Medley” McClurkin musically journeys through a panoply of languages, singing popular church hymns and songs in Japanese, Dutch, Zulu, Surinamese, and Spanish.

One of the songs that McClurkin sings to demonstrate his multilingual fluency is “You Alone.” After McClurkin sings a verse of “You Alone” in Japanese, the English speaking audience shows their appreciation of his linguistic fluency with applause. They then begin laughing once they discover that the only intelligible word to them in the entire verse is “hallelujah.” McClurkin then seizes the opportunity to interject a brief sermonette about the significance of the word and explains that it is “the same in every language.” “Hallelujah” thus functions as a common point of identification, a lyrical semiotic of unification. Its universal pronunciation and meaning further prove for McClurkin that real spirituality transcends ethnic and linguistic distinctions. To justify his multilingual approach, McClurkin pulls from 1
Corinthians 9:19, claiming that his motivation is to evangelize to all people. McClurkin explains: “You have to become all things to all men that you might save some.” Additionally, McClurkin also covers two other songs on this album that became popular initially in the white CCM market, such as “Agnus Dei” by Michael W. Smith, as mentioned earlier, and “Draw Me Close” by Kelly Carpenter.

These albums thus prepared McClurkin’s followers for We All Are One, which resists ethnic division and advocates a multicultural agenda more overtly than his previous projects. Throughout this album, McClurkin once again navigates through a linguistic panoply in order to construct difference and enact an imagined identity. In “You Are My God and King” McClurkin begins the song by singing, “Oh Lord, oh Lord, you are my God and king.” After singing this line first in English, McClurkin sings the same line in Spanish (Oh Señor, oh Señor, tu eres mi dios y rey) and then in French (Oh Jesus, oh Jesus, vou set mon dieu e roi). As is common in gospel music, McClurkin uses the modulation as a device to build intensity, but he also deploys it as a method to transition from one language to the next. The song begins in E-flat major. However, McClurkin shifts from E-flat to F major in order to transition into Spanish. He deploys the same modulatory device when he transitions into French, at which point the key changes from F major to F-sharp major. Much like Carr, McClurkin travels through a succession of modulations to gradually bring us closer to the coming eschaton, with each language lyrically embodying the multicultural ethos of the kingdom.

Once McClurkin has settled in F-sharp, he eventually reaches the climactic moment, signified by singing “hallelujah.” Each language that McClurkin sings during the series of modulations thus functions to anticipate the ultimate expression of unity, exemplified through the universal word “hallelujah” (Example 2.5).
At this point, McClurkin’s background singers begin singing “hallelujah” on a jubilant, syncopated rhythmic pulse. McClurkin then asks the audience to participate in the unity chant by teaching them each part, initiating a playful contest between each choral section. He first asks his background singers to demonstrate singing each part and then asks the audience to imitate them. In classic call and response fashion, McClurkin uses the word “hallelujah” to encode interethnic unity. By invoking this word, McClurkin, his background singers and the audience collectively perform the eschaton, transposing the imagined egalitarian community of heaven onto the earth.

McClurkin again invokes the word “hallelujah” during “The Hallelujah Song,” which McClurkin claims was given to him divinely by God on a Sunday in church during prayer.\(^{352}\) The song opens with a hallelujah chant, in which McClurkin sings “hallelujah” on a simple, easily “singable” melody (Example 2.6).

Once he introduces this melody, his background singers respond by imitating McClurkin’s opening melody on an octave unison. As they are singing, McClurkin ad libs by lightly singing

\(^{352}\) “Donnie McClurkin Biography,” accessed September 2, 2015, [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Donnie-McClurkin/e/B 00 0 AQ1H1A](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Donnie-McClurkin/e/B 00 0 AQ1H1A).
“all around the world say” in order to foreground the global implications of the word “hallelujah.”

During the vamp, McClurkin then once again leads his background singers in a similar chant, except this time substituting the words “Thank you Jesus” in the place of “hallelujah.” During this chant, McClurkin incorporates a slightly different melodic and rhythmic pattern than the previous hallelujah chant (Example 2.7).

He then sings “Thank you Jesus” in a variety of different languages. With each new linguistic utterance the climax increasingly builds, as each language signifies a renewed climactic moment. McClurkin sings “Thank you Jesus” first in Dutch (“Dank U Jesus”), then in Spanish (“Gracias Jesus”), and finally in Yoruba (“O Se Baba”).

The title track “We All Are One” best encapsulates McClurkin’s overall message of transcultural unity. Because the lyrical content is so richly imbued with McClurkin’s theological critique of both church and culture, I will transcribe the lyrics in their entirety:

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\text{Listen can I have your ear / Everybody gather near / Can I ask a question now / Can somebody tell me how / How we got so separated / How we got so torn apart / When did we become divided / Tell me now when did this start / Some Episcopalian, Church of God and Lutheran / COGIC, Presbyterian, Gospel and the CCM / Baptist and the Methodist, Oneness and the Trinity / When will we remember we are free / And we all are one / And we all are one / And we all are one, one in the Lord / Can we learn to love without prejudice / Can we learn to live with togetherness / Are we one united, are we undivided / Are we past the past, are we free at last / Tell me can you hear the sound / Dividing walls are falling down / Loving God and loving man / Holding up each other’s hand / Differences are tolerated starting bonds of unity / Showing all the world that we are free / And we all are one / And we all are one / And we all are one, one in the Lord.}
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Throughout this very detailed theological critique, McClurkin challenges his followers to adopt a more tolerant conception of intersubjectivity that is devoid of denominational division and past prejudices. While performing this song on a TBN *Praise The Lord* broadcast, McClurkin asks the audience to physically enact this renewed intersubjectivity by “holding up each other’s hand” in a shared act of interracial solidarity. Through this physical act of solidarity, McClurkin invites the audience to imagine their gathering as participatory with the ethos of the coming kingdom. As the entire audience sings “And we all are one” with conjoined hands, McClurkin segues into a sermonette in which he delves into deeper detail about the meaning of this song and his desire to abandon racial and denominational demarcations. In doing so, he also articulates how he believes real spirituality should be actualized interpersonally:

This is the great command of God that we unify. Jesus prayed in John 17 and he said, “Father, make them one as we are one. I in you, them in me,” and that’s the way it’s supposed to be. Not Lutheran, Presbyterian, not Church of God, Church of God in Christ, Church of God in Prophecy, AOH, PAW, COOLJC, Baptist, Methodist, not Catholic. It doesn’t have anything to do with the denomination, it has to do with the unity. Do you hear me? Don’t separate us. The Bible wants us to know that God doesn’t want us separated. We’re supposed to be co-joined. We’re supposed to be linked arm and arm, heart to heart, soul to soul. In order to do the will of the Lord we cannot do it separate. . . . For the last hundred some-odd years we’ve been trying to do it separate and it hasn’t succeeded. It’s only when we all join together. It’s only when we all link up together.

After this first part of his sermonette, McClurkin then warns the audience that he is about to make a statement that is racially charged and that may provoke criticism from detractors:

I’m going to say this and probably get into some trouble. Right here look at me. [gestures to the camera to move closer to him] There is no black church. I didn’t hear anybody in here. And I know some people may call me ignorant for saying this because I’m as black as they come. But the bottom line is there is no black church. There is no Hispanic church. There is no Asian or Korean church. I don’t hear anybody here. There is no European church. If there were churches called based on ethnicity it would make God a racist. But Jesus prayed, he said when you pray, pray in this manner: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Let your kingdom come on earth and your will be done on
earth the same way that it’s done in heaven.” So that means if there are no denominations in heaven, then what are we doing on earth?353

During his sermonette, McClurkin argues that denominational and racial division is antithetical to real spirituality. He proves his case by portraying racial and denominational unity as the will of God and as the essential message of Jesus’s prayers in John 17. Unity, according to McClurkin, is the “great command of God” and is in accordance with what “the Bible wants us to know.” To further substantiate this concept of spirituality, McClurkin argues that the social ethos of the imagined heavenly community should serve as a catalyst in encouraging a different earthly communal identification—“If there are no denominations in heaven,” avers McClurkin, “then what are we doing on earth?”

McClurkin’s critique of racially distinct churches is arguably the most potent part of his sermonette, as he is attempting to deconstruct the racial designations to which most churchgoers have grown accustomed. McClurkin’s ideology about race is rooted in the belief that eradicating the color line on Sunday morning is the first step, and perhaps the most important step, toward racial unification. He reassures the audience, however, that the deracialization of the church does not imply the denial of his authentic blackness. His statement, “I’m as black as they come,” is intended to suggest that his ideology about race and authentic blackness are not mutually exclusive concepts. Considering that such an ideology could potentially provoke a negative response, McClurkin uses the common homiletical stock formula “I don’t hear anybody here” as a rhetorical stimulant to elicit an affirmative verbal response from the congregation.354

While McClurkin’s multicultural music and radical deracialization of the church are intended to encourage his followers to accept difference, his proclamation that “there is no black

353 Donnie McClurkin, hosted by Jan Crouch, Praise the Lord, TBN, November 19, 2010, http://www.itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ce/p3YWNSMzpuXkwf0qalz4tj-m3xakr0.

354 Bruce A. Rosenberg, Can These Bones Live?: The Art of the American Folk Preacher (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1988), 74-75. In his study of black preachers, Rosenberg uses the concept of “formulas” to describe the repetitive phrases that preachers often use to keep their audiences engaged.
church” denies the reality of difference. In proclaiming that “there is no black church” he is contradicting the very interracial agenda that he is propagating, as the black church has historically been a necessary component in establishing social equality. Religion scholar and theologian Alton B. Pollard offers an apt definition of the black church: “The black church in the United States is a network of communities of faith, worship, and life born out of and informed by the historic experiences of people of African descent in this land.”\(^{355}\) Removing “black” as a qualifier decontextualizes the black church from its historical narrative of black empowerment and disrupts its historical continuity as an institution that is rooted in the existential concerns of black people. Therefore, to deny the existence of such a church is to deny the existence of the primary institution that has empowered blacks to achieve equal rights and that has even enabled McClurkin to stand on a white-owned religious network and advocate such an ideology. His analysis thus overlooks the pragmatic utility of the black church in the quest for a more just society and its historical necessity in addressing the specific needs that are unique to the black community.

What is most striking about McClurkin’s post-racial theology is the absence of a substantive critique about systematic racism. McClurkin’s advocacy of a multiculturalist agenda places more focus on individual agency rather than on hegemonic forces that stymie black upward mobility and perpetuate social inequality. This tendency to place disproportionate emphasis on the individual is also present in the multicultural agendas of Franklin, Houghton, and Carr. An individualist approach to social progress is common among Word of Faith and prosperity gospel televangelists. Marla Frederick observes that for many televangelists, “race is not seen as a systemic problem but rather as a problem between individual people, a problem of

individual prejudices.” She goes on to explain that “they believe that shared worship is the balm that resolves racism.” By asking the audience to sing “we all are one” with conjoined hands, McClurkin perpetuates the myth that interracial worship is a pragmatic solution to racism. “For men and women to worship together on Sunday morning,” says Frederick, “does not mean that they have shared convictions about the death penalty, affirmative action, the justice system, workers’ rights, living wage laws, the erosion of minority-majority voting districts, or a host of other issues that influence racialized divisions in U.S. society.” McClurkin’s approach thus interferes with his ideal of oneness, as his investment lies exclusively in changing the individual hearts of the people, rather than addressing the political and socioeconomic conditions that perpetuate inequality. Without a substantive discussion about the aforementioned systemic issues, along with other pressing concerns like mass incarceration and the lack of educational resources available to impoverished, low-income communities, social reality is belied and a “façade of racial progress” is embraced.

Moreover, McClurkin’s assertion that the existence of racially distinct churches makes God a racist is a simplistic, reductionist leap of logic. In making such a bold declaration, McClurkin equates the will of God with his multicultural agenda thereby neglecting necessary discussions that dissect the racial tensions that are often lying underneath such external acts of cultural diversity. This kind of easy reductionism, in which racial problems are divinely eradicated through cultural diversity, enables the simplistic conflation of race and ethnicity demonstrated by McClurkin and the other artists discussed in this chapter.

While analyzing the musical and discursive strategies of each artist, their tendency to conflate racial tension in America and global world peace into one unifying multicultural
category became increasingly evident. Resolving racism in America and enacting initiatives for world peace on an international scale are two different realities that require very different strategies and approaches. For these artists, however, the resolution strategy is often reduced to the advocacy of multicultural worship and the incorporation of exotic sonic devices and foreign languages. The conflation of race and ethnicity under the umbrella of multicultural worship obscures the need for a more critical analytical approach to race that deconstructs oppressive systemic structures.

In addition to the conflation of race and ethnicity among these artists, there is also an implicit conflation of exoticism and authenticity or realness that emerges in their projects. This conflation is also common in popular music culture, in which the exotic is often thought to be equated with authenticity and to evoke a real emotional response. This conflation is what Timothy Taylor refers to as “authenticity of emotionality.” According to Taylor, this real emotional response is “bound up with constructions of spirituality,” in which Western listeners often perceive exotic, enigmatic sounds as possessing a real spiritual quality. Taylor cites a few examples to demonstrate how marketing discourses surrounding world music albums equate the exotic with a real emotional, spiritual encounter. Taylor explains that Paul Simon’s *The Rhythm of the Saints* (1990) is described by Simon as “real and emotional,” while the album *Global Meditation: Authentic Music from Meditative Traditions of the World* (1992) is marketed as “meditative, sacred, and spiritual music.”

This same dynamic, in which the exotic is equated with a real emotional and spiritual experience, is at work among the artists discussed in this chapter. In analyzing the appropriative

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360 Frith, “The Discourse of World Music,” 308. Frith states that the equation of the exotic and authenticity in popular music can be traced back to the 1950s.
361 Taylor, *Global Pop*, 23
362 Ibid., 24.
363 Ibid., 24-25.
practices of gospel artists, there seemed to be an assumption among these artists that incorporating the exotic provided a more real emotional and spiritual experience. The cheerful applause and awe that is expressed by their audiences when exotic sounds are heard point to the emotional response that is often expected and elicited by gospel artists whenever they engage otherness. When Kurt Carr asks the Armenian accordionist to “play a little praise music on that” and when McClurkin constructs a language pastiche during “The Language Medley,” in both instances, the artists are intentionally deploying the exotic to induce a real emotional, affirmative response from the live audience. By engaging the exotic, the emotional and spiritual experience is enhanced because the exotic is perceived as more real. In this context then, the concept of real spirituality contains meaning that is twofold: it describes the desire for the manifestation of God’s divine will for racial reconciliation while it also connotes a visceral emotionality that is perceived as being connected to that which is spiritual. As Taylor aptly observes, “it seems that if the feelings presented and evoked are so real, they must therefore also be deep, or spiritual.”

He also explains that western listeners “often impose gut-level, romantic ideas and feelings to musics they might not otherwise be able to respond to at all, except with puzzlement.”

It is precisely the romanticization of the exotic that enables this conflation of exoticism and realness. As a consequence, the “other” is further exoticized, as natives are portrayed as “more real” than the “modernized” Westerner. This conflation can also potentially portray the “other” as primitive, as one whose musical culture has never been hybridized or “tainted” by Western modern society. The portrayal of the exotic as “real” might also contain commercial and economic implications. Taylor explains that marketing discourses in popular music culture often emphasize the innate spiritual and emotional qualities of exotic music as a strategy to convince

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364 Ibid., 25.
365 Ibid.
consumers that by buying such music, they too will experience spiritual transcendence. This marketing scheme in popular music might shed light on how otherness is constructed for commercial profit in gospel music. The eschatological discourses used by the artists in promoting and defending their work can perhaps be interpreted as a discursive strategy to attract consumers to buy the album by guaranteeing a real spiritual experience of exotic transcendence. Just as the lure of a real emotional experience has been used as bait to attract consumers of popular world music, this same bait could likely be used as leverage to attract consumers in gospel music practice. Such underlying marketing schemes might therefore complicate their professed intentions, which tend to focus exclusively on enacting the will of God and racial reconciliation through Christ rather than on marketing strategies and economic profit.

Their outward profession of racial reconciliation through Christ speaks to the undercurrent of Christian evangelism that colors their motives in the quest to construct a global identity. Although racial reconciliation is portrayed as most important to these artists, the Christianization of the entire globe seems to be equally as important. Carr’s declaration that he wants his music to reach “not just white and black, but other countries, other nationalities” suggests that he desires to spread the message of Christ beyond the confines of his American market base. Furthermore, Franklin maintains that “when you find Him the lesson is complete,” while both McClurkin and Carr portray racial reconciliation as the answer to the prayers of Jesus. The implication is that finding Christ and maintaining a strong relationship with Christ are necessary preconditions for accepting difference. Thus, in each scenario, the artists frame their multicultural agendas within the exclusive context of Christianity. Their construction of a global identity therefore precludes individuals who practice other faith traditions and reduces racial reconciliation to a Christian act. Again, Marla Frederick’s analysis is informative, as she
accurately explains that the Christianization of the entire world evades real racial issues. Subsuming multiculturalism within the all-inclusive umbrella of Christianity serves escapist ends, and “camouflages the need for a serious critique of systemic problems that reproduce racialized inequality.”

Without a more sophisticated approach to race relations, their attempts at renegotiating intersubjective identity run the risk of remaining consigned to the realm of the imaginary. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh discuss these kinds of musical representations of difference that never manifest through real pragmatic action. “These kinds of purely imaginary projections that are fantasy-imbued,” they observe, “act primarily as imaginary extensions of the subject, and are never enacted in real cultural transformations of individual or collective self.” Thus, their identifications with other cultures may merely excite the emotions of their followers instead of enacting tangible social change.

Gospel artists might argue that this purely imaginary construction, however, is not totally inconsequential. The ability to temporarily transcend the quotidian racial realities of an unjust society and imagine a community unencumbered by racial tension, for some, may be empowering. In the imaginary realm, their followers can envision themselves as socially independent subjects who are not beholden to structural powers that predominate. From this perspective, they do not have to wait idly for those in power to rescue them from oppression; but rather, through acts of self-affirmation and individual mobility, they can realize their own power, even if it is realized for a temporary, imaginary moment. Through gospel artists’ articulations of oneness, their followers are given a vocabulary with which to reorient their self-understanding.

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366 Ibid., 155.
368 Walton, *Watch This*, 178. Walton argues for the utility of a constructed imagined space regarding the ideologies of popular televangelists.
“This imaginative space, we must admit,” avers Jonathan Walton, “has the potential to inform and animate lived reality.”369

Indeed, it is the lived reality of their followers that gospel artists and their multicultural rhetoric seem to overlook. However, the multicultural practices of these artists do not immediately suggest that they are completely uninformed of the lived realities of their followers and totally oblivious to structural systems that oppress. In fact, it is likely that they view their approaches as subcategories of liberation.370 Although McClurkin’s proclamation that “there is no black church” and that the existence of such a church implies that “God is a racist” undoubtedly reflects simplistic, deductive reasoning, McClurkin might argue that his racially neutral theology is the way in which he chooses to respond to systemic oppression. These artists seem to believe that if racism is going to be dismantled, then it must first start with the church, as the people of God should be the first to lead by example. This, for them, is a pragmatic solution to the social ills that cause division and can perhaps be the first step toward racial reconciliation.

Conclusion

Each artist that I have discussed uses their musical constructions of difference to challenge racial division and to encourage new models of cultural interaction and inclusivity. Their musical and discursive practices function as mediators between their audience and the ideal egalitarian eschatological community. Within this mediated space, their music becomes a terrain upon which racial demarcations are transcended and a new social existence is imagined. Their constructions of an imagined community through various musical and discursive practices reveal how gospel artists encourage the formation of a global community and offer a new understanding of intersubjective identification.

369 Ibid., 173-174.
While their appropriative and representational practices promote an egalitarian ethic on the surface, the ethical ramifications of such practices often reinscribe the very boundaries they seek to dismantle. Despite how exoticizing and microsocial their strategies appear to be, these artists maintain that their constructions of identity are God-ordained. By asserting that their multicultural agenda is the divine will of God, they challenge their followers to reorient their understanding of spirituality and to understand multiculturalism as part of God’s plan for reconciling humanity. This renewed understanding of spirituality, they believe, fosters the transformation of communal identities.

In the next chapter, I will delve more deeply into the rhetoric of transformation and the ways in which it emerges in the sacred act of worship. While real spirituality in this context is conceived as a culturally transformative experience in which one’s perception of “others” is redefined, in the following chapter, real spirituality is defined by a personal transformation that takes place through worship. I will therefore discuss how the ability to engage in transformative worship is used as a barometer to measure the realness of one’s spirituality.
Chapter Three
My Worship Is For Real

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

- John 4:23-24 (NIV)

On April 15, 2013 Gregory Dickow hosted a TBN Praise the Lord broadcast and invited gospel music legend Hezekiah Walker on as a guest. Hezekiah Walker is known for popular gospel staples like “Clean Inside” (Live in Toronto, 1993), “Souled Out” (Souled Out, 2008), and “Every Praise” (Azusa: The Next Generation, 2013) to name a few. Dickow is widely known as the pastor of Life Changers Church, a megachurch in Hoffman Estates, Illinois and has a television show that airs weekly on TBN. With Dickow leading the conversation, Walker and Dickow offer a critique of the current state of gospel music and discuss the kind of message that they believe gospel music should exemplify. This discussion eventually develops into a conversation about authentic worship and their desire to see its manifestation in both the church and the gospel music industry:

DICKOW: Talk about gospel music, because a lot of gospel music isn't gospel music ‘cause it's not preaching the gospel really, right? A lot of times there's not a lot of gospel in some of the Christian music out there. But every time you sing and every time you do a song, it is the word of God. It is the gospel. Why is Christian music sometimes moved away from really giving the word?

WALKER: Well, you know I think we have a lot of gifted and talented people that are in gospel music, but I don’t know if their heart is really in the music like it’s supposed to be. You know, it’s one thing to say it but it’s another thing to do it. And I think that we have to begin to practice what we preach. And a lot of times we really take our talent and we take our gifts and we would like to use it for something else, but right now for the time being we just kinda do gospel. You know, but gospel is not the gospel like you said if Jesus Christ is not in it. You know, because that’s what the gospel is. It’s all about the good news of Jesus Christ and I sing the gospel because I believe the gospel. I sing the gospel because I love the gospel and this is the gospel of Jesus Christ and I’m not ashamed of it. I’m not ashamed of it.
Walker then begins to discuss the importance of revitalizing real worship and incorporating it as a part of the musical and ecclesial experience of Christians. He thus offers real worship as a kind of corrective to the insincere motives of artists who “do gospel” for the wrong reasons:

WALKER: When I was growing up, we didn’t just come to church just to hear singing . . . but we really came for transformation.

DICKOW: Amen.

WALKER: And the worship, the worship transformed the people and also the power of God. There were times when I was growing up in church where the power of God was so heavy in our services until you couldn’t stay in the services and not be delivered.

DICKOW: Yeah, that’s right and I think when the word of God is preached, when people are free to truly worship God, not just witness a music experience

WALKER: Yes, yes.

DICKOW: but worship Jesus

WALKER: Worship Jesus! Worship!

DICKOW: then the power of God is gonna show up.

WALKER: It's gon' show up.

DICKOW: ‘Cause as they worshiped in the temple in Solomon’s day, the glory of God showed up. They had the word, they had the worship, and the glory of God, the tangible presence of God. . . . We can’t convince somebody to be delivered. We can’t sing enough to get ‘em delivered. The presence of God

WALKER: The experience.

DICKOW: has gotta manifest in their lives to deliver ‘em, right? That’s what we need in our churches today.

WALKER: That’s right. That’s right. We need the manifestation of God in our churches today. . . . We have gravitated to the celebration and to the musical experience until we forgot about the worship, the in depth part of worship. And I really believe . . . I really believe, and you know I may get in trouble for saying this because a lot of times, you know, in these kind of settings people don't like to tell the truth. But the truth of the matter is this: I think . . . in a lot of our settings at this point in the church, if we move away from that real authentic worship and just cling to the musical experience, nothing will ever happen. . . . But the glory, the glory of God has manifested in our worship, when we
worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Dickow then begins to tell the Old Testament story in which God commands Abraham to slay his only son Isaac. Dickow’s invocation of this narrative is intended to suggest that real worship requires a posture of complete submission and surrender to the will of God. Walker then responds and elaborates on what submission to God implies in the act of real worship:

DICKOW: And really, true worship is when you're holding nothing back from God, right?

WALKER: You're holding nothing back from God! [applause] When you give it all to Him. True worship is when you come to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. You're not worried about your clothes. You're not worried about what you have on. . . . You're not worried about what people think about you, what people are saying about you, you just come for authentic real worship. And I really believe that that type of worship is coming back into the house of God. 371

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The conversation between Dickow and Walker exemplifies how artists often harness worship as an authenticating mechanism. The title of this chapter, “My Worship Is For Real,” is taken from a popular gospel song written by gospel singer and songwriter VaShawn Mitchell that was released in 1991. The song begins with a spoken introduction that denounces an artificial, routinized spirituality devoid of real concern for God and postures the devotional act of worship as evidence of a sincere relationship with God. The title and the meaning of this song are thus emblematic of the ways in which worship is often conceptualized within black churches and the gospel industry. In gospel music and black and black church culture, worship is often defined as an outward expression of a personal, inner affection toward God. Worship is an expression of God’s worth, not just for what God has done, but for who God is. In gospel music discourse and practice, worship is often used as a barometer to measure the authenticity or realness of one’s

spirituality. Gospel artists regularly use worship to gauge the quality of one’s relationship with God and, as alluded to in the conversation above, to determine whether a believer is wholeheartedly submitted to the divine will of God. Worship therefore signifies real spirituality, as worship is believed to be an outward expression of an inner, genuine relationship that the believer has with God.

Gospel artists often describe worship as a sublime experience so real that it transcends material reality. In their music and discourses, worship functions as a catalyst to reorient material place into an immaterial space of spiritual abandon.\(^372\) Within this constructed transcendent space, the distance between the worshiper and God is collapsed and God becomes immanent. That is to say, worship creates a space in which God’s presence is more palpable and accessible; or, in the words of Hezekiah Walker, worship facilitates the manifested, “tangible presence of God.”

In describing the metaphysical, sublime space that is accessed through worship, gospel artists employ a host of commonly used coded terms in their music and discourse, which I refer to as worship rhetoric: “atmosphere,” “rain,” “glory,” and “secret place” are among the coded terms used to describe the ecstasy and increased intimacy with God that occur within the space of worship. Gospel artists also believe that once this ethereal space is accessed, the worshiper can partake of a range of phenomenological, embodied experiences. In describing embodied experience, other coded terms regularly surface that are also encompassed within worship rhetoric: “transformation,” “healing,” “deliverance,” “freedom,” “breakthrough,” “miracles,” “signs and wonders” are all terms that are consistently employed to signify the phenomenological processes in which the worshiper is increasingly conformed into the image of

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\(^372\) Monique Ingalls, “Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship,” *Ethnomusicology* 55, no. 2 (2011): 257-259. In her discussion of evangelical conference worship, Ingalls uses the place/space critical construction to describe what she believes takes place during what she refers to as “pilgrim journeys” to these conferences.
This terminology is regularly used to denote liberation from sin and alleviation from all types of physical, psychological, and emotional maladies.

In seeking relief from such maladies, militaristic language is also commonly employed as a component of worship rhetoric, as artists often engage in “spiritual warfare” to oppose evil forces that they believe are designed to prohibit believers from becoming who God intends for them to be. Real worship thus involves potential alterations in spiritual identity; it empowers the believer to abandon a “former way of life” consumed by various ailments and false identifications and to embody a new spiritual and existential reality that is more in alignment with God’s perfect will.

In addition to the transcendence of material place, worship also involves the transcendence of human temporality. Gospel artists emphasize that real worship is not subject to the rules of temporal propriety. Worshipers are often taught that impromptu moments of spiritual ecstasy should take precedence over the planned sequence of events; the more that worship defies the order of the planned program, the more authentic it is understood to be. This conception of worship as transcending temporality is entangled with varying modes and subcategories of worship, which I refer to distinctively as free worship, cacophonous worship, and improvisational worship. Each of these modes of worship emphasizes a particular worship practice that helps to induce the feeling of temporal transcendence.

Moreover, gospel artists often describe the realness of worship as being so transcendentally sublime that the ability to find words to articulate such an experience often

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177


374 Nekola, “ ‘I’ll Take you There,’ “ in Christian Congregational Music, 120. Nekola argues that “music enables the listener to transcend time and space, privileging the experience of the moment.”
eludes them. Artists therefore engage in musical constructions of ineffability, for it is believed that the sublimeness of worship transcends the very confines of the English vocabulary. The ineffability of worship or the inability to accurately articulate the experience of transcendent worship is understood as further evidence of its realness. Also, the use of slow tempos and lyrics that are generally Godward in their orientation are also among the variety of ways in which the transcendence of worship is musically articulated.

Gospel artists adamantly profess, however, that real worship only results from the eradication of self-interests, as selfish ambition is often perceived as an impediment to a real experience with God. Self-effacing devotion is thus a precondition for the facilitation of real worship.375 In order to exemplify self-deprecation, gospel artists often engage in discourses of disavowal in both their conversations and in their lyrical content.376 Discourses of disavowal enable them to deflect attention away from themselves—their professional success and their adept artistry—and onto God. As a strategy to further divert attention away from themselves, they also often claim that worship is a “lifestyle” or a lived experience.377 In other words, worship is not something that you do in a particular moment to attract attention to yourself or for commercial interests, but it is who you are. By embracing worship as a component of their daily living and identification, artists portray themselves as more genuine and sincere regarding their acts of worship.

While the topic of Christian worship music is still a relatively young and burgeoning area of scholarship, the works that exist mainly discuss worship music as it pertains to the white

377 Nekola, “I’ll Take you There,” in Christian Congregational Music, 127; Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 207. Glenn Hinson, Fire In My Bones: Transcendence And The Holy Spirit In African American Gospel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2000), 4-5; Nekola discusses how in the CCM industry there was often a “discourse of worship as a lifestyle” in their print advertisements. Likewise, Hinson also discusses how worshipers in a North Carolina community believe that worship is something that you live daily.
contemporary Christian music industry. Worship artists who primarily specialize in black gospel music, however, have not received as much critical attention. Judith McAllister, Israel Houghton, and William McDowell are some of gospel music’s leading worship music artists. All three artists have undoubtedly made indelible prints in the gospel music industry as well as in black churches by changing and contributing to the soundtrack of worship. Their songs and their conceptions of worship are invigorating the worship practices of churches within and even beyond American borders.

Each of these three artists regularly expresses a passion for worship and a desire to see others possess that same passion. The aforementioned aspects of worship are consistently incorporated into their discursive and musical practices with the intention to reinforce worship as a real spiritual experience. As they engage these musical and discursive practices, they simultaneously deconstruct popular misconceptions about worship in order to emphasize an “accurate” conception of what they believe real worship is. Although I discuss how each artist exemplifies various facets of worship, these facets are not always unique or fixed to one particular artist, as these practices are commonly shared among each artist. McAllister, Houghton, and McDowell ultimately believe and teach that worship is a devotional expression that emerges from the sincerity of the heart and can only be experienced by those who have a real relationship with God.

A History of Christian Worship Music

Before discussing modern day worship artists, it is first important to understand the history of worship music and the shoulders on which contemporary worship artists stand. The beginnings of Christian worship music can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s during the Jesus People Movement, which took place primarily in Southern California. In her historical
overview of contemporary worship music (the first of its kind), Monique Ingalls quotes historian Lisa McGirr to explain the various catalysts that contributed to the emergence of the Jesus Movement:

A search for authenticity, the rejection of liberal rationality, a middle-class counterrevolution against 1960s “permissiveness,” and a search for community created a cauldron mix that fueled the growth of evangelical Christianity. The “Jesus movement,” born in Southern California in the late 1960s, best exhibits these linkages.378

This movement was also inspired by young people who were searching for “answers to social problems such as war and racism” during the time of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War.379

The Jesus Movement was essentially the Christian alternative to the 1960s hippie counterculture. Although they rejected many of the ideological values of the counterculture, Jesus People nonetheless appropriated sartorial trends and musical styles that were identified with the counterculture.380 One of the musical styles that was appropriated into Jesus music was the folk music of the 1960s, which often included an emphasis on simplicity—“plain, unadorned presentation of lyrics,” along with “a simple melodic and harmonic structure for communal accessibility.”381 By appropriating the popular folk style into their music, Jesus music incorporated the talents of the newly converted while simultaneously functioning as a proselytizing method to attract unbelievers.382

The Jesus Movement and the musical style that accompanied it were embraced and advocated by well-known pastor Chuck Smith. Smith was the longtime pastor of Calvary Church, a charismatic megachurch located in Costa Mesa, California. Jesus music became so infectious that Calvary Chapel began its own music recording and publishing company entitled

378 Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 55.
379 Nekola, “I’ll Take you There,” in Christian Congregational Music, 120.
380 Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 55.
381 Ibid., 62.
382 Ibid., 57
Maranatha! Music. Maranatha! Music released a series of praise albums in the 1970s containing Jesus music that represented the beginnings of the contemporary Christian worship music genre. These praise albums contained music strategically designed for corporate worship. Maranatha! Music thus played a pivotal role in the development and proliferation of early contemporary worship music. Alongside the efforts of Maranatha! were also large Christian conferences (Explo ’72), interdenominational events, organizations, and outdoor festivals (Jesus ’72) that exposed this new music to larger, more mainstream audiences beyond the west coast.\(^{384}\)

Charismatic church services also played a foundational role in the early crystallization of contemporary worship music. Anna Nekola claims that a charismatic revival emerged in the 1950s that influenced a large component of American Protestant denominations as well as Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Nekola states that

> charismatic belief encourages an emotionally expressive and experiential attitude towards worship, defining its goal as both praise of God, and personal, intimate communion between the deity and the worshipper—a "ritual re-enactment" of the disciples’ experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.\(^{385}\)

In addition to a highly emotionally charged experience and an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit, as referenced in earlier portions of this dissertation, charismatics also believe in the gifts of the Spirit (glossolalia, prophecy, healing, and the working of miracles among others). Charismatic praise and worship services began with twenty to forty minutes of uninterrupted congregational singing, usually led by a worship leader, a band, and an ensemble of selected singers. Worship songs during these gatherings were considerably shorter than traditional hymns

\(^{383}\) Ibid.

\(^{384}\) Ibid., 61-70. Ingalls discusses Explo ’72—an evangelical Christian conference that “drew over 100,000 evangelical youth for its final day-long concert”—and its role in proliferating Jesus music; Birgitta Johnson, “‘Oh, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing’: Music and Worship in African American Megachurches of Los Angeles, California,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2008), 268-269. Johnson also speaks about outdoor festivals—like Jesus ’73, Praise ’74, and Salt ’75—that contributed to the expansion of Jesus music. Jesus ’73 attracted approximately 8,000 people.

\(^{385}\) Nekola, “‘I’ll Take you There,” ” in Christian Congregational Music, 120.
with more of a concentration on single themes and images. During these services worship leaders often encouraged “a wide range of physical expressions through clapping, raising hands, swaying and even dancing.” Ingalls claims that “out of the theology of worship emerging from charismatic and Pentecostal congregations” grew the genre term “praise and worship.” Charismatic services thus functioned as a major impetus in the emergence of the praise and worship movement.

As the contemporary worship song repertory continued to expand beyond charismatic services, there emerged “alternate industry institutions” that were created to promote this new music due to its increasing popularity and “commercial viability in evangelical circles.” One such industry institution was the Christian music magazine entitled *Contemporary Christian Music (CCM)*. *CCM* eventually became one of the definitive magazines for consumers who wanted information pertaining to popular Christian music artists and their placement on the charts. According to Ingalls, “*CCM* lent its name to the genre which it helped to define, and by the early 1980s, contemporary Christian music had become a genre in its own right.” The contemporary Christian Music industry essentially became a label to designate religious pop music marketed to white audiences, while gospel music remained a designation for religious music marketed to black audiences.

A major development in the 1980s that further contributed to the proliferation of worship music was the founding of worship recording companies: Vineyard in 1984 and Integrity Music in 1985. Both companies emerged out of charismatic church fellowships—Vineyard emerged out

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387 Ibid., 24-25.
388 Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 84; Pollard, *When The Church Becomes Your Party*, 25. Pollard also makes the claim that the praise and worship movement emerged from charismatic services.
389 Ibid., 75-76.
390 Ibid., 76; Birgitta Johnson, “‘Oh, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing,’ ” 268. Johnson claims that 1978 was the year that the term “contemporary Christian music” was coined. She argues that this label helped to encompass a wider range of worship music styles beyond the folk-influenced style. Various music groups, according to Johnson, “were performing more acoustic guitar-based, folk-and ballad-style Christian music.” Thus, a wide range of stylistic approaches was embraced under the umbrella of CCM.
of Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Integrity Music out of Covenant Church.\textsuperscript{391} Integrity in particular played a pivotal role in creating a market for praise and worship music. In the mid-1980s, Integrity began the process of gathering worship songs sung in charismatic congregations to create a new marketable genre of music. Due to Integrity’s indefatigable efforts in promoting praise and worship as a viable commercially marketable category, the entire CCM industry soon began to embrace praise and worship as a legitimate, marketable category as well. In the same way that praise and worship began to spread throughout the Christian music industry, it also spread beyond charismatic churches to include non-charismatic evangelical churches and mainline churches, such as Baptists and Methodists.\textsuperscript{392}

Ingalls argues that the spread of praise and worship was also due to a shift in the sound of worship music from a folk and rock-influenced sound in the 1970s, to a more contemporary, orchestral sound in the 1980s. “1980s praise and worship songs,” avers Ingalls, “indexed the ‘contemporary’ in their use of synthesizers and light percussion.” This contemporary sound also employed “lush orchestration, keyboard-led ensembles, and bright, mixed-ensemble vocals.”\textsuperscript{393} This sonic approach, according to Ingalls, may have been more palatable for conservative audiences who took offense to the associations of seventies worship music with hippie counterculture.\textsuperscript{394} Therefore, decoupling worship music from the remnants of seventies counterculture may have significantly contributed to its embrace beyond the charismatic church.

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 79-80. Ingalls states that Vineyard Christian Fellowship was formed by a group in 1982, led by John Wimber, that separated from Calvary Chapel. Their mission was to place more primacy on the act of worship and they eventually developed a theology of worship that became a standard component of their devotional practices. “ ‘Worship’ came to refer to a solid block of thirty to forty minutes of music at the beginning of a church service whose goal was an intimate encounter with God.” Covenant Church was initially an independent charismatic church in Mobile, Alabama; Johnson, “ ‘Oh, For A Thousand Tongues to Sing,’ ” 272. Johnson documents that the Vineyard Churches formed over a disagreement regarding the experience of the Holy Spirit.

\textsuperscript{392} Ibid. 80-84. Praise and Worship’s growing popularity in the 1980s is also signified by the creation of an awards category at the Dove Awards in 1981—“Praise and Worship Album of the Year”—to acknowledge the importance of this burgeoning genre within the Christian contemporary music industry. See Pollard, \textit{When The Church Becomes Your Party}, 25; Also see “Past Winners,” GMA Dove Awards, accessed October 27, 2015, http://doveawards.com/awards/past-winners/. This website indicates that the first category given for “Praise and Worship Album of the Year,” was in 1981.

\textsuperscript{393} Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 94.

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid.
By the end of the 1980s, the title “praise and worship” was used with regularity across doctrinal demarcations and denominational affiliations.395

Although the praise and worship music phenomenon initially flourished mainly within white evangelical charismatic spaces, this music also began to influence the sonic landscape of black artists and black audiences. According to Deborah Smith Pollard, media networks such as Black Entertainment Television (BET) and the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) offered a medium for black audiences to be introduced to this music genre.396 Pollard also notes that record labels previously discussed that specialize exclusively in the promotion of praise and worship, including Integrity, Maranatha! Music, and Vineyard Music were instrumental in bringing the sounds of praise and worship to black audiences. Moreover, black gospel artists like Andrae Crouch, Thomas Whitfield, and the West Angeles Church of God in Christ Mass Choir were among the early pioneers in the seventies, eighties, and nineties that helped to introduce the praise and worship sound to black churches.397

Some of Andrae Crouch’s standards, like “The Blood” (Take The Message Everywhere, 1970), “Jesus Is The Answer” (“Live” at Carnegie Hall, 1973), “Soon And Very Soon” (This Is Another Day, 1977), and “Oh It Is Jesus” (No Time To Lose, 1985) can undoubtedly be considered early compositions in the praise and worship genre. Birgitta Johnson mentions Crouch’s Live in London (1978) album as a major milestone in the early development of praise and worship music, with songs like “My Tribute” (Keep On Singin’, 1975) becoming a national favorite among blacks and whites alike.398 As is common in praise and worship music, many of the aforementioned songs written by Crouch have very catchy choruses that are easy to learn and

395 Ibid., 26-27.
396 Pollard, When The Church Becomes Your Party, 25.
397 Ibid., 26–30
398 Ibid., “‘Oh For A Thousand Tongues To Sing,’ ” 288.
that encourage audience participation through congregational singing.\(^{399}\) Moreover, because
many of his songs were vertical in their orientation, addressing God directly, his compositions fit
comfortably within the praise and worship tradition.\(^{400}\) Thus, his multicultural appeal, “easy-to-
learn” choruses, and vertically oriented lyrics all served as musical prognosticators of the praise
and worship phenomenon that was soon to overtake black churches.

In the 1980s, Thomas Whitfield was an early innovator and contributor to the incipient
stages of praise and worship in black gospel music. With popular songs like “Hallelujah
Anyhow” (\textit{Hallelujah Anyhow}, 1984) and “Precious Jesus” (\textit{Alive & Satisfied}, 1992), Whitfield
established himself as a pioneer of worship anthems.\(^{401}\) Containing semblances of the praise and
worship style with its simplistic lyrics, “Hallelujah Anyhow” reiterates two words throughout the
overwhelming majority of the song: “hallelujah” and “anyhow.”\(^{402}\) The repetition of only two
words was most likely the reason for the song’s vast appeal and popularity, as the simplistic
lyrics and melodic content easily invited congregational participation. “Precious Jesus,” which
contains mainly unison singing and a simplistic melody, is another popular worship anthem by
Whitfield that further solidified him as a consummate songwriter of worship music.

Although there were indeed significant contributions in the 70s and 80s that led to the
emergence of the praise and worship movement in the black church, praise and worship only
became overwhelmingly popular in black churches across denominational lines in the 1990s.\(^{403}\)
During this time, one of the most significant innovators of praise and worship was the West
Angeles Church of God in Christ Mass Choir. This mass choir recorded a series entitled \textit{Saints in
Praise} that contained three volumes all released in the early 90s. Many of the songs on each

\(^{399}\) See previous chapter on multiculturalism to get more information on the stylistic characteristics of praise and worship.
\(^{400}\) Johnson, “ ‘Oh, For A thousand Tongues To Sing,’ ” 287; Pollard, \textit{When The Church Becomes Your Party}, 34. Both Johnson and Pollard state
that praise and worship lyrics contain vertical texts.
\(^{401}\) Johnson, “ ‘Oh For A Thousand Tongues To Sing,’ ” 292.
\(^{402}\) Ibid., 293.
\(^{403}\) Ibid., 296. Johnson also attests to the popularity of praise and worship in the black church in the 90s.
volume contained vertical and simplistic lyrics, unison singing that lacked complex harmony, and catchy choruses.\textsuperscript{404} Pollard claims that “volume I of the series was an early, if not the first, praise and worship project purchased by a large segment of the black gospel community.”\textsuperscript{405} The second volume of \textit{Saints in Praise} featured Judith McAllister (discussed in more detail later) more prominently, who would soon be known internationally as a trailblazer of praise and worship music. These albums released by the West Angeles COGIC Mass Choir were an extension of the pioneering efforts put forth by McAllister in instituting praise and worship as a prominent component of the worship practices at West Angeles in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{406} The songs on each volume became very popular in black churches and helped to usher in a new praise and worship sound on Sunday morning.\textsuperscript{407} This particular series helped to pave the way for other artists who would make significant contributions to praise and worship during the late 90s like Fred Hammond and Byron Cage, who later became known as the “architect of urban praise and worship” and “the prince of praise” respectively.\textsuperscript{408}

Another reason for praise and worship’s widespread popularity in the black church in the 1990s was due to shifts in theology and worship practice within black churches across the country.\textsuperscript{409} Many Baptist preachers began following Bishop Paul Morton’s lead and began transforming their churches into either a Full Gospel Baptist Church or a non-denominational church to signify a transition to a more charismatic flow of worship that included the gifts of the

\textsuperscript{404} Ibid., 300-301.
\textsuperscript{405} Pollard, \textit{When The Church Becomes Your Party}, 26.
\textsuperscript{406} Johnson, “ ‘Oh, For A Thousand Tongues To Sing,’ ” 299-300.
\textsuperscript{407} Greater Salem Church in Charlotte, NC is an example of a church that appropriated many of the songs from \textit{Saints in Praise} in order to usher in the new devotional practice of praise and worship.
spirit. The introduction of praise and worship music and praise teams into their worship format aided pastors in introducing charismatic theology and worship practices to their congregations, as praise and worship required an outward, more demonstrative congregational response in worship.

The praise and worship movement became such a phenomenon in black churches that it replaced earlier devotional forms, in which the deacons of the church would begin service by leading the church in congregational songs, traditional hymns, or lined hymns. These songs were commonly sung a cappella, with only hand clapping and foot stomping as the accompaniment. However, because these devotional songs were commonly sung in slow tempos and were often difficult to understand, many congregants, particularly those from younger generations, became increasingly bored and disengaged. The deacons were thus replaced by a praise and worship team comprised of a select group of singers and a worship leader who led each song. In contrast to the slow, lined hymns sung by the deacons, praise and worship songs contained intelligible, simplistic lyrics and easily “singable” melodies that were undergirded by an upbeat, contemporary musical pulse.

While the praise and worship industry was catapulting to a new level of prominence throughout black churches, there were further developments occurring within the white Christian contemporary worship music industry in the 1990s that would influence how black artists

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410 “What We Believe,” Full Gospel Fellowship Church International official website, accessed October 30, 2015, [http://www.fullgospelbaptist.org/](http://www.fullgospelbaptist.org/). Also see intro and chapter one for more information on Bishop Paul Morton. Bishop Anthony L. Jinwright, the former pastor of Greater Salem Church, (the church in which I grew up), was influenced by Bishop Paul Morton and used praise and worship as a stylistic mechanism to introduce charismatic theology to his congregation. Initially, this church was entitled “Salem Missionary Baptist Church.” However, following the lead of Morton and many other pastors who were being influenced by charismatic theology, Jinwright changed the name of the church to Greater Salem Church to connote the shift in theological and worship practice. Also see, Johnson “ ‘This Is Not the Warm-Up Act!’ “ 123. Johnson states that while Bishop Kenneth Ulmer was introducing praise and worship to his congregation, he also simultaneously ended his affiliation with the Missionary Baptist Church to become a part of Morton’s Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship.

411 Pollard, *When The Church Becomes Your Party*, 22-23. In explaining the tradition of lining out hymns, Pollard states: “Lining out involves one individual, usually a deacon during a regular service or perhaps a layperson during a testimonial meeting, chanting a line or two of a hymn and ending on a specific pitch. The congregation follows by that same passage with some variation on the tune. Practiced in North America by early colonists, lining out later became a hallmark of hymn singing in black churches, perhaps because of its similarities to call and response found throughout the African diaspora.” Lined hymns were also more popular in the Baptist tradition.

412 Ibid. Pollard explains how the hymns sung during devotional services eventually fell out of popularity among black churchgoers: “The melismatic, elongated vowels couched in often somber tones (“I-lo-ove the Lo-ord, He heard my cry-e-ye-ee”) for years have been fodder for Christian comedians, who have commented on being amused and puzzled by much of the devotional ritual.”
performed worship. Although the praise and worship genre was still thriving, there began to be less focus on praise and more of a focus on worship exclusively. As Ingalls explains, “while earlier charismatic theologies of praise and worship had contended that both individual and communal expressions were necessary parts of corporate worship, in the 1990s, individual ‘worship’ began to eclipse communal ‘praise.’ ”\textsuperscript{413} During this time, the worship ballad, the sacred counterpart to the 90s pop ballad, became increasingly popular.\textsuperscript{414} Worship ballads embody a heightened emphasis on sentimentality and contain highly personal and “intimate texts, generally sung in the first person to the Divine Lover.”\textsuperscript{415} The sentimental texts led to charges that worship ballads were excessively sappy and focused more on the individual’s emotions than God. The lyrical ambiguity in some worship ballads also fueled criticisms from detractors, as the ambiguous pronoun “you” was often used by artists instead of an explicit reference to God.\textsuperscript{416}

Toward the late 90s and early 2000s, there was yet another shift toward a modern, rock-based sound in order to attract younger audiences to the gospel message. This new stylistic development emerged from British Christian bands and artists like Delirious?, SonicFlood, and Matt Redman. Ingalls states that contemporary music of the 80s and early 90s was more representative of a soft-rock, orchestral-based sound, while the new modern sound was “‘harder,’ ‘edgier,’ and ‘guitar-rock based.’”\textsuperscript{417} Lyrically, modern worship served as a corrective to what was perceived as the overly sentimental lyrics of the worship ballads that placed an inordinate amount of attention on the individual’s intimate relationship with God. Modern artists responded by writing songs that accentuated God’s transcendence and distance from

\textsuperscript{413} Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 132.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{415} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 144.
humanity. The modern worship sound experienced enormous commercial success in the late 90s and early 2000s, as “mass quantities of worship music recordings were being produced and selling very well.” By this time, the CCM industry was fully embracing worship music exclusively, as worship music had traditionally been the exclusive commercial territory of worship labels like Maranatha! and Vineyard. As a consequence of the CCM industry’s full embracement of worship music, “since the early 2000s, worship music has been the fastest growing segment of the Christian music industry.”

Black gospel artists who specialize in worship have been heavily influenced by the developments in praise and worship that have occurred in gospel music as well as contemporary Christian music. The CCM industry’s transition to an emphasis on worship exclusively has undoubtedly influenced gospel artists, as some of these artists who will be discussed place a high premium on the power of worship and even often elevate worship as the preferred devotional practice over and above praise. We will also see how a lyrical emphasis on God’s transcendence appears in some of the lyrical content of these artists, which is thus reflective of lyrical and theological shifts that occurred within the CCM industry. Judith McAllister, Israel Houghton, and William McDowell are the current inheritors of the worship music phenomenon, which remains extremely popular within the black gospel community and among black audiences. Each of these artists uses worship to authenticate their spirituality and to encourage their followers to develop a deeper, more genuine relationship with God.

Judith Christie McAllister

Judith Christie McAllister’s (b. 1963) professional career in praise and worship began as a student at Oral Roberts University (ORU). While attending a church service during her tenure

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418 Ibid., 151.
419 Ibid., 152.
420 Ibid., 153.
at ORU, McAllister heard the teachings of Dr. Myles Munroe (1954-2014), who was an internationally known televangelist.\textsuperscript{421} McAllister recalls: “He began to unfold the wisdom and the rich word of praise and worship and he went through the levels and the varying dynamics and aspects of praise. . . . I mean, I didn’t even look up at him I was writing so much.”\textsuperscript{422} This encounter with the teachings of Dr. Munroe enlightened McAllister’s perspective and gave her a renewed spiritual understanding of praise and worship that she had never before experienced in her lifetime.

After this encounter with Munroe’s teachings on praise and worship, McAllister speaks of a life-altering supernatural experience in which God communicated to McAllister her calling as a worship leader:

Maybe like three weeks later, we had what we called chapel services at ORU where we would go from on Tuesdays and Thursdays to chapel and I was one of the Oral Roberts University Singers at the time that dealt with the…program. But one of the chapel singers didn’t show up. So they just asked me to fill in. And I remember it. I stood there and I heard the Lord say so clear to me: “This is what I’ve called you to.” And I just took that as, you know, the mandate from God to continue in that. And based with the knowledge that I already had, you know, three weeks ago with what Dr. Munroe shared . . . I just began to feed myself with the Word of God, feed myself with books and knowledge that would help me in this particular area which God had called me to.\textsuperscript{423}

McAllister’s interest in praise and worship was also influenced by the music of Ron Kenoly (b. 1944), an internationally known worship artist, whose worship CDs and videos McAllister studied regularly.\textsuperscript{424}

While still a student at ORU, McAllister’s husband (then fiancé) was recruited by Bishop Charles Blake to be Blake’s personal aide. As a result, McAllister and her husband moved to


\textsuperscript{422} “Judith McAllister On SoulProsper Radio,” \url{http://www.spradioshow.com/judith-mcallister-interview.html}.

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{424} Ibid.; “About Ron Kenoly,” Ron Kenoly Ministries, accessed November 2, 2015, \url{http://www.ronkenoly.com/about}. Kenoly is known worldwide for songs like “Lift Him Up” which became an international hit.
California and joined Blake’s burgeoning ministry. While her husband began serving as personal aide, McAllister was eventually hired by Blake as the worship leader at West Angeles Church of God In Christ. As worship leader, she brought many of the praise and worship songs and teachings that she learned at ORU to West Angeles. As opposed to the traditional devotional service in which deacons began the service in song, McAllister created a praise team and began instituting the praise and worship format into mid-week services. As McAllister began composing new praise and worship songs for the congregation, praise and worship became increasingly popular in the church and was eventually incorporated into Sunday morning worship services.

Not only did McAllister influence the sound of worship in West Angeles, but her sound also travelled beyond West Angeles to influence the music and worship practices of churches both nationally and internationally. As referenced earlier, Judith McAllister played a prominent role as song leader for the series Saints in Praise. Some of the praise medleys heard throughout this project were composed or arranged by McAllister, such as the “Adoration Medley.” Within this medley McAllister leads popular songs like “We Bring The Sacrifice of Praise” and “God is Great and Greatly to be Praised.” These songs became praise and worship anthems for countless churches worldwide and helped to transition churches from a traditional devotional service led by the deacons into a new praise and worship era. As McAllister transitioned into becoming a solo artist in the late 90s and early 2000s, many of her compositions like “Highest Praise” (Halle Halle Hallelujah), “Oh Give Thanks,” (Send Judah First, 2000) and “Like The Dew,” (Send

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426 Johnson, “ ‘Oh, For A Thousand Tongues To sing,’ ” 299-300.

427 The worship leader at Greater Salem Church in Charlotte, NC used this medley to help the church transition from the traditional devotional model to a new praise and worship model.
McAllister’s contributions to the development of praise and worship in black churches have led many to label her as the undisputed “First Lady of Praise and Worship.”

McAllister was Worship Leader at West Angeles for 17 years and Executive Director of the Music and Worship Arts Department for 13 years. After her tenure at West Angeles, in 2009 Bishop Charles Blake appointed her as the President of the International Music Department of the Church of God in Christ, a position that she currently occupies. “In this assignment, she oversees the music ministry of the largest Pentecostal denomination in the country, with more than 12,000 congregations and a membership that exceeds 6 million worldwide.” McAllister also founded Never Ending Worship Enterprises, an organization “designed to facilitate and enhance the believer’s corporate and individual worship experience.” This organization has provided a platform for McAllister to teach her belief that worship involves the total person and should not be reduced to a devotional act on Sunday morning.

The concept of “never ending worship” is connected to McAllister’s heavy emphasis on worship as a lifestyle. Worship, according to McAllister, is not something that is artificially practiced during an isolated moment in time, but it should be incorporated into one’s daily existence. In his ethnography of an African American church service in North Carolina, Glenn Hinson makes the following observation about how church attendees conceptualized worship: “Sincere worship far transcends those bounded events designated as ‘services.’ ‘True’ saints, in contrast, are said to fill their everyday lives with praise and prayer. . . . Such worship both

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428 Send Judah First was McAllister’s first solo release and was recorded live at West Angeles COGIC.
430 Ibid.
complements and comments upon that which occurs in church.”\textsuperscript{433} McAllister’s conception of worship echoes similar sentiments: “Worship is more than just an act on Sunday morning,” she argues. “Worship is a lifestyle. It’s what we live. It’s who we are. It’s how we breathe. . . . When we are doing what God has commissioned us to do, what He has created us to do, that becomes worship unto the Father.”\textsuperscript{434} The highest form of worship for McAllister is when one ascertains the purpose for why God has created them and embodies it in everyday living. Genuine worship is thus a lived experience that involves the discovery and acceptance of one’s real identity and imbues every facet of one’s being.

The concept of worship as a lived experience, however, is not only about embodying one’s identity daily, but it is also entangled with conservative conceptions of what an acceptable lifestyle of worship should include. A lived experience of worship only occurs when one conforms to proper, conservative standards of moral etiquette. Similar to some of the artists discussed throughout the love album chapter, McAllister often employs code words, like “holy” and “pure,” to describe what she believes constitutes an adequate lifestyle of worship:

One of the things that we must understand particularly in this last day is that God is calling for musicians, for singers, for worship leaders, for choir directors, choir members, for dancers, liturgical dancers, that their lives be just as holy and pure as those that deliver the word. Because in scripture there is no difference, it’s all the way across the board. . . . So for some musician to say: “Well, I don’t have to do that. I don’t have to pray. I don’t have to consecrate. I don’t have to fast.” No, no, no! You don’t understand your function. And I believe that God . . . has allowed me to move in this particular season and really bring in an understanding to the musician, to the worship leader, to the praise team member, to the choir member, to the choir director, to the minister of music, that their life has to be holy before God.\textsuperscript{435}

In this conversation, McAllister deconstructs the myth that preachers (“those that deliver the word”) are required to embody the character of Christ in everyday living in ways that other

\textsuperscript{434} “Judith McAllister On SoulProsper Radio,” \url{http://www.spradioshow.com/judith-mcallister-interview.html}.
\textsuperscript{435} Ibid.
leaders in the church are not. For McAllister, worship as a lived experience implies that
devotional practices, like prayer, fasting, and consecration, are not the exclusive practices of
preachers, but apply to anyone who takes their relationship with God seriously. Indeed,
McAllister’s employment of apocalyptic, eschatological rhetoric (“this last day”) is intended to
communicate the seriousness with which she believes worship participants should interpret their
communion with God, for no one knows the day in which Christ shall return. Commitment to
such practices as prayer and fasting is evidence of a genuine lifestyle of “holiness” and
“purity”—character traits that are necessary preconditions for achieving real worship. One’s
embodiment of “holiness” and “purity” as acts of worship provides proof of the authenticity of
their spirituality and the depth of their relationship with God.

McAllister’s use of the ambiguous terms “holy” and “pure” are loaded with theological
implications that are not explicitly stated. As discussed in the love album chapter, these terms
encode a particular kind of moral behavioral ethic—which includes abstinence from worldly
indulgences like alcohol and sexual promiscuity, to name a few—that is commonly idealized
within Pentecostal culture. The term “consecrate” is code for a kind of purification ritual in
which the believer is gradually molded into the image of Christ. In her study of the Church of
God in Christ, Anthea Butler avers that “sacrifice, consecration, and cleaning” are necessary
prerequisites to receive “spiritual benefits.” In this instance, the spiritual benefit of “holiness,”
“purity,” and “consecration” is uninhibited access into the transcendent space of worship where
God’s presence abides.

The “holiness” and “purity” that real worship requires is further stressed through
McAllister’s construction of a dichotomy between “praise” and “worship.” In her discussions of

436 See p. 29 of the love album chapter for a more complete explanation of what coded terms like “holy” and “pure” signify within Pentecostal contexts.
worship, McAllister often portrays “praise” in contradistinction to “worship” in order to foreground the spiritual sincerity that is required in order to engage in the act of worship. On the live DVD for her debut solo project Send Judah First, McAllister includes various dialogues intermittently between songs to express her beliefs about the distinction between “praisers” and “worshipers”:

I believe that you can see the difference between praise and worship in individuals. Give a typical Sunday morning situation—worshipers come to worship God. They come for not what they can get but what they can give. Praisers come just to get a feeling, a good feel. You know, the difference between praise and worship, praise is the vehicle that gets us to the destination of worship. . . . And in St. John chapter four, Jesus said that “God is a spirit, and they that worship,” not praise, “those that worship Him, must worship in spirit and in truth.” So we need to use the vehicle of praise. Don’t let go of that vehicle, but reach the destination of worship. And when we reach the destination, get out of the vehicle and do business with God.

In this statement, McAllister invokes common charismatic rhetoric by portraying worship as a destination that begins with praise. The progression from praise to worship is commonly described as a journey from the outer courts into the Holy of Holies, the place in which God’s presence becomes most manifest. McAllister’s relegation of praise to a subsidiary level of importance in her response further stresses her belief that true worship requires a genuine relationship with God and solidifies the place of primacy that she believes worship should occupy. Praisers are superficially and selfishly oriented while worshipers are selfless individuals who are more preoccupied with “what they can give.” “Doing business with God” encodes the process in which the worshiper is totally submitted to the will of God, allowing God to “consecrate” in whatever way God sees fit.

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440 Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 85; Boone, “Hearing Faith,” 189-190.
The construction of a dichotomy between praise and worship is often abetted by the commonly constructed dichotomy of “religion” verses “relationship.” “God is not into religion,” McAllister often claims, “He’s into relationship.” As discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, “religion” connotes empty ritualistic routine while “relationship” signifies a genuine concern for God’s desires to be fulfilled. “Praisers” thus tend to be more “religious,” as their actions tend to be motivated by mere habitual, religious regiments, while “worshipers” are motivated by a heart that has been genuinely transformed by a real relationship with God.

McAllister’s use of words like “holy” and “pure” as well as her relegation of praise to worship, which also includes the relegation of “praisers” to “worshipers,” has hierarchical implications that potentially create spiritual stratifications in the church. Such stratifications can therefore function as an impediment to the creation of a spiritually inclusive devotional space. In his study on Trinidadian evangelical Christians, Timothy Rommen describes such spiritual stratification as a “coded hierarchy of value” that privileges worship over and above praise. Such privileging portrays the practice of worship as a devotional act only available for the spiritually elite, for those who are adept with regard to various spiritual practices and have mastered fleshly restraint. Furthermore, by claiming that only those who are “holy” and “pure” can worship, she implies that worship is an activity that only those who are a part of an exclusive “holy club” can access. Thus, while McAllister denounces “religion” in favor of “relationship,” her deployment of terms like “holy” and “pure” is highly imbued with religious implications, encoding a particular kind of religious, behavioral ethic that is commonly invoked within Pentecostal rhetoric.

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442 See chapter 2, “Thy Kingdom,” for more information on how churchgoers commonly pit “religion” against “relationship.”

One particular moment during McAllister’s Raise the Praise DVD exemplifies her conception of worship and the ways in which she engages worship rhetoric. What takes place before, during, and after the song “Holy-Declaration of the Saints” demonstrates how McAllister musically and rhetorically constructs worship. The song begins with a slow keyboard introduction, in which the pianist plays repeated sixteenth note patterns mainly within the higher treble octave. This pattern creates a kind of meditative state in which one can begin the process of transitioning into the ethereal space of worship. To further aid in this transition, while the keyboardist continues to play the introductory material, McAllister theatrically quotes scriptures taken from the New Testament book of Revelation that speak about how the angels worship God in the Holy of Holies (Revelation 4:8, 5:11, and 5:12). The words from Revelation elicit ecstatic worship from the audience, as such words encourage the audience to attempt to recreate the environment of heaven as described in the scriptures. McAllister affirms this recreation of place when, after the reading of the scripture, she declares: “Tonight we wanna duplicate the atmosphere of heaven.” The scripture from Revelation, which emphasizes the worship activity within the inner courts of heaven, along with her use of the worship term “atmosphere,” function as verbal cues to reconfigure materiality into a realm of immaterial worship.

McAllister and her background singers then solemnly and reverently begin singing the lyrics to “Holy-Declaration of the Saints” by engaging in a worship chant: “Holy, holy, holy is the lamb.” This same chant is repeated several times replacing the word “holy” with “worthy,” “faithful,” “awesome,” and “righteous”—each word functioning as a description of the character of Christ. Occasionally between each text variation, she modulates a half step higher, which serves to musically intensify the expression of worship. After the text variations, the rhythmic pulse alters, in which a syncopated eighth note pattern is emphasized, causing the rhythmic pace
to increase slightly in speed. McAllister and her singers then begin to engage in a call and response chant in which McAllister calls, “He’s holy!” while her background singers and the congregation respond by shouting, “Holy!”

The multiple text variations to express the attributes of Christ, combined with a series of modulations, an alteration in rhythmic pulse, and the call and response chant all serve to precipitate the explosive, spontaneous moment of worship that occurs at the end of the song, at which point clapping and shouts of “hallelujah” and “thank you Jesus” resound throughout the church. McAllister seizes this ecstatic moment as an opportunity to redefine a term commonly invoked within worship rhetoric: “glory” or the manifested presence of God. Her renewed conceptualization of the meaning of the term “glory” is validated by her supposed divinely inspired reinterpretation of a commonly quoted scripture that discusses God’s glory:

Let me explain something to you. The Bible says: “But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory.” Now for so long I thought and I was taught as a child that the glory in that particular scripture is glory [in] heaven. . . . I found out that that glory is not this glory [points to heaven]. But it is the glory that is created as we praise and worship the Lord. And it’s not that we praise and worship Him to get what we need, but as a result of praising and worshiping Him and the glory filling the house, then we can reach in and get whatever we need. AND THE GLORY IS IN THIS PLACE RIGHT NOW! REACH IN AND GET WHATEVER YOU NEED! HALLELUJAH!

McAllister then asks for the congregation to sing the call and response chant again with this new conception of “glory” in mind:

Now we’re gonna do that tag of that song one more time. But this time, I don’t want you to face me, I want you to face your neighbor. And I want you to declare that He is holy to your neighbor. . . . I want you to sing it to them and I want you to sing it until you feel something happening in between the two of you. Uh huh! Just like that glory that was created in the midst, hallelujah, of the Ark of the Covenant—HALLELUJAH—as they faced one another. There was a glory that was created. ARE YOU READY?! COME ON!444

444 Judith McAllister, *Raise the Praise* (Franklin, TN: Judah Music, Inc., 2007), DVD. The scripture that McAllister quotes—“But my God shall supply…”—is taken from Philippians 4:19.
McAllister’s revelation that glory is created through praise and worship helps them to reinterpret the words of the chant (“He’s holy”) and give it new meaning. As support for her reinterpretation, McAllister references the “Ark of the Covenant,” which was a physical symbol from the Old Testament that represented the glory or the presence of God. By asking them to communicate to one another, McAllister asks the audience to engage in what I call intersubjective acts of worship, in which worship becomes a shared experience. This often involves a common practice in the black church in which congregants turn to their neighbors and make faith declarations that are mutually affirming and theologically reassuring. In this particular instance, intersubjective worship involves the entire congregation pairing up in groups of two as a sign of mutual solidarity to sing and to affirm to one another that God is holy. By making this mutual declaration, McAllister claims that they are empowered to create glory, or the manifested presence of God. Intersubjective worship therefore functions as a conduit to access a metaphysical space in which the presence of God becomes more tangible. Thus, McAllister’s engagement of intersubjective worship requires that worship become a shared experience in which worshipers work together through faith in search of a common goal—the creation of glory.

Once this metaphysical glory is constructed through intersubjective worship, then worshipers can reach in and “get whatever they need.” After they sing the “holy chant” again with McAllister’s reinterpretation of “glory” in mind, McAllister states more explicitly what worshipers can get when they encounter glory:

Well you better forget about the fact that this is a recording and go ahead and get your, get your miracle! Get your, get your healing! Get your, get your deliverance! Come on! REACH IN THE GLORY! REACH IN THE GLORY! REACH IN THE GLORY!

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445 Andrew Mall, “‘We Can Be Renewed’: Resistance and Worship at the Anchor Fellowship,” in The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, eds. Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 172. Andrew Mall uses the term “shared experience” to describe a “collective experience,” in which a communal environment “can open themselves to spiritual encounters.”
REACH IN THE GLORY! YEAH! YEAH! YEAH! HALLELUJAH!
HALLELUJAH! . . . Come on reach in and get it. Reach in, reach in. Come on everybody, reach in, reach in. [Begins to use her hand as though she is physically reaching into the glory to get something out of it.] Whatever it is. Come on, whatever it is. Reach in and get it. And hold it unto yourself and then begin to thank Him for what you’ve received. Come on. Hallelujah. . . . Get everything you need and pull it unto yourself. SOMEBODY SHOUT I GOT IT! I GOT IT! I GOT IT!

The glory that is constructed through intersubjective worship is construed as a space that one can access in order to experience a real spiritual encounter that includes a range of supernatural phenomena. “Miracles,” “healing,” and “deliverance” comprise the range of embodied experiences that one can “reach into the glory and get.” McAllister’s conceptual trajectory of worship in this instance begins with a shared experience through intersubjective worship, which then leads to the creation of glory, and finally culminates with the appropriation of any number of phenomenological embodied experiences depending on the requests of the worshiper. Such experiences, however, can only occur upon one forgetting that “this is a recording.” This kind of rhetoric implies that real worship transcends the constricted confines of the physical place of a live recording as well as the temporal constraints that accompany it. One’s access to a “miracle” or “healing” is therefore contingent upon an understanding that real worship is not restricted by physical and temporal limitations.

At another moment during this live recording, McAllister induces yet another ecstatic moment of worship that reinforces this idea of creating transcendence. After the song, “Glory To His Name,” the congregation transitions into what is often referred to in the black church as a “praise break.” Praise breaks normally include shouting or dancing in the spirit and are accompanied by upbeat music played by the band. At this moment during the recording, McAllister begins to shout which then induces a collective praise break, as her background singers and the congregation also begin shouting. McAllister then kicks off her shoes—an action

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446 McAllister, Raise The Praise, DVD.
that denotes realness in black performance—and begins to run and leap across the stage as though enraptured in spiritual euphoria.

The praise break then leads into free worship, mirroring the analogy described earlier as a journey from the outer courts into the Holy of Holies. I define free worship as a mode of worship in which all that is seen and heard are raised hands, claps, cries, screams, wails, glossolalia, and varied utterances of adulation to God. Moments of free worship are sometimes accompanied by the keyboardist who traditionally plays soft, prolonged chords. Other times, as in this instance, it does not involve instrumental accompaniment, but is accompanied only by the sounds of human voices. Free worship gives the impression that time has stopped and that human temporality has been superseded by the divinity’s time. In her recounting of this worship encounter, McAllister explains how free worship made her “lose consciousness” and become unaware of human temporality:

There was a point in the concert where I lost all consciousness of the people around me. I lost all consciousness of the fact that this was actually a recording, which is something you should never do. But in this instance God came in so strong that, you know, it was about me and Him at that point. And it was a wonderful experience. And people have since . . . called us and told us about how much they enjoyed seeing the authenticity of worship. And how it is something that is actually doable. Not just by our ordinary church member, but by artists—that artists can lose all sense of time, we can lose all sense of who we are and just allow God to minister to us and bless us and take us to a place that we’ve never been before.  

McAllister conveys in this response that a loss of a “sense of time” is part of what makes worship authentic. Church members, according to McAllister, should not be the only ones to “lose themselves” in worship; but this kind of authentic display of devotional passion should exude even from those who are defined as professional “artists.” The relinquishment of the self as an “artist” aligns with McAllister’s regular disavowal of artistry. On her website for “Never Ending Worship,” it reads: “Judith Christie McAllister is not a ‘gospel artist.’ Her ministry of

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447 McAllister, *Raise The Praise*, DVD.
music is just one of the many ways in which she fulfills her life’s assignment of bringing people into closer relationship with the Father.” The relinquishment of the artistic self and of temporal constraints enables worshipers to be “taken to a place,” a transcendent realm that they have never before experienced.

McAllister’s conception of worship thus denies self-interests—a prerequisite for transcendence into the material realm. McAllister’s engagement in a discourse of disavowal does the work of portraying her as more sincere, as one who is more preoccupied with a real relationship with God over and above artistic presentation. McAllister’s performance of sincerity through worship is part and parcel of McAllister’s overall agenda to expose the incongruities that exist between inner motive and outward profession. Ultimately, she believes that worship should not be reduced to mere religious routine, but should be a reflection of one’s real relationship with God. We will also see how Israel Houghton postures his ministry as a conduit through which worshipers gain a deeper relationship with God. Like McAllister, his understanding of worship denies the importance of self-interests and also transcends material restrictions.

**Israel Houghton**

While Israel Houghton’s multicultural approach to music-making is discussed in great detail in the previous chapter, it is equally as important to discuss his artistry within the context of worship. Houghton is known internationally as one of the music industry’s leading worship artists. As referenced previously, his worship music has transcended racial boundaries and is sung in both black and white evangelical spaces. “Here I Am To Worship” (*Live From Another Level*, 2004), “Moving Forward” (*The Power of One*, 2009), and “Hosanna” (*Love God. Love People.*, 2010) are among the popular worship songs penned by Houghton. Due to his cross-

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449 Houghton’s biography and musical achievements are discussed in more detail in the chapter on multiculturalism.
cultural appeal and the popularity of his songs, Houghton has played a pivotal role in introducing praise and worship to black churches.

In an interview for the Christian Broadcasting Network, Houghton explains how he first became acquainted with worship:

My first real experience with worship, I was 19. I was playing drums in the church band at a church in Phoenix, and they asked me to be the worship leader. They had heard me sing or something and they said, “Why don’t you consider leading worship for us?” I said something like, “I’ll pray about that.” He [The pastor] said, “Pray hard because you start tonight!” Honestly, I didn’t know what I was doing.

Houghton then goes on to explain how his worship was not only limited to public devotion, but also permeated his life privately:

My first real experience of just knowing this is what I was born for, this is what I was created for, I took my piano into the kitchen because I had tile on the kitchen floor, and it was great acoustics in there and I would just worship. Four, five, and six hours would go by, and I’d sit there weeping and crying and having this conversation with God all by myself. I like to say I was doing worship before it was popular. I was doing worship as a lifestyle before it was a section at the bookstore.450

As worship is a highly commercially profitable genre in the gospel and CCM industry, Houghton is careful to deny an investment in worship because of economic interests. In the same way that he denied his interest in multiculturalism as commercially opportunistic, he denies an investment in a worship marketing fad and portrays his interest in worship as emanating exclusively from his private, authentic relationship with God. His claim that he was worshiping for hours by himself perpetuates the typical worship narrative espoused by many Christian artists—that worship is a public expression of a private reality. Such a narrative does the work of authenticating their motives and portraying them to their consumers as sincere—as real worshipers who have a real relationship with God.

Houghton is currently the longtime senior worship leader at Lakewood Church, the largest church in the U.S. with a membership of nearly 40,000 where popular televangelist Joel Osteen is pastor.\footnote{“Leadership Team,” Lakewood Church, accessed November 12, 2015, \url{https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/Pages/new-here/Leadership-Team.aspx}.} In addition to being Osteen’s worship leader, Houghton is in demand internationally and often serves as worship leader for popular Christian organizations and conferences like Champions For Christ, Promise Keepers, and the Hillsong Conferences.\footnote{Kristi Watts and Julie Blim, “Israel Houghton: An Intimate Portrait of Worship,” \url{http://www.cbn.com/cbn_music/interviews/700_club-IsraelHoughton_041205.aspx}; “Conferences,” Joyce Meyer Ministries, accessed November 12, 2015, \url{http://joycemeyer.org/Events.aspx}; \url{http://powerofone.cc/}; \url{http://www.ezazanap.hu/en/node/399}. Site no longer available.} Houghton has also served as worship leader for the crusades of well-known evangelist Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, and often serves as a regular worship leader for the conferences of popular televangelist Joyce Meyer.\footnote{LaTonya Taylor, “From the Vault: Interview with Israel Houghton,” GospelGal.com, July 12, 2006, \url{http://gospelgal.blogspot.com/2006/07/from-vault-interview-with-israel.html}.} Houghton’s passion for worship fueled the creation of the One Church Worship Academy. Founded by Houghton, One Church Worship Academy provides “intensive instruction and interaction designed specifically to develop leadership principles and techniques for worship ministry” within the local church.\footnote{“Welcome,” One Church Worship Academy, accessed November 12, 2015, \url{http://powerofone.cc/}.} Houghton’s approach to worship is thus both performative and pedagogical; he not only demonstrates how to musically construct and perform worship on the stage but he also spearheads practical workshops that function to equip church leaders on how to create an ecclesial environment that is conducive for worship. Houghton ultimately describes himself as “the court jester of worship”—one who is called to entertain “the King.”\footnote{“Welcome,” One Church Worship Academy, accessed November 12, 2015, \url{http://powerofone.cc/}.} Houghton’s worship theology is engraved on the back of the majority of his CDs with New Breed. It reads: “Our commitment is to help people worldwide experience the manifest presence of God.” This aligns with Houghton’s oft-quoted motto for his group: “to cover the...
earth with the sound of glory.”

In my examination of Houghton’s worship discourse, I have observed that he places heavy primacy on the authenticity of one’s heart as a precondition for being a real worshiper. While placing priority on the position of one’s heart, he often disavows the importance of “artistry” and the intentional construction of a “worship sound.” Similar to McAllister, he also discusses worship as a lived experience:

Houghton: Worship was never about us. Worship is about Him. . . . He’s far more interested in the position of our heart…Worship is not something that you sort of put on, you know, and go, okay I feel like worshipping today. I think worship is who you are, it’s what you do, it’s your natural breathing in and breathing out lifestyle. . . . A lot of people view worship as, I’ve gone to church and I did church. And then that’s the only time they’ve like worshipped. And I realize, like, I can’t really just do one out of seven days and feel like I’m surviving. It’s sort of like drinking water, man.

Interviewer: And even going beyond music alone. You know, we worship God with our money, with our lifestyles, with our relationship, with our conversations.

Houghton: With the way we honor other people, with the way I parent my children. All of that is a life of worship, because worship is not about tempo, it’s not about . . .

Interviewer: Slow songs

Houghton: Yeah, exactly. It’s not about a certain lyric or a certain, you know, “I’ve raised my hands, therefore we’ve worshiped.” I think those are all…auxiliary pieces to it. I think worship has always been about our heart, our gratitude, our approaching, you know, the throne of grace, man.

For Houghton, genuine worship requires a subjective reorientation—a realization that worship is “never about us”—in which attention is deflected away from one’s own selfish motives and onto God. Houghton’s denial that worship is a particular “lyric” or “tempo” further aids in this subjective reorientation, as it places primacy not on musical artistry, but on the purity of one’s heart. The heart in this instance refers to the essence of one’s true identity or

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458 Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 212-213. Ingalls speaks about how it is common in white evangelical worship to deflect focus from one’s self and onto God.
the core of one’s being. This understanding of the heart, according to Houghton, should therefore not be limited to a particular musical construction, but should be embodied daily. In contrast to McAllister, Houghton does not use ambiguous, coded terms like “holy” and “pure” to describe the lived experience of worship. Instead, Houghton explicitly states that worship as a lifestyle extends to relational commitments and to how he parents his children.

While Houghton denies that worship is a particular “lyric” or “tempo,” by downplaying the intentionality of his worship performance he neglects what could be a rich and informative discussion about how worship is musically constructed. According to Monique Ingalls, there is a strategic intentionality in the musical construction of worship. Ingalls claims that standard worship songs “generally feature slower tempos, more poignant contrasts between major and minor harmonies, and intimate lyrics expressing devotion, love, and desire for God.”459 As in the majority of worship music, Houghton’s songs do in fact possess a “certain lyric” that is intentionally Godward, deflecting attention away from the self and onto God. The tempo is also generally slow in order to induce deep meditation and contemplation on God.

Such characteristics are prevalent throughout CD 2 of Houghton’s *Live From Another Level*. Each song flows seamlessly into the next as one single medley, musically exemplifying his concept of worship as a continual, never ending commitment. Out of all twelve songs, the only songs that are more upbeat are the first (“Friend of God”) and the very last (“Going To Another Level”). However, tracks 2-11 are each slower paced songs with lyrics that focus on the love, friendship, and transcendence of God. The song “Rise Within Us” is an example of a slow paced worship song that illustrates how Houghton engages transcendence. The lyrics read:

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Rise within us Holy Spirit / We’re ready, we’re ready, we’re ready for You / Rise with power Holy Spirit / We’re calling, we’re calling, we’re calling on You / Rise with healing Holy Spirit / We’re desperate, we’re desperate, we’re desperate for You / Show Your glory Holy Spirit / We’re longing, we’re longing, we’re longing for You.

With each utterance Houghton asks the Holy Spirit to “rise” or to fully manifest within each worshiper. Houghton’s ad libs in between each utterance, however, reveal that this idea of “rising” does the work of reframing temporal and physical boundaries.

As Houghton requests for the Holy Spirit to “rise,” he then vigorously speaks over his background singers and proclaims: “Let Him rise! Let Him rise! Remove every restriction Lord. Remove every barrier in this moment and time. We’re ready for change. We’re ready to be transformed.” The request for the Holy Spirit to rise thus also becomes a request for the worshipers to rise above their own physical and temporal limitations by overcoming every “restriction” and “barrier” in this “moment and time.” Overcoming the barriers “in this moment and time” gives one access to “change” and “transformation.” Houghton goes on to explicitly request the kind of phenomenological embodied experiences that he wants his worship to induce. Shouting again over his background singers, he utters: “Heal my body! Heal my mind! Heal my past, present, and future!” Houghton also often uses the term “breakthrough” to describe such phenomenological experiences in which one’s physical condition is supernaturally and instantaneously altered through worship. The two songs following “Rise Within Us”—“Another Breakthrough” and “Lord of the Breakthrough”—both use the term “breakthrough” to signify embodied experience. Such transformations and embodied experiences are the ultimate goal of worship for Houghton and function as evidence of the authenticity of worship.

A real spiritual encounter with God through worship is often evinced by one’s inability to find the proper words to describe the experience. In “To Worship You I Live,” Houghton demonstrates how to musically construct ineffability by using nonsense syllables. This worship
practice can be construed as what Will Bonne calls “extra-linguistic communicative practices” that seek to articulate the inscrutability of God. As is common in worship music, Houghton constructs ineffability using the syllable “oh.” Before Houghton begins to musically construct the ineffable, he lyrically reconfigures spatial boundaries as he freely and improvisationally sings: “Away, away from the noise, alone with you. Away, away to hear your voice, to meet with you. Nothing else matters.” These lyrics are intended to transition the participants “away” from physical place and into the intimate space of worship where “nothing else matters” save the communion between the worshiper and God. The transcendent lyrics therefore set the tone for the musical construction of ineffability, which further functions as a vehicle for mystical transport. His construction of ineffability has two themes. In the first theme, Houghton sings (Example 3.1):

![Example 3.1]

The slow melody is intended to induce a trancelike state in which the worshiper experiences ineffable intimacy with divinity. Houghton then has the instrumentalists drop out so that only his background singers and the congregation are heard, increasing the feeling of solitary intimacy between the worshipers and God. This theme of solitary transcendence is then expanded into a longer, more instrumentally robust melodic line (Example 3.2).

![Example 3.2]

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Boone, “Hearing Faith,” 12; Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 224-228. Ingalls also references this practice as a “performed inarticulacy,” and “inarticulate awe” that attempts to describe “the indescribability” of God.
This same theme is appropriated and slightly altered in gospel singer Tamela Mann’s cover of “I Can Only Imagine.” While singing this ineffable theme, she refers to it as a “war cry.” Indeed, musical constructions of ineffability are often intertwined with militaristic rhetoric. For example, during the song “We Win” from disc one of Houghton’s *Live From Another Level*, Houghton constructs another ineffable “oh” theme and also refers to it explicitly as a “war cry.” Such constructions of ineffability thus often function to transform worship into a form of “spiritual warfare”—a phrase often used within charismatic ecclesial spaces that involves the invocation of God to intervene on behalf of the worshiper. The nonsense syllable “oh” operates as a kind of spiritual weapon that is deployed to wage war against the plan of Satan and to enact the perfect will of God in the life of the worshiper.

During his 2012 album *Jesus At The Center: Live*, Houghton engages in another worship practice that emerges regularly among worship artists. Throughout the song “Overflow,” Houghton interweaves short sermonettes spoken by televangelist Bishop Michael Pitts, in which Pitts speaks words of encouragement and affirmation to the live audience. After each sermonette, Houghton’s background singers then respond and sing repeatedly and emphatically: “More than enough, more than enough, more than enough, overflow, overflow!” These proclamations that speak of God’s abundant blessings eventually reach their climax at the end of the song and culminate in cacophonous worship. This mode of worship involves a cacophony of instrumental sounds that resound simultaneously. Each instrumentalist in the band repeatedly strikes a single tone, collectively creating a cacophonous drone. The entrance of the culminating drone signals

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461 Gospel artist Troy Sneed also sings an ineffable “oh” theme in his song “Lay It Down” (*All Is Well*, 2012) and refers to it as a “war cry.” Likewise, in his song “You’re All I Need” (*Souled Out*, 2008), Hezekiah Walker sings an “oh” theme and calls it a “war cry.”

the end of the melody and the cessation of a rhythmic pulse. As the instrumentalists sustain the drone, screams and shouts of praise and thanksgiving are uttered by the worshipers to God, adding more sonic layers to the cacophony. As it is uninhibited by metric time and a precise melodic configuration, cacophonous worship gives the illusion that temporal constraints have been eradicated. The steady drone combined with the collision of instrumental sounds and vocal utterances all participate in the creation of a space in which the worshipers feel unencumbered by the rules of temporal propriety, thus further inducing the sense of an authentic spiritual experience.

The inclusion of a cacophonous drone also helps to create an ethos of spiritual militarism, as the sound of the drone and the instrumental collision sonically evoke a warlike militancy.\textsuperscript{463} The militarism that is commonly induced by cacophonous worship is confirmed by the warlike rhetoric that Bishop Pitts appropriates once the drone begins: “Get a push back in your spirit,” he proclaims. “And push against the spirit of debt! Push against the spirit of recession! Push against the spirit of the devour. And put a yes in your mouth. Open up your mouth and agree with the promise of God and say yeah!! Say yes!” The voice of Pitts helps to stage a confrontation with evil forces that seek to keep the lives of worshipers burdened with financial turmoil. By saying “yes” to God, the worshipers are encouraged to accept the “promise of God” and to therefore embrace their God-given identity. The creation of an ethos of spiritual militarism through cacophonous worship thus functions as a supernatural stimulant for identity construction and affirmation.

Each worship practice espoused by Houghton is for the ultimate purpose of seeing the lives of worshipers wholly and irrevocably transformed. As stated in one interview, Houghton

asserted: “I believe worship has the power to change.” And this transformation, for Houghton, is primarily predicated upon the vulnerability of one’s heart and its susceptibility to change: “The life of worship is not just about singing. Matter fact, it has very little to do with music,” claims Houghton. “The life of worship has everything to do with the position of your heart, and can God reach and turn that heart at any time.” Thus, Houghton believes that when worship is reduced to a mere musical construction, it loses its real spiritual appeal and does not accomplish the purpose for which God intended—to transform the worshiper’s relationship with God and to align the worshiper within the perfect will of God.

William McDowell

William McDowell (b. 1976) is currently one of the premiere worship leaders in the church and within the gospel music industry. McDowell’s journey as a worshipper began as a student at Full Sail University in Orlando, Florida. During his tenure at Full Sail, McDowell was mentored by world-renowned worship artist Ron Kenoly and eventually served as Kenoly’s Music Director and keyboardist for two years. During this time, Kenoly helped to cultivate and develop McDowell’s artistry and prepared him for a professional career as a worship artist. After working with Kenoly, McDowell then became worship pastor at The Gathering Place Church in Lake Mary, Florida, where he served under the leadership of Pastor Sam Hinn, brother of world-renowned healing evangelist Benny Hinn. After four years of serving as worship pastor under Hinn, McDowell then began his worship music ministry full time and eventually

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467 Ibid.
became the founder of Deeper Fellowship Church in Orlando, Florida where he currently serves as senior pastor.\footnote{Pastor William McDowell, “Our Story,” Deeper Fellowship Church, accessed November 26, 2015, \url{http://www.deeperfellowshipchurch.org/our-story-1}.}


Evocative of McAllister and Houghton, McDowell also defines worship as a lived experience. In one interview, McDowell claims that “a worshiper is one who is intimately acquainted with and has a daily relationship with God and responds to Him in obedience.”\footnote{“William McDowell,” Da Gospel Truth, accessed November 27, 2015, \url{http://www.dagospeltruth.com/william-mcdowell/}.} On his live DVD for his 2013 album Withholding Nothing, McDowell again articulates his conception of worship as an act of daily obedience as he simultaneously disavows a preoccupation with musical artistry to communicate sincerity: “True worship is not a song. It’s a posture of submission before God. It’s a posture of obedience before God.”\footnote{William McDowell, Withholding Nothing (Port Washington, NY: Delivery Room Music, LLC & Entertainment One U.S., 2013), DVD.} Ultimately, the goal of worship for McDowell is “to become an invisible worshiper. At some point,” according to McDowell, “you have to disappear if you’re gonna point to Him.”\footnote{William McDowell, interview by Smokie Norful, Praise the Lord, TBN, August 4, 2015, \url{http://itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/cc/5ybG83drzb0mXamTtOuxpd1rX7bSOup3?offset=1975}.} The invisibility of the worshiper is a prerequisite for experiencing an authentic spiritual encounter with God.

McDowell also uses the phrase “audience of one” to articulate the degree of intimacy that should be shared between the worshiper and God during the act of worship.\footnote{Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 201. Ingalls refers to the phrase “audience of one” as a performance metaphor often invoked by evangelicals.} The absence of this realization implies that one is performing to please the audience and to cater to their...
emotions rather than to please God. In his most popular songs, a discourse of disavowal
inundates the lyrical content, as McDowell is intentional about posturing real worship as a
devotional act solely predicated upon selflessness, sincerity, and a desire to please God. In both
of his hit songs “I Give Myself Away” and “Withholding Nothing”—both of which peaked at
number one and number eight respectively on Billboard’s “Hot Gospel Songs” charts—avowals
of self-sacrifice and surrender define the main message. The lyrics to “I Give Myself Away”
read:

Here I am, here I stand / Lord my life is in Your hands / Lord I’m longing to see Your
desires revealed in me / I give myself away so you can use me / Take my heart, take my
life as a living sacrifice / All my dreams, all my plans / Lord I place them in Your hands /
My life is not my own, to You I belong / I give myself, I give myself to You.

The sacrificing of one’s selfish desires allows God’s “desires to be revealed” and thus
facilitates the realization of one’s God-given identity. When one surrenders personal desires,
then one can be fully “used” by God. Avowals of self-sacrifice are also found in his popular song
“Withholding Nothing.” McDowell claims that “Withholding Nothing” was originally a part of
“I Give Myself Away,” because both songs have similar declarations of surrender. “Withholding
Nothing,” however, eventually developed into its own song. The lyrics to “Withholding
Nothing” read: “I surrender all to You / Everything I give to You / Withholding nothing / I give
You all of me / King Jesus, my savior, forever / I give You all of me.” The lyrics are intended to
encourage total transparency between the worshiper and God. A posture of complete
vulnerability, in which the worshiper “withholds nothing” from God and gives God “all of
him/herself,” gives the worshiper greater access to God and thus positions the worshiper for a
more real spiritual encounter.

mcdowell/chart?f=398.
spotlight.com/william_mcdowell_intvw.htm.
Not only does McDowell consistently engage in a discourse of disavowal in his lyrical content, but he also foregrounds the role of worship in constructing an ethereal space where transformative phenomena occur. In one interview on TBN, McDowell elaborates on this understanding of worship: “One of the most powerful things about worship…is that worship gives us access to God. It’s a portal. So the Lord began to show me that through the vehicle of worship, we’ve gained a portal or an unprecedented access to the throne of God where the secrets of heaven are revealed, and when declared, change things on the earth.”476 In another interview, McDowell further elaborates upon what he believes changes specifically through worship: “Worship has a response but it also has a result. And the result of worship is change. The result of worship is that our hearts change, our posture changes, our minds change, our speech changes. . . . The truth is, biblically that’s impossible to have an encounter with God and leave the same way.”477

In many of his songs, McDowell often uses the term “rain” as a code to signify the ethereal space where God’s presence manifests as a result of true worship. During the title track “As We Worship” from his 2009 album As We Worship, McDowell beckons God to “send the rain.” He then goes on to list the phenomenological embodied experiences that occur once a transcendent space, in this case indexed by the analogy of “rain,” is created through real worship. The lyrics to the beginning of the first verse read: “Holy Spirit we’re calling on You / We are asking You to send the rain / When we worship in spirit and truth / Something happens that we can’t explain / Demons tremble, kings bow down, lives are changed / At the sound of Your name.”

476 William McDowell, interview by Trent Cory, Praise the Lord, TBN, September 6, 2012, http://itbn.org/index/detail/lib/Networks/sublib/TBN/ec/lvdXd0NTrjUMS2wGJHoQQnJweja3FV4xM.
The song then transitions into the vamp, in which McDowell’s background singers repeatedly sing “As we worship.” As the vocalists repeat these lyrics, McDowell ad libs on top of his singers and lists the various phenomena that he believes should occur “as they worship”: “Bodies are healed, yes, and bondage is broken, and families restored . . . hallelujah, vision released, yeah, and dreams are repaired, and strategies given . . . we’ll see miracles, signs, and wonders . . . the lame will walk, the dumb will talk, and the blind will see.” Such phenomenological embodied experiences occur through “the portal” of worship which functions as supernatural transportation into metaphysical space. The analogy of “rain” to describe worship-induced metaphysicality is also deployed during the song “Downpour” (the first line is “Let your glory rain down”) on the same album as well as on McDowell’s latest single “Send the Rain” (Sounds of Revival, 2016). McDowell also often refers to this space in which God rains as “the secret place” where God reveals his “face” and shows his “glory.” This analogy can be heard on the songs “Closer/Wrap Me In Your Arms” and “Show Me Your Face,” both of which are from the album As We Worship. On his album Arise, during the song “Waiting” McDowell articulates how the “secret place” is intertwined with conceptions of temporal transcendence. McDowell sings: “Right here, in the secret place, where time doesn’t matter.”

This kind of otherworldly, euphoric worship experience that defies temporal propriety is precisely what McDowell’s musical construction of ineffability seeks to communicate. McDowell expresses the unfathomability of God during the song “My Heart Sings” on Withholding Nothing. Throughout this song, McDowell expresses how his worship experience with God is so sublime and transcendent that the vocabulary to describe such an experience escapes him. The lyrics read: “How could I describe a God that’s indescribable / How could I
explain a love that’s unexplainable / I’m at a loss for words / Oh, oh, oh / My heart sings oh, oh, oh.” McDowell’s ineffable theme is a slow, serene three-part harmony (Example 3.3):

As his background singers repeat this ineffable theme, McDowell ad libs on top of the vocals by shouting: “My worship is too deep for my words, so I say ‘oh!!’ . . . I gotta cry out from the depths of my heart!! My vocabulary is too limited when it comes to God!! So I say ‘oh!!’ ” McDowell then asks the live audience to repeat the same ineffable chant without instrumentation, encouraging them to partake in the sublime transcendence of the inscrutable God.

As a crucial aspect of his understanding of worship, McDowell also commonly foregrounds the importance of the church as an institutional body created by God to bring about God’s plan for humanity. McDowell does not reduce the church to the institutional structure, but rather defines the church as the individuals who belong to it—the body of Christ. At the beginning of his 2011 album Arise, McDowell opens the album with a monologue in which he places primacy on the authority of the church and expresses anxiety about the church losing its influence in culture. This then transitions into the song “Arise,” which is a summons for the
church to arise and to reclaim its authority. During this song, McDowell inserts a monologue in which he explains his church-centered theology:

The church we see is not on the periphery of the world, but the world on the periphery of the church. Meaning that when God looks at the earth, when He looks at a city, He does not see a city with a church in it; He sees the church with a city around it. The church is the vehicle by which Jesus speaks, acts, and moves. Everything God wants to do in the earth, He wants to do through His church.

McDowell’s church-centered theology has important implications for worship. McDowell often portrays the church as an institutional body of believers who are responsible for facilitating authentic worship. In his lyrical content, McDowell often requests that the church engage in intersubjective acts of worship in order to transform other nations around the globe. While McAllister’s engagement in intersubjective worship was limited to the individual worshiper and his/her neighbor, McDowell’s act of intersubjective worship expands beyond the actual confines of the local worship community and engages the international community. McDowell describes this shared experience as “intercession,” in which the gathered worshipers use worship to “intercede” on behalf of other nations and cultures around the world. The “Song of Intercession” from Arise opens with a monologue in which McDowell articulates his understanding of the church’s role in international intercession: “The nations are desperately in need of a church who will arise in power and intercede on their behalf, that the Lord of glory will intervene in the affairs of the earth. . . . It’s time for us to intercede on behalf of the nations.”

McDowell believes that worship creates a space in which the believer has the power to transcend geographical restrictions and enact transformation in other countries. McDowell’s concept of intercession through intersubjective worship therefore involves the enactment of phenomenological embodied experiences that are not only available for the individuals gathered in the local worship setting, but are also for individuals in other nations, as well as for various
nations as a whole. During the song “Spoken,” from his live concert DVD of *Withholding Nothing*, McDowell explains:

I want you to know tonight that in the presence of God the things that we declare don’t stay in this room. When we declare the word of the Lord, we have the ability to speak from Orlando, Florida and things can change in China! We have the ability to speak right now and things can change in Africa! We can speak right now and things can change in the Middle East! Do you believe that tonight?!

McDowell thus deploys Word of Faith verbiage, placing emphasis on the power of verbal proclamation, to enact international transformation.

In his second release of the “Song of Intercession” on the *Withholding Nothing* DVD, McDowell engages the concept of international intercession more deeply than in his first release of this song on *Arise*. The “Song of Intercession” comes right after the song “Ask,” which petitions God to heal the international community. As McDowell sings the lyrics to “Ask,” scenes of McDowell leading worship around the world are shown: Ghana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Canada are among the nations where McDowell is seen worshiping. Visual images of international worship set the tone for the transition into the “Song of Intercession” in which the background singers solemnly sing: “Oh Lord we come to You / We lay our lives before You / You know our needs before we ask / So we come not for ourselves / But we’re crying out for the nations.” The last few lines of the song then read: “Oh Lord, we pray / As Your church we arise / Jesus, please hear our cry and have mercy.” This song then transitions into intercessory declarations made through prayer and intersubjective worship; McDowell asks all those gathered in the worship setting to pray for global transformation and to worship God on the behalf of other nations. This moment of intercession is musically accompanied by a variety of cyclic melodic patterns. The repetition of the melodic patterns gives the illusion that the normal progression of time has ceased, transporting them into a frozen, trancelike state of worship. As
McDowell, his singers, and various audience participants kneel to their knees in a moment of international solidarity, McDowell begins his plea for the transnational community:

Can we release the sound of intercession all over this room. . . . Let a cry for the nations be released in this room. Wherever you are, we’re praying for you in China. We’re praying for you in Indonesia. We’re praying for you in Africa. We’re praying for you in Southeast Asia. We’re praying for you in the Middle East. We’re praying for you Europe. We’re praying for you America. We’re praying for you governments. . . . We’re praying that the Father of glory would intervene on your behalf and show you His glory and show you His reality . . . The church shall arise with power! . . . Holy Spirit come invade! Come invade every nation! Every leader! In the name of Jesus! Show your glory! . . . Shift the atmosphere over every nation! Shift the atmosphere over every government! Shift the atmosphere! . . . We declare the Lordship of Jesus in every nation of the earth! Let every nation of the earth be filled with the glory and the knowledge of God!

The rhetorical engagement with the international community transcends the physical place of the local community while the repetition of the melodic figure gives the illusion of defying the progression of linear time. “Shift the atmosphere” is a very common rhetorical trope deployed in gospel music and black church discourse when referencing worship.478 The “atmosphere” usually refers to the physical worship setting that, through the act of worship, is susceptible to being altered into a metaphysical space where God’s presence and transformative power dwell more richly.479 Real worship is thus the catalyst for transforming the atmosphere from one experiential terrain to another. McDowell believes that by praying for atmospheres to be shifted internationally, he is encouraging God’s presence to manifest in various governmental systems and is therefore helping to enforce God’s perfect plan throughout the world. Will Boone’s study of black church discourse provides further elucidation of this concept: “The experience of moments when there is a ‘shift in the atmosphere’ helps to build faith in the idea of

478 Most recently, this phrase was the title of a popular worship song, “Shifting the Atmosphere” (Shifting the Atmosphere, 2012) performed by burgeoning worship artist Jason Nelson.
479 Boone, “Hearing Faith,” 20-21. Boone notes that “shifting the atmosphere” is a phrase that “encourages the Spirit’s immanence to manifest.”
a divine plan, as they view these moments as evidence of God’s continuing transformation of the world, leading eventually to the establishment of His kingdom.”

McDowell’s engagement in intersubjective worship for the international community, however, seems to be exclusively motivated by an evangelistic impulse to convert countries into Christian nations. As a consequence, the lyrical content of his music does not address the various socioeconomic issues within each of these nations. His use of the nebulous word “change” fails to render specifics with regard to the “change” that he seeks to implement transnationally. Although McDowell’s charitable foundation, Igive myselfaway.org, addresses issues like hunger and the lack of safe drinking water, the lyrical content of his music reduces charity to the Christianization of the entire globe. Moreover, his concern for other nations seems to be informed by his assumption that everyone in America is economically stable and therefore not experiencing as much lack as in other countries. During the introduction to the “Song of Intercession” on the album Arise, McDowell claims that

specifically in America—the most financially prosperous nation on the earth—the enemy has deceived many parts of the church by convincing us to continue to pray for our own needs, when we have everything we could possibly ever imagine. . . . Is there anyone in this room tonight who has enough faith to know that every one of your needs is taken care of? It’s time for us to intercede on behalf of the nations.

McDowell makes the false assumption that everyone in his audience has all of their needs met simply by virtue of being an American. McDowell therefore prioritizes the concerns of individuals in other nations while overlooking the socioeconomic challenges that some may be confronting who are present in his local worship setting.

McDowell’s transcendent moment of international intercessory precipitates the transition into what I call improvisational worship. Improvisational worship usually takes place during

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480 Ibid., 149.
transcendent moments of spiritual exuberance. During these highly emotionally charged moments of praise and worship, the artists may be inspired to compose a melody on the spot and to instruct his/her background singers to follow suit. After McDowell petitions God on behalf of other nations, he turns to one of his background singers, Daniel, and asks him to spontaneously “take the moment . . . and go for what he was sensing.” At this point, Daniel begins to freely ad lib and composes a singable melody. Adding quick ornaments and melismatic flurries to his vocal lines, Daniel improvisationally sings: “If they’re looking for you, let them find you in me.” Daniel then begins an extemporaneous call and response chant with McDowell’s background singers—he sings: “Fill me up, I wanna say what you say. Fill me up.” As he sings each line, McDowell’s singers repeat after him. As this is taking place, McDowell is seen instructing his background singers to follow Daniel’s lead in what is portrayed as a divinely inspired spontaneous moment.

McDowell explains this moment of improvisational worship in an interview as a part of the bonus tracks from the Withholding Nothing DVD:

It’s an unscripted moment. . . . What you’re seeing is completely spontaneous. Unrehearsed: unrehearsed by the band, unrehearsed by the singers, unrehearsed by Daniel. Just a moment to respond to what was happening in that moment. And it literally represented, I believe, a shift in the night.

This transcendent moment in which the rules of temporal propriety are transgressed in exchange for spontaneous moments of spiritual ecstasy are precisely what defines the essence of worship for McDowell. On his official website, McDowell discusses how the Withholding Nothing DVD was intended to foreground a real worship experience that placed less attention on the mechanics of a live recording and more emphasis on an authentic worship experience: “The DVD highlights 2000 people immersed not in a recording, but in worship, people who don’t know they are being
heard by anyone but God.\textsuperscript{482} The impromptu moment of improvisational worship was therefore a part of McDowell’s plan to construct a space of increased intimacy between the worshiper and God, in which the performers and the audience became “unaware” of the artistic and professional constraints of a live recording.

As one of the contemporary vanguards of worship music, William McDowell continues to express his commitment to creating “an authentic sound” that transports worshipers into the “manifested presence of God.”\textsuperscript{483} McDowell’s intentional musical construction of “immersive environments” of worship is intended to provoke a change in one’s relationship with God, which then precipitates reconstructions of self-identification.\textsuperscript{484} These outward immersive environments of worship, however, are mere extensions of the “internal environment” of worship that true worshipers embody through daily expressions of obedience and self-sacrifice. If one’s public performance of worship is not an expression of one’s real spiritual identity privately, then one could run the risk of being, as McDowell puts it, “found out” or exposed as a spiritual charlatan.\textsuperscript{485} McDowell therefore portrays his worship practices as a real component of who he is privately, rather than a superficial, performed façade to be donned publically.

The preoccupation with portraying sincerity among gospel worship artists infiltrates the overwhelming majority of their discourses about worship. The presence of sincere motives, according to Ingalls, is often the primary barometer that evangelicals use to assess an artist’s worship performance. She goes on to argue that a heavy emphasis on sincere motives, however, has disadvantages, in that it suffocates critical conversation and places an artist “in a space
beyond critique.”486 This leads to what Ingalls calls a “discursive impasse,” in which evangelicals are disempowered from the ability to critique or condemn “any particular event, space, or product.”487 Using “genuine motives” as the sole basis for evaluating an artist’s performance may lead to some feeling as though they are being “judgmental” because they feel that they do not “have the right” to judge someone’s heart, thereby silencing critique.488 This same discursive impasse, I believe, exists among gospel artists in their discussions about worship. Discourse is often minimized or even silenced among gospel artists, who often neglect to share candid information about the economics of the worship music industry and the benefits they receive from it, their own personal artistry, or the ways in which they artistically craft worship with a deliberate intentionality, for fear that their motives might be perceived as disingenuous. Avoiding such conversations protects them from accusations that they are self-centered and pretentious—two character traits understood to be unbefitting of Christ followers. Discourse thus regularly reaches an impasse where discussions are exclusively rooted in realness or matters of “the heart.”

It can be argued, however, that their discourse of realness, which primarily stresses motive and intent, is itself a byproduct of commercial trends and does the work of positioning their projects as more marketable. Ingalls argues that due to the explosion of commercial worship in the late 1990s, authenticity discourse grew in popularity, encouraged by fears that the true meaning of worship was being diluted and that artists were worshiping for profit.489 In an interview for a Christian magazine, Israel Houghton expresses anxieties about the commercial viability of worship music while also resisting the notion that he creates worship music for that reason: “When an industry industrializes something as sacred as worship, it concerns me as ‘hey,

486 Ingalls, “Awesome In This Place,” 294.
487 Ibid., 242.
488 Ibid., 145.
489 Ibid., 185.
let’s do some worship now’ instead of understanding the purity of it. I can think of worse songs that everybody could be jumping on. But, I’m like, as for me and my house, we’re going to keep it authentic and pure.”490 Although seemingly resisting commercialism, this kind of discourse of realness makes worship projects more attractive to conservative Christian audiences, as consumers want to believe that the artists are authentic and totally untainted by the entrapments of capitalism. Houghton’s discourse of realness does the work of portraying him as a sincere worshiper, therefore making his persona more palatable and digestible for conservative Christian consumers.

One of the main ways in which gospel artists also articulate the authenticity of their worship is by releasing live recordings. Each one of the albums examined in this chapter is a live recording, many of which are also accompanied by DVDs that are created to expose the viewers to real, uncensored worship. These live recordings and DVD releases that show uninhibited worship, however, have very significant economic implications that are reflective of wider commercial patterns. The word “live” is often strategically added to the title of the album to communicate the authenticity of the worship experience to consumers, promising to transport the listener to a space of divine encounter. The “live” title encourages listeners to relive the worship experience and to worship with those on the recording, even though the recording may have taken place years prior to the listening experience. Thus, when McAllister says, “forget about the fact that this is a recording,” or when McDowell claims that his albums are simply “an encounter with God captured on CD”—these denunciations of the professional, spatial, and temporal constraints of recording mechanics invite consumers into the experience and contribute to what makes a live recording highly marketable.491 Such denunciations give the impression that the

recording is merely a presentation of an authentic moment. All three of the artists discussed have released albums with the word “live” on the album cover, boldly advertising the promise of a real spiritual experience—three such examples include *In His Presence: Live* (2006) by McAllister, *Live From Another Level* (2004) by Houghton, and *As We Worship: Live* (2009) by McDowell.

In addition to the “live” title functioning as a strategic marketing strategy, Anna Nekola argues that the discourses of worship as a “lifestyle” and as an “experience” also have commercial implications. Nekola argues that worship as a highly individual and personalized devotional act became increasingly marketed through media products and technology in the 1990s and 2000s. Worship advertisements through recording companies like Integrity Music as well as Christian magazines, like *Worship Leader*, began to promise consumers that by listening to worship albums, their private daily experiences would be instantaneously transformed. “Integrity Music’s print advertisements in the early 2000s,” she argues, “help reinforce the emerging discourse of worship as a lifestyle where private listening to worship enables one to turn everyday tasks into an experience of God’s presence.” These advertisements also often contained visual imagery that showed individuals wearing headphones while listening to worship music. Such images suggested that through listening to this music, worship could become a part of your personal, everyday experience. The discursive practices of these gospel artists therefore coincide with marketing discourses deployed throughout the 1990s and 2000s to advertise worship music.

As worship artists discuss and embody their worship practices, a fascinating tension commonly emerges between spontaneity and intentionality. Gospel artists communicate

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492 Nekola, “‘I’ll Take you There,’” in *Christian Congregational Music*, 125.
493 Ibid., 127.
494 Ibid., 129.
exuberant moments of free worship or improvisational worship as totally spontaneous and unplanned. As discussed previously, William McDowell articulates these moments as “unrehearsed” and “unscripted moments.” While these moments are often described as completely unexpected, it is fair to say that those who espouse Pentecostal worship practices are taught to expect the unexpected—to create an “atmosphere” in which the unexpected is permissible and even anticipated. This expected unexpectedness is what historian Grant Wacker calls “planned spontaneity,” in which participants approach the worship space with an expectation for the Spirit to move unexpectedly.495

In fact, having “a spirit of expectation” is a common church colloquialism that admonishes worship participants to prepare their hearts and minds for God to do whatever God so desires. One of McDowell’s songs entitled “Expecting” best exemplifies this tension. The opening lyrics read: “I’m expecting, anticipating a move of God.” “A spirit of expectancy” is thus understood to increase the likelihood for the Spirit to move—to heal, deliver, and set free unexpectedly. While I am not suggesting that these moments of free and improvisational worship are merely artificially contrived, as there is an element of real unpredictability that is embraced within these worship services, I do suggest that these ecstatic moments are certainly very predictable components and continuations of static, preexisting Pentecostal practices.496

This same discursive tension exists as it pertains to the constant engagement in discourses of disavowal. As I have shown throughout this chapter, these artists deflect attention away from themselves often denying that they are “artists” and that there is an intentional method or artistry undergirding their performance. These artists, particularly Houghton, are worship superstars within the church and participate in the capitalistic and commercialistic enterprise of the music

industry just as any other popular artist. Again, Ingalls’s work is informative as she notes that many of these worship artists have “gold-certified records, chart-topping songs . . . internet fan groups, and national and international tours which rival the scope and income of those of many top-grossing secular pop acts,” all of which “attest to their fame.”

Not only do they participate in the practical economic dynamics of the industry, but they are also strategic in how they artistically construct worship and how they harness their own vocal abilities. Although McDowell, Houghton, and McAllister all agree that “worship is not a song,” and generally downplay the various artistic, professional components of the music, they all demonstrate how to intentionally construct worship and use their voices in ways that are very skilled. During one of the many interspersed interviews on her Send Judah First DVD, McAllister’s comments reflect this reality: “One thing that I’ve attempted to do even with this project is to be as simple as possible . . . so that the ordinary lay person can catch these songs, that they can sing them during their devotions. They can, you know, minister to the Lord any time, any place, simply.” These comments shed light on a major element of worship music, highlighting the ways in which worship artists often intentionally compose songs with few lyrics that are “catchy” so that they can be easily learned.

These artists are also intentional about how they skillfully use their voices. While Houghton and McDowell often incorporate very intricate vocal melismatic ornamentations throughout their vocal lines, McAllister often showcases the extent of her soprano range. At the end of all four of her solo projects, McAllister reaches up to the extremities of her vocal range. For example on the song “Raise The Praise,” (Raise The Praise DVD) she modulates seven times up to a high B5 and during the song “Rain” (In His Presence: Live), she modulates six times also up to a high B5. In one interview, it appears that McAllister spiritualizes her vocal

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acrobatic display and places more emphasis on the spiritual aspects than her vocal ability: “God
told me a long time ago that my voice is like a trumpet. And when you hear it you’ll understand,
because it opens up things in the spirit. And I know that . . . and that’s why I often do a lot of that
shouting because I understand that when I do there’s an authority behind that that is not just
vocal. It’s spiritual. And it does something in the atmosphere.”

Although McAllister has provided a theological explanation to spiritualize her displays of
vocal strength at the end of each album, her vocal prowess and skill are undeniable as evidenced
by the reactions of the audience as she ascends incrementally up the scale. During “Raise The
Praise,” even her background singers stop singing, as the song modulates to a key beyond their
vocal range, and stand gaping in utter awe of McAllister’s range. What makes this even more
impressive is that she engages in these chromatic modulations up to a high B at the very end of
the concert after singing with a full-throated belting technique for close to two hours. These
deliberate displays of vocal strength and durability are not simply evidence of authentic
spirituality, but of real vocal power and intentional skill. These dualities that exist— spontaneity
and intentionality, disavowal and deliberate artistry—reflect the ways in which artists often find
themselves caught in the nexus between their audience’s “voiced calls for egalitarian
selflessness” and their “unvoiced invitation to artful self-expression.”

Another unspoken tension lies in the commonly spoken existential phenomena that these
artists proclaim worship should induce. “Miracles,” “healing,” “breakthrough,” etc., are among
the supernatural phenomena that these artists believe are an inevitable consequence of real
worship. These terms, however, share resonances with Prosperity Gospel and Word of Faith
theological verbiage. In the same way that Prosperity Gospel and Word of Faith theology teach

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499 Hinson, Fire In My Bones, 145.
that a simple verbal profession can immediately alter one’s existential reality, the deployment of worship rhetoric can also give the impression that by worshiping, one’s life can change instantaneously. These worship declarations can potentially reduce God to a kind of “genie” and create an environment in which worshipers engage in worship merely for personal, supernatural benefits. While McDowell has said on numerous occasions that it’s “impossible to have an encounter with God and leave the same way,” how does worship theology account for those who do in fact leave the same way? What about those who engage in sincere, authentic worship but do not experience any “transformation,” “miracle,” “healing,” or “deliverance”? These coded terms within worship rhetoric can therefore create misplaced expectations and cause excess attention to be placed onto the self rather than onto God.

**Conclusion**

Judith McAllister, Israel Houghton, and William McDowell epitomize how worship is harnessed as an authenticating apparatus both to communicate the sincerity of their own motives and to vet the intentions of others. Each artist explains worship as a transformative devotional act of sacred experience that only those who have a real relationship with God can encounter. Their music and discourses exemplify the functionality of worship—how it is performed, lived, and phenomenologically embodied. Lest they appear overly preoccupied with their own self-interests and artistic achievements, these artists are sure to deflect any and all attention off of themselves and onto God; for it is not their own selfish motives or capitalistic ambitions that lead them to worship, but rather it is the desire to see individuals experience the manifested presence of God that fuels their passion for worship.

Due to their emphasis on worship as an authentic act, their conversations are often limited to a discourse about realness rather than a more nuanced discussion about the intentional
construction of worship. These discourses of realness function as protective mechanisms against potential critics from their conservative Christian consumer base who might question the integrity of their motives. Essentially, gospel artists and their followers conceive worship as an act not just to be performed publically, but as an outward extension of an inner, private love affair with the divine. In the next chapter on gospel reality shows, I further examine this tension that gospel artists often navigate between public persona and private reality. Just as the sincerity of motives is a crucial component in the creation of authentic worship, we will also see how the sincerity of motives is likewise portrayed as a significant driving force behind the creation of gospel reality shows.
Chapter Four
The Gospel Reality Show

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

- 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

There is no entertainment medium that better embodies the preoccupation with the real than the reality show. Reality shows have become a cultural phenomenon within the twenty-first century and have transformed the landscape of the television industry. As they increasingly pervade major networks and occupy prominent time slots, reality shows continue to soar in popularity and remain integral components of American television. Alongside reality shows that foreground secular themes and showcase stars from popular culture is a growing number of faith-based reality shows that emphasize religious themes and involve widely known religious figures. Particularly within the past ten years, gospel stars have occupied the reality show platform and have attempted to present a more sacred, family-friendly alternative to the more tawdry brand of reality shows that predominate the airwaves. Mary Mary and Preachers of L.A. are two reality shows that feature prominent artists in the gospel industry. These shows have captured the attention of church audiences by offering rare glimpses into the personal lives of famous gospel artists and revealing a side of their personalities that often defy their public image as religious leaders.

In this final chapter, I examine how gospel artists often use the reality show as a platform to engage in muddy authenticity, a naked spirituality that portrays them as flawed individuals
with real life problems.\textsuperscript{500} Within this context, real spirituality presupposes an eradication of sanctimonious facades and a humble acceptance of the reality of imperfection without the denial of one’s Christian identity. In other words, to be spiritually real is to be totally transparent.

Rather than portraying gospel artists as “perfect Christians” and conforming to the romanticized image that gospel stars believe many of their fans have of them, gospel reality shows expose intrasubjective conflict, revealing dissonances and incongruities that exist within individual subjectivities.\textsuperscript{501}

Intrasubjective conflict is articulated through various dualities that emerge regularly within the narrative of gospel reality shows. These shows commonly emphasize three dualities: the duality of public persona and private struggle; divinity and humanity; and the imperatives of ministry versus the reality of capitalism and consumer culture. The first duality involves how artists negotiate the tension between their public image as religious leaders and their private struggles, which often fall far short of the Pentecostal ethical standards that they publically profess. The duality of divinity and humanity deals with the struggles of maintaining Christ-like character while still dealing with human imperfections. These first two dualities therefore expose the tension between the ideal self and the flawed self. In discussing the duality of ministry versus capitalism, I examine how gospel artists often mitigate potential criticisms about their financial success and material abundance as readily seen on their reality shows by spiritualizing their capitalistic endeavors, thus helping them to maintain respectability among their Christian followers. Rather than capitalism and ministry being perceived as antagonistic, irreconcilable


\textsuperscript{501} Georgina Born, “Modernist Discourse, Psychic Forms, and Agency: Aesthetic Subjectivities at IRCAM,” \textit{Cultural Anthropology} 12, no. 4 (1997), 490. Born uses intrasubjectivity as a framework to describe the inner conflicts that take place within individuals who work for a music research institute in Paris called IRCAM. She discusses how they experience inner tensions between having a passion for popular music and conforming to modernism as the ideal musical aesthetic upheld by IRCAM.
entities, capitalistic aspirations and capitulations to consumer culture are portrayed as part of the work of ministry. Being transparent about these dualities portray gospel stars as more “real,” as they are no longer willing to hide their private matters or their material abundance.

Throughout the plot narrative of these shows, intrasubjective conflict often culminates at the nexus of performance. Their performances are transformed into therapeutic rituals that enable artists to reconcile competing subjectivities. That is to say, gospel artists use the performance space both to address these dualities and to overcome them. Performance therefore becomes another opportunity to transparently express interiority and to communicate unbridled realness.

Essentially, these artists believe that using the reality show platform to divulge their inner dialectical conflicts and to reveal their fallacies is a part of God’s plan—it makes Christ more accessible to their fans who often idolize gospel artists and mistakenly assume that perfection is a prerequisite for having a real relationship with God. Gospel artists therefore interpret their transparency as a tool both to evangelize to non-Christians and to draw current Christians into a closer relationship with God. In order to evangelize to their television audience, gospel stars often engage in what I call a discourse of relatability. This kind of discourse attempts to strip gospel stars of the hierarchical economic and social trappings that accompany celebrity and to portray them as merely “average.”

*Mary Mary* and *Preachers of L.A.* are currently among the most popular reality shows featuring gospel music artists. Each show has garnered millions of followers who are intrigued by the supposed display of realness expressed by some of gospel music’s most successful artists. The fact that these are religious leaders on reality shows makes the temptation to watch all the more enticing due to the standard of religious piety that these religious figures are expected and believed to uphold. Both shows have and continue to play pivotal roles in shifting the public’s
perception of the private lives of religious leaders and deconstructing the myth that religious
leaders are fully divine. Gospel artists believe that the intentional deconstruction of this myth and
an adherence to total transparency through the reality show are a part of God’s work and God’s
plan.

**Secular and Faith-Based Reality Shows: A Brief History**

Although the twenty-first century has seen an unprecedented growth in reality show
popularity, media studies and communications scholars trace reality TV to the 1940s and 1950s,
which included formats like *Candid Camera* and *Queen for a Day*. These shows foregrounded
regular, ordinary people who happened upon irregular, extraordinary circumstances.\(^{502}\) During
the 1970s the series *An American Family*, which documented the life of the Loud family, is
generally acknowledged as the first reality TV program. *An American Family* drew over ten
million viewers a week and challenged the image of the middle class American family by
revealing marital tensions and engaging taboo social topics like homosexuality.\(^{503}\) The 1980s and
1990s were generally dominated by the reality format of the daytime talk show. Phil Donahue,
Sally Jesse Raphael, Ricki Lake, and Oprah Winfrey were among the many talk show hosts that
helped to precipitate “the confessional ethos and cultivation of everyday drama that permeate
contemporary reality TV.”\(^{504}\) During this same time period, amateur, low-budget television, in
the form of *America’s Funniest Home Videos* and *Cops*, offered us even greater glimpses into the
realm of the real as the nonprofessional production techniques were intended to signify
unmediated authenticity, straight from the television screen to the viewer.\(^{505}\)

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\(^{504}\) Ouellette and Murray, “Intro,” 3.

\(^{505}\) Ibid., 7.
Since the success of *An American Family* in the 1970s, the monitoring of the everyday lives of average people did not emerge again until the early 1990s when *The Real World* debuted. Media studies scholars Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray argue that this show marks a watershed in reality show history in that it introduced “many of the textual characteristics that would come to define the genre’s current form.”\(^{506}\) By documenting the lives of individuals from diverse backgrounds—which included differences in race, religion, sexual orientation, and political ideology among them—the producers of *The Real World* were able to strategically provoke conflict and thus attract a faithful viewing audience.

With the *The Real World* paving the way as a major predecessor in the genre, reality shows began to achieve extraordinary commercial success by crossbreeding game shows with the documentary format—the result was successful shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. On the heels of the success of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, which was also a pivotal player in the reality show surge leading into the twenty-first century, this hybrid format was an ideal solution to bringing fans of both genres together to watch the same show. The U.S. versions of *Big Brother* and *Survivor* debuted on CBS during the summer of 2000 and averaged ten million and twenty-five million viewers per episode respectively.\(^{507}\) *Survivor*’s unprecedented ratings success established a new record, making *Survivor* the most popular summer TV series up until that point.\(^{508}\) These two shows were crucial transitional moments in television production and entertainment and spawned a domino effect in which major networks began to follow suit creating their own reality shows. Consequently, other reality shows began to emerge on major networks, like *American Idol* on Fox and *The Bachelor* on ABC. These shows were a part of the reality show’s transition from “the fringes of television culture to its lucrative core,” and began

\(^{506}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{507}\) Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 1.
\(^{508}\) Ibid.
to dominate the prime time hours on network television.\textsuperscript{509} Ouellette and Murray note that “by January 2003, one-seventh of all programming on ABC was reality based. ABC executives, along with NBC, Fox, and CBS, promised to bring even more reality to their schedules in the coming season and cut back on scripted fictional drama series and sitcoms.”\textsuperscript{510} The phenomenon of the reality show eventually led to the creation of two new Emmy categories, which helped to further solidify reality shows as a significant component of television entertainment.\textsuperscript{511}

The immense popularity of reality shows precipitated multiple reality show subgenres that include a myriad of topics and formats: the gamedoc, dating shows, courtroom programs, docusoaps, makeover and lifestyle shows, crime documentaries, talent competitions, reality show parodies, and shows that involve celebrities portraying themselves as “real” people are among the reality subgenres that have inundated the airwaves.\textsuperscript{512} Scholars have approached these subgenres from a number of analytical and theoretical angles with the aim to uncover some of the deeper meanings that the reality show conveys. Some of their conceptual approaches include investigating representation with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. They also examine issues such as audience and receptivity, neoliberalism and constructions of American identity, the economic origins of reality television, and the implications of voyeurism and surveillance culture, to name a few.\textsuperscript{513}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Ouellette} Ouellette and Murray, “Intro,” 4.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., 4-5.
\bibitem{Andrejevic} Andrejevic, \textit{Reality TV}, 2, 8.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., 3-4; Meizel, \textit{Idolized}, 26-27.
While scholars have engaged reality shows with secular themes, faith-based reality shows have not yet received commensurate critical attention. In proper neo-Pentecostal fashion, religious figures have begun seizing the opportunity to use the reality show platform as a means to “share the gospel.” Faith-based reality shows are occupying some of the most prominent prime time slots and are competing in popularity and ratings with some of their secular counterparts. Faith Based Consumers, a Christian organization that promotes the representation of Christian values in business, entertainment, and media, released a survey proving that faith-based television is in high demand. According to a Faith Based Consumer survey “62% of faith driven consumers would watch at least three additional hours of TV or movies weekly if there were more faith-friendly options,” and “55% say there are not enough options in the marketplace.” Additionally, “40% say lack of family friendly options prevents them from going to the movies more often.” The commercial viability of faith-based programming has attracted the attention of industry executives who have discovered that there is a vibrant and sustainable market of Christians who want to see their faith represented through media and entertainment.

In addition to the demand by Christians for faith-based representation in media, another reason for the rise in faith-based reality TV is the increasing fear among conservative Christians that the church is losing its cultural influence and is becoming increasingly less relevant, particularly with regard to younger generations. As referenced briefly in the first chapter, The Barna Group released a study in 2014 that statistically proves the decline in the church’s...
popularity within American culture. “According to Barna Group’s 2014 tracking data, overall church attendance has dipped from 43% in 2004 to 36% today.” Barna Group also notes that the number of individuals who have not attended a church function within the last six months has increased in the last decade “from one-third to nearly two-fifths of all Americans.” The change is most present among Millennials and Gen Xers: “more than half of Millennials and Gen Xers say they have not been to church in the last six months.” Some of the most commonly cited factors that contribute to the decline of the church include clergy abuse and immorality, hypocrisy, and sanctimony. Reality show participants therefore believe that they are countering suspicions about the hypocrisy of the clergy by disarming skeptics through their transparency.

It is precisely the hypocrisy of clergy, as often revealed through the public failures of major televangelists, that many believe has led to the Christian preoccupation with realness in the twenty-first century. In an online article for The Gospel Coalition—a major evangelical network of pastors committed to the maintenance of a scripture-centered church—evangelical writer Brett McCracken discusses the distaste for phoniness and hypocrisy that continues to grow among Christians because of the lack of moral integrity among the church’s leaders. McCracken claims that many younger evangelicals “grew up in an evangelical culture that produced more than a few noteworthy cases of fallen leaders and high-profile hypocrisy. Their cynicism reflects a church culture that often hid its imperfections beneath a façade of legalism

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519 Ibid.  
520 Ibid.  
522 “Overview,” The Gospel Coalition (TGC), accessed February 8, 2016, http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/overview. TGC involves leaders such as evangelical powerhouses Timothy Keller and John Piper, known for their intellectual approach to the Bible. TGC’s website also is one of the most visited Christian websites in the world, with over twenty million viewers a year.
and self-righteousness. All of this contributed, in the early and mid-2000s, to an authenticity boom in evangelicalism.”\textsuperscript{523} Public failures like those of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker in the 1980s and early 1990s, and those of Juanita Bynum and Bishop Eddie Long in the 2000s, have precipitated rising calls from conservative Christians to remove self-righteous masks and to be more real about private indiscretions.\textsuperscript{524}

The following list is a representative sample of a growing number of faith based reality shows that have emerged roughly within the last 5 years: \textit{19 Kids and Counting, Snake Salvation, Preachers’ Daughters, Preach, The Sisterhood, Divas for Jesus, and It Takes A Church}. While some of these shows like \textit{Preach} and \textit{The Sisterhood} were scrapped very quickly because of claims that it exploited and misrepresented the church, some of these shows have been quite successful and have consistently attracted large audiences. Shows like \textit{Duck Dynasty} and \textit{American Bible Challenge} in particular have far surpassed ratings expectations. In August 2013, approximately 11.7 million viewers tuned in to watch \textit{Duck Dynasty} for its fourth season premiere, becoming at that time the most watched cable reality show episode in history. This record shattered the previous ratings record for the A&E network that was set during the season three finale of \textit{Duck Dynasty}, which attracted 9.6 million viewers.\textsuperscript{525} Likewise, \textit{American Bible Challenge} also broke ratings records for the Game Show Network and delivered 1.7 million viewers during the series premiere on August 23, 2013, the highest in the network’s history.\textsuperscript{526}


\textsuperscript{524} Jimmy Swaggart was exposed in the eighties for having sex with a prostitute while Jim Bakker was imprisoned for misappropriating finances. In the 2007, it was revealed that Juanita Bynum’s then husband, Bishop Thomas Weekes, stomped her in a parking lot, which eventually led to their divorce. Also, in 2010, Bishop Eddie Long was sued by multiple young men who alleged that Long used his pastoral authority to coerce them into sex.


\textsuperscript{526} AJ Marechal, “‘Bible Challenge’ has brought record-breaking ratings to the cable net,” \textsuperscript{526}Variety, August 8, 2013, \url{http://variety.com/2013/tv/news/gan-renew-american-bible-challenge-for-third-season-1200575881/}. 

239
In addition to *American Bible Challenge*, which features Kirk Franklin as the musical co-host, an increasing number of faith-based reality shows are beginning to feature black gospel artists: among them are *The Sheards* (featuring Karen Clark-Sheard and Kierra Sheard), *It’s A Mann’s World* (featuring David and Tamela Mann), *Thicker Than Water* (featuring gospel songwriter and producer Ben Tankard), *Preachers of Detroit* (featuring Dorinda Clark-Cole), *Fix My Choir* (featuring Deitrick Haddon), and *Preachers of Atlanta* (featuring season 3 *Sunday Best* winner Le’Andria Johnson and gospel rapper Canton Jones). The two shows that will be discussed in this chapter—*Mary Mary* and *Preachers of L.A.*—are examples of a growing trend to present gospel artists as “normal” people. These shows reveal aspects of gospel artists’ personal lives that do not always conform to their public persona. By portraying gospel artists as “everyday” people with “everyday” problems, these shows defy conventional expectations of spirituality, which according to gospel artists, impose an unrealistic standard of perfection on Christian leaders. These artists believe that by providing viewers with an entryway into their conflicted interiorities they are evangelizing to individuals who are enduring the same kinds of circumstances. Their willingness to share their flaws and inner conflicts present a new model of spirituality in which transparency and realness are portrayed as effective methods for doing the work of ministry.

*Mary Mary*

*Mary Mary* is a gospel duo composed of sisters Erica Campbell (b. 1972) and Tina Campbell (b. 1974). Erica and Tina were reared in the Pentecostal church and attended Evangelistic Church of God In Christ where their father was a preacher and their mother was a choir director. The group and the group’s name were created by their producer Warryn

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527 Ibid.; Erica Campbell and Tina Campbell, “Mary Mary original debut premiere interview,” YouTube video, 8:34, posted by “itsdynomyte,” April 14, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nElFBb8T3U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nElFBb8T3U).
Campbell (b. 1975), who is also the husband of Erica Campbell. The name Mary Mary was inspired by two women named Mary in the New Testament Bible: Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, and Mary Magdalene, from whom according to the Gospel of Luke Jesus cast out seven demons. The name Mary Mary is thus intended to represent the duality of divinity and humanity—the ideal, virtuous Christian, as signified by Mary the mother of Jesus, and the flawed sinner who is in need of divine transformation, as signified by Mary Magdalene.

Mary Mary broke barriers in 2000 when they released their debut crossover single “Shackles” (Thankful, 2000). The hip-hop backbeat and dance pulse helped to give the song an upbeat, contemporary groove and contributed to their crossover appeal. Moreover, their chic, urban fashion style along with their energetic performance approach, as seen in the music video for “Shackles” and in their overall stage persona, offered a more hip version of the gospel and thus resonated with younger, more secular audiences. “Shackles” was played on secular stations before it was played on gospel stations and peaked at number 9 on Billboard’s Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart, while the entire album Thankful peaked at number 1 on Billboard’s Top Gospel Albums chart. Because of the groundbreaking crossover success of “Shackles,” Thankful went platinum, placing Mary Mary in a rare, elite group of platinum-selling gospel artists. Their subsequent albums Incredible (2002) and their self-titled 2005 album Mary Mary each went gold and landed the number one spot on Billboard’s Top Gospel Albums chart. Over the course of

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528 Warryn and Erica Cambell also recently became pastors of a church entitled California Worship Center. See official website: http://californiaworshipcenter.com/#home.
530 Ibid.; “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/marystory/chart?f=323. Mary Mary have also accomplished other chart successes as well. In addition to Thankful, Incredible, and Mary Mary, their 2008 record The Sound and their 2012 single “Go Get It” also reached number one on the Top Gospel Albums Chart; Mary Mary and The Sound also placed number one on the Top Christian Albums chart.
their career, Mary Mary has won four Grammys, solidifying their status as one of the most successful groups in gospel music history.

Considering the crossover success of Mary Mary and their overall mission to reach “unchurched” audiences with their music, the creation of their reality show seemed a fitting addition to their cross-cultural brand. In 2012, Mary Mary debuted their reality show *Mary Mary* on WE tv (Women’s Entertainment). In an interview on TBN, Erica and Tina explain the purpose for their reality show and how they believe it will be beneficial for Christendom. In discussing what they believe to be the evangelistic thrust of their show, Erica and Tina engage in a discourse of relatability, explaining how their show is palatable to the average, flawed individual:

Erica: We’re committed to being honest and not being fake or phony. You know, there are confessionalists on the show and they ask how you feel. And sometimes we don’t always feel the greatest, and we’ll say that. And I think it’s gonna liberate some people who think that they have to be perfect in order to come to God [audience claps]. . . . I’m just, I’m so grateful for this opportunity to have this show because usually it’s our music that inspires and now I’m praying and hoping that our life and our lights are shining to allow us to inspire.

Erica claims that through the show she and Tina can be evangelistic “lights” that encourage people to have closer relationships with God despite their fallibility. Tina then chimes in and discusses more about how their reality show is meant to be a Christian alternative to secular reality shows that indulge in conflict and drama simply for ratings. She also says more about relatability and how their show makes God more accessible to average people:

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chart, which is traditionally dominated by white contemporary Christian artists—see “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/mary-mary/chart?f=310; They landed in the top ten for three of their albums—*Mary Mary* (no. 8), *The Sound* (no. 7), and *Something Big* (2011, no. 10)—on the Billboard 200 chart, which is comprised of artists from all genres—see “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/mary-mary/chart?f=305; “God In Me” and “Get Up” both from *The Sound* scored a number one spot on the Dance Club Songs chart—see “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/mary-mary/chart?f=359; “God In Me” and “Heaven” (*Mary Mary*) were number one on the Hot Gospel Songs chart—see “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/mary-mary/chart?page=1&f=398; Five albums that reached the top ten on the Top R&B/Hip Hop Albums chart: *Incredible, Mary Mary, The Sound, Something Big, and Go Get It*—see “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/mary-mary/chart?f=333; In addition to “Shackles,” “God In Me” also crossed over onto the Hot R&B/Hip Hop Songs chart and landed at number 5—see “Mary Mary,” Billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/309858/mary-mary/chart?f=367.
Tina: Our show is not like every show out there. We were not willing to be something other than who we are just for ratings. . . . But I was actually really happy to see one of the reviews in the New York Times that said this show is able to peel back the façade that everybody in the faith-based world is just flawless and they’re just always in the praise mode. . . . When you make your God so inaccessible to anybody that’s not serving Him then they don’t even try to access Him. If you can show people the love of God and they feel like there’s something about you that’s tangible . . . then they wanna touch and feel and know your God. And so I was really excited to see that. And again, not that we show perfection because we’re not perfect. We’re aiming for perfection, but we fall. 533

By disclosing their deficiencies, Tina believes that they become more “tangible” or relatable, which as a consequence, makes God more tangible and relatable. Later in the interview, Tina then mocks church people who she believes are not real about their inner conflicts and imperfections. She begins by impersonating how hyper-religious Christians give sanctimonious responses to simple questions:

Tina: How are you doing? “Blessed and highly favored. God is just with me. I’m walking with the Lord. How about you?” It ain’t like that all the time. No, let’s just be real!

To appease their Christian audience, Erica and Tina claim that their show is not like other shows that compromise moral values for a ratings boost. In contrast, their show is designed to draw people closer to God—not through an ostentatious display of piety, as Tina mockingly put it, but through a naked display of realness. By revealing their imperfections before the world, they believe that they are redefining conceptions of spirituality and presenting a new understanding of God—one that portrays a relationship with God as more conceivable to those who may feel as though their flaws make God inaccessible. For Tina, the simultaneous embracement of one’s flaws and one’s Christian identity signifies realness and relatability, both of which function to eradicate the mask that Christians hide behind.

Donnie McClurkin, who is conducting the interview, concurs with their mission

to use their reality show as a platform to make themselves and God more relatable. He also
postures *Mary Mary* as a part of God’s divine plan to expand the Christian platform to a different
market beyond the confines of the church:

McClurkin: See, on the stage, on the pulpit on Sundays, on the concert stages, all they see
is the perfection. . . . But they don’t get to see the imperfections that go along with every
day. The behind the scenes, the at home, the dealing with relationships. . . . And like you
said, it’s not like any other reality show because this deals with the real deal of
Christianity. . . . I want the Christian body to believe and understand the vast platform
that gospel has, the vast platform that the kingdom has. . . . God is giving us the leeway,
the headway into all of these different genres, all these different platforms and says be
this light here, be this representative here.  

McClurkin again reiterates that this show is unlike other shows and positions *Mary Mary*
as a part of God’s agenda to expand the platform of Christianity. He also reiterates Erica’s
terminology and refers to their reality show as a “light.” This terminology is taken from the
words of Jesus, who in the Book of Matthew admonishes his followers to be “the light of the
world.” This phrase is intended to admonish followers of Christ to set an example of
godliness, especially in secular environments, so that nonbelievers might be encouraged to
pursue a relationship with God. According to McClurkin, *Mary Mary* is therefore a kind of
“light” that is intended to evangelize in the secular world of reality television. McClurkin’s
response therefore yields theological credence to Mary Mary’s reality show and provides a
biblical explanation for their engagement in muddy authenticity. Evangelistic rhetoric and
relatability discourse ultimately help Mary Mary to obviate criticism and maintain spiritual
legitimacy among their conservative Christian base.

Even though Tina and McClurkin make the claim that their show is a “light” and
different from other mainstream reality shows because of its nuanced portrayal of Christianity,
there are elements of their reality show that are very similar to the average docu-series. Like most other reality shows, *Mary Mary* is full of conflict that undoubtedly contributes to the ratings success of the show. From their never ending contention with their manager Mitchell Solarek, to their unexpected pregnancies that cause them to make last minute professional decisions, to the constant verbal fights between Erica and Tina, this show undoubtedly satiates the viewer’s appetite for drama and offers the same amount of conflict and strife as the average reality show. Particularly during season three of the show, viewers witnessed conflict of epic proportions when it was revealed that Tina’s husband—Teddy Campbell, who is also a gospel singer and drummer—had engaged in multiple extramarital affairs for years while Tina was traveling on the road with Mary Mary. This season especially divulges the unfolding of an intrasubjective dialectical conflict within Tina, who struggles to forgive her husband, and documents her attempts to negotiate multiple subject positions as a wife, mother, Christian, and gospel artist.

The majority of season three discloses the disjuncture between public image and private reality that Tina attempts to navigate. Season 3, episode 2 reveals that Tina’s private issue becomes public when she decides to discuss the story of her husband’s infidelity in Ebony magazine. The remainder of the season shows Tina trying to rectify her marriage privately while dealing with the public ramifications of her decision to share her husband’s infidelity with the world. In one instance during episode 6, the audience witnesses the internal dialectical conflict that Tina has as she struggles to reconcile competing subjectivities and attempts to make a decision about what plan of action to take. In one of the most emotionally intense moments of the season, Tina expresses to her mother and Erica the multiple, contradictory desires that coexist within her: “Do I pray? Do I attack? Do I get revenge? Do I let God avenge me? Do I divorce
him?” This then leads to Tina emotionally breaking down as she comes to terms with the public/private tension that the infidelity has induced:

Tina: I still wanna have hope. But I’m an honest person Mama. I gotta go out here and sing “go get your blessing.” I gotta stand in front of these people and be inspirational. And it’s so hard because they don’t have a clue. I am so broken. It is so devastating for me.

Tina reiterates the struggle of trying to negotiate the dualistic binary between the public and private during episode 12 of the same season. Again, Tina confronts what she believes to be a contradiction between who she is as a religious public figure and what she is enduring privately:

Tina: Everybody thinks you’re so strong ‘cause you’re trying to forgive, but you’re failing at forgiveness. . . . I feel so out of the loop with everything going on in my life. So I got a effed up home life . . . and then I gotta get on the stage and act like a good saint and I’m not a saint. I just get on the stage and try to be inspirational and half the time I don’t believe what I’m actually saying. I do not believe what I actually wrote ‘cause life is defeating me. That’s a hypocrite. God don’t get no glory out of that.

Tina conceives of the seemingly irreconcilable public/private binary as evidence of hypocrisy, as her image as a religious, inspirational figure does not coincide with the reality of her private existence. This tension is also played out in how she performs motherhood publically before her children. Tina often references the intrasubjective dissonance of trying to appear emotionally whole before her children so that the private affairs between her and their father do not impact the children’s wellbeing. Tina even confessed to wanting to kill herself and her own children because of the depth of her pain from her husband’s infidelity. During season 4, episode 6 Tina begins telling her testimony on stage and discloses her desire for God to kill certain people because of the depth of her anger. At this moment, Erica quickly interrupts Tina’s testimonial and begins to playfully sing their hit song “Go Get It” as a strategy to lighten the mood and deflect attention away from what Tina said. An interview of Erica then cuts in where she explains that her motive for interjecting was to protect their public image as gospel.
celebrities: “This is no place to be talking about all your stuff,” Erica avers. “I mean I know that’s your life, but that’s kind of damaging to the brand and who we are as gospel artists and people of faith and not killers.”

The management of the public/private duality during this season overlaps with the existential paradox of being divine, yet human. Tina often sharply rebukes her family for expecting her to don a holy façade and handle her private matters in a more Christ-like manner. Her family’s expectations of her to be divine deny her the space to be real and to truly embrace the inner conflict that she is experiencing. In the most heated scene of season three (which was also aptly used repeatedly to advertise the show before the debut of season three), Tina communicates her frustration toward Erica for not allowing her to be human. This heated exchange comes after Tina finds out that Teddy has had more affairs than what he initially disclosed:

I gotta find out in front of the whole Goddang world that all of my life was a lie! And you want me to quote scriptures right now?! You want me to say something that’s all positive! I feel negative right now! I just want you to understand that. . . . Y’all want me to be “saver” than I am! I love Jesus! I wanna be like Jesus! But I’m not Jesus! Y’all gotta let me be broken. Let me get it out. . . . Y’all don’t want nobody to feel what they feel. If I bottle it all up I’mma be walking around with this same pain three years from now, eight months from now . . . if I don’t let myself feel what I’m feeling.

Her use of the term “saver” refers to salvation. In other words, she believes that her family wants her to act more “saved,” more Christian, than what she actually feels. The inner dualistic conflict between divinity and humanity is further played out through another confrontation that Tina has with her husband. After Teddy attempts to encourage her by reassuring her that God will heal their marriage, Tina censures him for using hyper-religious rhetoric and denying the reality of her human feelings:

Tina: You be talkin’ so much in God language, [but] the natural part of me is hurting. Teddy, I’m not married to Jesus Christ. I’m married to you. . . . No, no, no no!!
You gon’ have to come out of heaven! I don’t want you to tell me God, Jesus, Lord, faith, hallelujah, ‘cause I’m not sleeping with Jesus! I’m not having babies with Jesus! I’m not making breakfast with Jesus! I’m not going on dates with Jesus. It’s you Teddy! It’s you!

Such conflicting dualities are temporarily reconciled on the performance stage. As Tina negotiates contradictory and opposing selves, the performance space becomes a part of a therapeutic ritual that empowers her to be real about her internal contradictions and to overcome them. During the last episode of season three when Erica confronts Tina about starting a solo career and putting their career on hold as Mary Mary, Tina tells Erica that performing functions as a healing ritual: “It lifts me in a way that nothing else does,” she claims. “When I’m on the stage . . . I am constantly reminded that life will get better—keep living, you gon’ learn, you’re gonna be stronger. And I need that.”

During episode 2, one performance in Baton Rouge, Louisiana is evidence of how Mary Mary harnesses performance to be real about their inner dualisms and to reconcile conflicting interiorities. As they sing one of their hit songs “Yesterday,” a confessional moment cuts in and Tina begins discussing the therapeutic dynamic of the performative moment: “These people in the audience think that we came here to give them something. They came here to give me something. And right now, they’re giving me strength.” The show then cuts back to the stage and transitions into Tina giving a coded testimonial about her private matters: “Sometimes your situation looks so great,” she utters. “Sometimes your hardships seem so hard. And your bad situation is bad!” At this moment, the scene then transitions to Erica singing one of their popular songs from Thankful entitled “Can’t Give Up Now.” As she begins to sing the lyrics to the song, Erica solemnly turns to Tina and starts singing the lyrics directly to Tina to encourage her. Erica sings: “I just can’t give up now / I’ve come too far from where I started from / Nobody told me the road would be easy / And I don’t believe He brought me this far to leave me.” The lyrics
speak to the private struggle that Tina is experiencing and reassure her of God’s unconditional protection and her ability to persevere and overcome. The show then cuts back into the confessional in which Tina begins to discursively frame the performance event as a therapeutic ritual of overcoming: “The audience doesn’t know the truth of my situation, but Erica knows the severity of my situation. When I’m trying to overcome she’s trying to overcome. When I’m trying to smile, she’s trying to smile.”

This same therapeutic dynamic is present during another performance on episode 5. At this point, Tina is under the impression that her relationship with her husband is beginning to mend. She therefore uses the lyrics of the song “Yesterday” as a coded metaphor to signify the end of her marital troubles and the beginning of a new life with her husband. The opening lyrics to “Yesterday” read: “I had enough heartache and enough headache / I’ve had so many ups and downs / Don’t know how much more I can take / See I decided that I cried my last tears yesterday.” The bridge of the song speaks specifically to her hope of overcoming: “There ain’t nothing too hard for my God, no / Any problems that I have, He’s greater than them all / So I decided that I cried my last tear yesterday.” Performance thus becomes a liminal space between two realities: her marital troubles of yesterday and the future promise of a renewed marital relationship. The liminal space of performance allows Tina temporarily to overcome personal struggle and to imagine a new relational existence with her husband.

Throughout season 3, Tina repeatedly confesses that although she is embarrassed and anxious about her private matters being divulged for public consumption, the possibility of helping someone else who might be experiencing the same kind of relational duress makes her public confession worthwhile. Thus, evangelistic potential trumps temporary shame. But is evangelism the only motivation for their reality show and their public performance of realness?
In many respects, the consequences of Tina’s transparency about her marriage were not only evangelistic, but also professional and economic in nature. As a result of the promotional trailers showing Tina’s emotional meltdown, *Mary Mary* experienced a significant ratings boost, as the season 3 premiere delivered almost 1 million viewers—a 62% increase over the season two premiere. After the last episode of season 3 on May 15, 2014, it was recorded that *Mary Mary* scored an average of 1.1 million viewers over the duration of the season, which was a 46% increase over the previous season. The show’s emphasis on Tina’s inner conflict and her husband’s sexual infidelity demonstrate that while they portrayed their show as a Christianized version of the secular reality show, their show still capitulated to the staple thematic conventions—like sex and conflict—that make reality shows a ratings success.

The increased ratings of *Mary Mary* during the third season prove that while Erica and Tina often spiritualize the transparency of their show, the collapsing of the demarcation between the private and public realm is itself a marketing strategy that capitalizes on the public’s desire for realness and truth-telling. Indeed, it is undeniable that the disclosure of Tina’s conflict had capitalistic underpinnings. Tina’s private/public meltdown on the show temporally coincided with Erica’s launching of her solo career. Alongside the saga of Tina’s failing marriage, out of all twelve episodes of season 3, ten of the episodes feature Erica singing her solo debut “A Little More Jesus” (*Help*, 2014). Erica also stated during episode 2 that the Ebony article discussing Teddy’s infidelity and the release of “A Little More Jesus” were due to be released around the same time, which only served to add more publicity to Erica’s solo project. While these sisters might argue that the two incidents occurred simultaneously by happenstance, it would be

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difficult to deny the practical reality that Erica’s solo career benefitted from the increased viewership of their reality show due to Tina’s marital woes. Season 3 is thus just as much about Tina’s failing marriage as it is about Erica starting her own solo career.

Warryn Campbell, the group’s producer as stated earlier, is often the one who offers the viewer a glimpse into the more practical economic benefits, as opposed to the mere spiritual ones, of Mary Mary having a reality show. Warryn implies during episode 7 that Tina’s marital issues can be harnessed constructively for the success of Erica’s solo career. When Erica expresses to Warryn that Tina’s marital problems could possibly upstage her debut and be an impediment to her success as a solo artist, Warryn admonishes Erica to use Tina’s conflict as a springboard to capitalize: “You gotta use everything. I could say it’s a negative thing, but no. When you’re trying to promote something, it turns into a positive thing.” Another instance involving Warryn during season 1 further highlights the capitalistic underpinnings of their reality show. During this season, Warryn stresses the importance of Mary Mary releasing a single (“Go Get It”) while both Erica and Tina were enduring pregnancies. Warryn recommends this professional move so that they can remain visible and continue to capitalize off of their previous momentum. Warryn’s admonishment to Erica during season 3 and his advice to both Erica and Tina during season 1 both offer deeper insight into the capitalistic ramifications of Mary Mary doing a reality show—it helps to keep them visible and relevant before their fans and functions as a platform in marketing forthcoming music and future professional endeavors.

The divulgence of Tina’s marital issues coupled with the launching of Erica’s solo career through their reality show undoubtedly aided in the success of Erica’s solo debut album, Help. During the first week, Help sold 23,000 copies, debuting at number six on the Billboard 200

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539 We also see the realization of Warryn’s advice through Tina’s solo venture during season 4, when she claims that God gave her songs and a book to release that were both birthed out of her ordeal with her husband’s sexual infidelity. Teddy’s infidelity thus has positive economic ramifications for both Erica and Tina.
chart and peaking at number one on the Top Gospel Albums chart, extraordinary feats for a
gospel artist. 540 Erica also subsequently received a Grammy for “Best Gospel Album” in 2014.
Their single “Go Get It,” which was highlighted in numerous episodes during season 1, peaked
at number 4 on Billboard’s “Hot Gospel Songs,” number 3 on Billboard’s “Top R&B/Hip-Hop
Albums,” and also received a Grammy for “Best Gospel Song” in 2012. The subsequent success
of their music thus proves the economic viability of their reality show and the degree to which it
functions as not simply an evangelistic tool, but as a promotional agent in Mary Mary’s
professional success.

Much of the scholarship on reality TV discusses how realness is both mediated and
manipulated. In her analysis of American Idol, ethnomusicologist Katherine Meizel states that
“any demystification involved in reality television is carefully controlled and limited.”541 Media
studies scholar Rachel E. Dubrofsky also claims that

what happens on reality-based shows is not of course, a representation of what
“really” happened (if this can ever be accessed). The narrative is constructed by TV
workers, sometimes using a tiny percentage of footage actually shot. The production and
editing process involved in creating a reality-based series is integral to the story that will
be told on a reality-based show. . . . I do not believe there is an essential “real” that can
be accessed but rather that there are versions of reality based on the logic arising from a
given context. 542

Although Erica and Tina constantly make claims to the real, this quote from Dubrofsky
aptly describes the contrived nature of reality shows and the edited work that takes place behind
the scenes in order to strategically construct “reality.” According to Dubrofsky, it is the editing
process that determines how reality show participants are represented and characterized. In one
interview on The Wendy Williams Show, Erica and Tina are transparent about the editing process
that takes place for their show and the degree of creative control they have over how they are


541 Meizel, Idolized, 31.

542 Dubrofsky, “Therapeutics of the Self,” 265.
represented. While discussing how difficult it was to divulge her deepest relational secrets, Tina stated: “Fortunately, we’re executive producers on our show, so we watch our edits and we have to clear and okay a lot of things and it was hard for me to do it.” While this interview reveals the difficulty of her giving the “green light” to many of the more muddy scenes, in another interview she states that she intentionally instructed the cameramen to stop filming because she was uncomfortable with the amount of information that was being disclosed. Thus, while Erica and Tina make claims to the real, their admission with regard to their degree of executive power points to how realness is artificially constructed and manipulated.

The dualistic binaries that are played out through *Mary Mary* are intended to offer audiences a more real representation of Erica and Tina and a more humanized version of the private life of a gospel artist. The reality show becomes a platform to construct a new public image—one that is purportedly more genuine and true to their humanity without the wholesale abandonment of their divinity. Their claims to the real, which are often undergirded by evangelistic discourse, contain tangible economic implications that are not always as readily communicated in Mary Mary’s discourse about their show. These same dualities and implications that I have discussed in this section also arise in the series *Preachers of L.A.*

However, the process of negotiating intrasubjectivity is intensified and becomes more complicated because of the “preacher” label that is attached to the show and the subsequent standard of piety that the participants are expected to uphold as a consequence of that label.

*Preachers of L.A.*

*Preachers of L.A.* is a reality series that premiered on October 9, 2013 on Oxygen. This show attempts to demystify the lives of preachers, offering a sneak peak into the private matters

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543 Erica Campbell and Tina Campbell, “Will Mary Mary Get Back Together?” YouTube video, 6:00, from an episode of *The Wendy Williams Show*, posted by “Wendy Williams,” January 27, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4UQg_0UaOA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4UQg_0UaOA).

of those who lead the church. *Preachers of L.A.* is comprised of six megachurch pastors and their partners, all of whom are from Los Angeles and the surrounding area: Bishop Ron Gibson (pastor of Life Church of God in Christ, Riverside, California, 4,000 members) and his wife Lady LaVette Gibson; Bishop Noel Jones (pastor of City of Refuge Church, Gardena, California, 20,000 members) and his girlfriend Loretta; Pastor Jay Haizlip (pastor of The Sanctuary Church, Westminster, California, 3,500 members) and his wife Christy Haizlip; Pastor Wayne Chaney (pastor of Antioch Church, Long Beach, California, 2,000 members) and his wife Myesha Chaney; Bishop Clarence McClendon (pastor of Full Harvest International Church, Gardena, California, 3,500 members) and his wife Priscilla McClendon; and Deitrick Haddon (gospel recording artist and preacher) and his wife Dominique Haddon.

Out of all of the cast members on this show, Deitrick Haddon is the most well-known as a gospel artist. With popular songs like “Sinner’s Prayer” (*Lost and Found*, 2002), “Love Him Like I Do” (*Revealed*, 2008), and “Well Done” (*Church on the Moon*, 2011), Deitrick Haddon has established himself as one of the most edgy contemporary gospel artists in the industry. He is known for his urban fashion, choreographed stage performances, which often include dancing and synchronized movement, and his fusion of funk, R&B, and hip-hop with gospel performance. Haddon’s music is often intended to appeal to both younger audiences and mainstream audiences beyond the church and the gospel industry.

While Haddon has contributed the most musically to the gospel industry, Bishop Noel Jones and Bishop Clarence McClendon are unquestionably the most prominent preachers on the series. As world-renowned preachers, Jones and McClendon have shows on many of the major religious television networks, including The Trinity Broadcasting Network and The Word Network. Both Jones and McClendon, however, have also made forays into the gospel industry.
In 2000, Bishop Clarence McClendon released *Shout Hallelujah* with the Harvest Fire Mega Mass Choir. On this album, McClendon serves in the capacity of singer, songwriter, preacher, and executive producer. Likewise, Bishop Jones released a gospel album in 2007 with his church choir, The City of Refuge Sanctuary Choir, entitled *Welcome To The City*. Throughout the album Bishop Jones functions as both the primary artist, in which he intermittently offers brief homilies and words of encouragement, and the executive producer. *Welcome To The City* peaked at number one on Billboard’s Top Gospel Albums chart, as songs like “It’s Not About Us” became a radio favorite.

The emergence of this show caused many to wonder why preachers with such prominent positions in the church would ever take the risk of divulging their personal lives on reality TV—a medium that most would interpret as antithetical to the character that preachers should embody. When asked this question, the answer usually engages relatability discourse, in which they articulate their concern for churchgoers to understand that they are ordinary people and that imperfections should not be an impediment to a relationship with God. McClendon and Haddon repeatedly expressed a desire for the lives of preachers to be demystified so that people understand how relatable they are. On a segment from *The Arsenio Hall Show*, McClendon articulates that relatability translates into influence: “The kingdom of God is a kingdom of relational influence. Anybody you refuse to relate to, you also refuse to influence.” By relating to people and showing their followers that they are ordinary individuals, McClendon argues that people will begin to understand that God is accessible to them: “I want people to number one understand that they’re not very far from God. I think you know sometimes people think they’re

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so far away. And I think perhaps looking at the lives of men who are called of God will help them to understand we’re people. We have challenges just like everyone else but we approach them with faith in God.”

Gospel celebrity Deitrick Haddon echoes these sentiments and further engages in a discourse of relatability by foregrounding his desire for his followers to understand that his humanity and divinity are not antagonistically related. Haddon often claims that this show will help to deconstruct the binary between one’s divinity and humanity, a binary that Haddon believes conservative Christians all too readily conceive as irreconcilable, especially as it pertains to preachers. He believes that the deconstruction of the divinity/humanity binary will ultimately function as an evangelistic mechanism that will draw more individuals into a closer relationship with God:

We have an underlying agenda of reaching people because we’re preachers. I mean that’s what we’re called to do is reach people, love them, and show them that you can be normal and have such a high calling on your life. And I understood that when I wanted to be involved with this. When the idea came to me, I just knew that this is powerful, this is about to be powerful because what I’m going through is real. And I’m not the only one going through it. So many people are going through this. But they’ve never seen a preacher go through something like this and still maintain his call.

In this interview and in others, Haddon confesses that *Preachers of L.A.* was originally his idea; it became a platform for him to express his authentic self and harness it in a way that relates to ordinary people in order to transform lives. Haddon regularly portrays himself as one who is committed to “keeping it real,” a propensity that he describes as a natural part of his persona and how he grew up: “I come from Detroit. And if anybody knows anything about Detroit, we can’t help but to be real. When we walk out the door it’s real, like forreal. So that’s

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the way we were raised." This commitment to realness and transparency and a rejection of sanctimonious pretention are what Haddon believes will precipitate the "next dimension of winning souls." For Haddon, "there is ministry in transparency."

In the introduction to Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture, Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette discuss how reality TV culture subliminally teaches us that submission to hyper-surveillance is a prerequisite for proving yourself to be a good, honest person: "Part of what reality TV teaches us in the early years of the new millennium is that in order to be good citizens, we must allow ourselves to be watched as we watch those around us." In his discourses about his participation in reality shows, Haddon often promotes the normalization of increased surveillance as an authenticator of one’s morality and spiritual commitments. Submission to surveillance proves that one is committed to honesty and genuinely concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of their followers. Haddon therefore believes that an ethic of transparency should not be limited to himself, but should also be imposed on other prominent figures in the ministry. In an interview with HipHollywood.com, Haddon boldly challenges some of the black church’s most prominent pastors—Bishop T.D. Jakes, Pastor Creflo Dollar, and Bishop Paul S. Morton—to submit themselves to surveillance as evidence of their spiritual realness:

The reason why Preachers of L.A. is successful is because . . . people want to know about preachers. If you are a real person, if you are bringing it for real, you shouldn’t be afraid of this show. Open up your doors Bishop Jakes! Open up your doors Creflo Dollar! Open up your doors Bishop Morton! Y’all real people? You want people to hear you preaching and talking every Sunday? They have the right to know the real you.

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Despite the ways in which reality is manipulated on reality TV, in his challenge to other prominent pastors, Haddon portrays reality TV as unmediated. In actuality, reality TV does not present the real Deitrick Haddon, but a particular version of Deitrick Haddon that he wants the world to see. Thus, to require other pastors to conform to the same process of editing and manipulation as some kind of barometer to measure authenticity would probably do more to mystify them rather than authenticate them. Implicit in Haddon’s remarks is almost a fetishization of transparency that erroneously exalts a capitulation to voyeurism as a necessary precondition for achieving spiritual realness. Nonetheless, Haddon advocates a confessional approach to spirituality and believes that reality TV is an effective means to communicate spiritual honesty and relatability.

The communication of honesty is what the show’s participants believe will help to keep the church relevant during a time in which the church’s popularity is steadily declining. Pastor Wayne Chaney, another preacher participant from the show, believes that *Preachers of L.A.* will help to redeem the church in the eyes of those who have lost hope in the church. Complimenting statistical studies referenced earlier, Chaney confirms that there is a fear among conservative Christians that the younger Millennial generation is no longer attracted to the church. In speaking about the show, Chaney says:

> It really contradicts all those negative stigmas and, you know, preconceived ideas people have about church. They’ve given up on religion. You know, I think they realize we’re tangible, we’re real life individuals. And with this generation that resonates. Years past they wanted complete perfection or the mystique that comes with this position. Generation X, Y, Millennials, they wanna feel as if they know the people that are leading them.\(^{555}\)

Likewise, Haddon concurs that *Preachers of L.A.* will help bring individuals back to the church and claims that the realness displayed on the show will attract those who have been put off by the

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\(^{555}\) Chaney, Haizlip, and Haddon, “Preachers of L.A. Season 2 Interviews w/ Jay Haizlip, Deitrick Haddon, Pastor Wayne Chaney,” YouTube Video, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USeNHGK7QPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USeNHGK7QPI).
church’s phoniness: “It’s not about being fake and phony and up on the pulpit preaching to
everybody else but not sharing who you really are or your flaws. That’s what has really turned
people off in the church and made the church and the gospel a joke.”556 In another interview he
says: “We know that there are people out there that’s not going to church. They’re not walking in
the four walls of the churches. We have to go where they are. And that’s what that show allows
us to do.”557 By “going where they are” and appearing relatable, Haddon believes that he is
making the church more appealing to those who have grown detached from the church. These
comments by Chaney and Haddon prove that these preachers believe their show helps to provide
a potential answer to the anxieties surrounding the gradual decline in church attendance and aids
in redeeming the reputation of the church from its phony, hypocritical image.

A more practical reason for Haddon’s participation in this show was to use it as a
platform of confession and redemption after his private marital breakdown became public. After
fifteen years of marriage, Haddon divorced his wife, Damita Haddon, in 2011 amid allegations
from both sides that the other party was involved in sexual infidelity.558 This scandal came as a
surprise to the black church and the gospel music industry, especially given that Deitrick and
Damita commonly sang together and were even co-pastoring a church in Detroit, Michigan,
often giving the impression publically that they were a happily married couple. The scandal
caus[ed] Deitrick to resign as the pastor of his Detroit church and move to Los Angeles, where he
sought to begin life anew.559

556 Boston, “Deitrick Haddon wants Christians to be more transparent,” http://s2smagazine.com/81965/deitrick-haddon-wants-christians-to-be-
more-transparent/.
exclusive/isac-deitrick-damita/.
559 “Deitrick Haddon Sets The Record Straight About His Divorce & Implicates Isaac Carree As The Reason,” Praise 104.1 FM, January 22,
reason/; Jazmine Denise Rogers, “Deitrick Haddon’s Ex-Wife Says He Impregnated Current Wife While He Was Still Married To Her:
Chaney, Ron Gibson, Deitrick Haddon, Jay Haizlip, Noel Jones, and Clarence McClendon, “‘Preachers of LA’ Spark Controversy with Flashy
Faith,” YouTube video, 8:57, from a televised episode of Nightline on ABC, posted by “ABC News,” September 20, 2013,
While Haddon was still in the middle of divorce proceedings, he impregnated a much younger woman in Los Angeles, Dominique, who eventually became his wife on the show. Amid swirling rumors and accusations that he left his wife for a younger woman in L.A., Haddon took to social media and released a thorough explanation on Facebook describing what really happened with regard to his divorce. In a lengthy statement released on January 21, 2013, Haddon blamed fellow gospel singer Isaac Carree for committing adultery with his wife and breaking up his home. Haddon therefore denied the allegations that he left his wife for another woman and instead portrayed his wife’s affair with Carree as the reason for his divorce and the cause for why he left for Los Angeles in the first place. These allegations sent shockwaves throughout the gospel community and were subsequently denied by Isaac Carree.

*Preachers of L.A.* thus became the medium that Haddon used to prove his honesty, come clean about his private matters, and begin the process of redemption. Several instances throughout season 1 of *Preachers of L.A.* demonstrate how both Deitrick Haddon and Bishop Noel Jones confront the intrapsychic conflict of being gospel artists and preachers who publically comport with a Pentecostal ethical standard of morality while privately dealing with personal relational struggles and transgressions that involve sexual implications. Through Haddon and Jones, we see an ongoing confrontation between the self and the perceived self.

During the first two episodes of season 1, prior to Haddon marrying his fiancé, Haddon attempts to navigate the public stigma that Pentecostals often attach to non-marital cohabitation and the interiority that experiences a longing to live with his fiancé and child. Haddon often complains about having to reintroduce himself to his daughter whenever he goes to his fiancé’s

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house and the subsequent internal conflict of having to leave and go back to his home without them. During a confessional moment on episode 2, Haddon reveals: “It’s really hard ‘cause I have to go home to a bed alone, knowing that I have a family across town.” In a segment from episode three, Haddon’s fiancé, Dominique, confronts her mother about the public/private dualism that she and Haddon have to negotiate and expresses her frustration that such a dualism exists:

Dominique: I don’t know why all y’all old school 1970s people feel like it’s a bad thing to live with the person you love and you’re gonna marry. Who cares?

Mother: Okay, but you know that’s not realistic the way society sees that.

Dominique: What society? ‘Cause regular society don’t care. You mean in church?

Mother: Yeah. That’s not God’s will that you do that.

Dominique then explains how living separate from Haddon makes it more difficult for her to deal with the responsibilities of taking care of their child and makes her feel as though she is a single mother. Dominique continues:

Dominique: If he wasn’t who he was nobody would care if we were living together.

Mother: You right. You’re absolutely right.

Dominique: But since he’s Deitrick Haddon and he’s this gospel superstar, he gotta have these standards and these rules. If I love him who cares?

Another moment during episode 2 demonstrates Haddon’s struggle to negotiate the private and the public when Haddon and his fiancé are on a double date with Bishop Ron Gibson and his wife. Bishop Gibson often plays the role of the “spiritual police” on the show, the one who believes it is his duty to hold others to what he believes is a true biblical standard. Gibson confronts Haddon and asks Haddon if he is “shacking.” “Shacking” is a term used in
conservative black churches to denounce the practice of unwed couples living together. Haddon then retorts and says: “I’m sick of y’all bishops preaching this stuff that’s not in the Bible. Where do you find ‘shacking’ in the Word of God?” This instance, and many others throughout the show’s first season, exemplifies the ways in which the show becomes a site of theological contestation wherein competing interpretations of the Bible are articulated. While Haddon and his fiancé claim that Gibson’s argument is moot and obsolete, having no biblical relevance, Gibson interprets his confrontation with Haddon as a way to hold Haddon accountable by ensuring that Haddon’s private life does not contradict his public persona as gospel singer and preacher.

Lest anyone think that Haddon supports “shacking” and its implied sin, fornication (sex before marriage), a confessional interview cuts in where Deitrick reassures his conservative viewership that his public image does not contradict his private life and that he is in fact not “shacking” or fornicating:

In spite of what Ron Gibson and LaVette think, we’re not “shacking.” I just want to be real about it, there are nights when I don’t wanna leave my family. And this is one of those nights. . . . First of all who made up “shacking?” You will not find it in the Bible. I believe people can love each other and have limitations. But do I believe in fornicating and committing adultery? No, the Bible clearly tells you that is wrong. But shacking you will not find it.

Haddon subsequently gets married on the show during episode 4 in order to “hold up a standard” before his Christian audience and to prevent him from, as he puts it, falling into a “world of trouble.” Haddon’s public marriage can therefore be interpreted as an extra precautionary measure taken by Haddon to mitigate potential backlash from the Christian community about his relationship. The marriage ceremony signifies the reconciliation of his private struggle of desiring to be with his family with his public image of being a preacher and gospel singer.
The public/private tension is also played out through the relationship between Bishop Noel Jones and his girlfriend of sixteen years, Loretta. Throughout both season 1 and season 2, Bishop Jones and Loretta are interrogated extensively about why they have been in a relationship for so long without marital commitment. Similar to Haddon, Jones has to confront the assumptions that people might be making about his engagement in premarital sex—especially considering how long he has been in the relationship—and the impact that this might have on his public image as a Pentecostal bishop. As a member of the Board of Bishops for the Pentecostals Assemblies of the World Incorporated and one of the most prominent bishops in the black church, the issue of optics is unquestionably of utmost concern for Bishop Jones. He also confronts the internal conflict of being rejected by his mother and fearing the possibility that Loretta could reject him in the same way. Because of his high profile as a Pentecostal bishop and megachurch pastor, Loretta also expresses uneasiness with how to negotiate the public/private duality. In episode 5 she overtly expresses her concern: “The reason I’m so guarded about the relationship [is] because of the church world and how people think and how they perceive you.”

This tension regarding Bishop Jones and Loretta’s relationship reaches its culmination during the aftershow and the 11th episode of season 2. Bishop Gibson, once again playing the role of “spiritual police,” takes Bishop Jones to task on his long-term non-marital relationship and implies that such a relationship gives the public the impression that there is sexual activity. Both Gibson and his wife adamantly assert that Bishop Jones and Loretta are not setting a good example for Christians to follow by remaining unmarried. Bishop Jones, not unexpectedly, denies any sexual activity and says emphatically: “there is no sex.” Bishop Gibson however explained why Jones and Loretta’s unmarried status was a concern for him: “I question his

relationship because it’s public. If it were private, I wouldn’t be that concerned.”  

Gibson believes that because Bishop Jones’s private long-term relationship is public knowledge, there is more cause for concern because of the standard that Jones is expected to publically uphold.

Although these preachers claim that this show is a platform to expose their realness, their efforts to communicate that they are not having premarital sex often read as an attempt to appease their Christian viewership, rather than as evidence of their realness. The strategically placed confessional moment when Deitrick confesses that he is not “shacking,” and Jones’s confession that “there is no sex” both seem to function not as displays of realness, but as strategies to protect them—their brand and their image—from critical voices within the conservative Christian community. Thus, it remains certain that full disclosure of the private realm remains highly mediated and manipulated because of the strictures that Haddon and Jones have to conform to in order to maintain relevance and legitimacy before their Christian audience.

In an effort to navigate the private and public domains, Haddon and Jones often express their frustrations with how the church community only accepts their divinity and rejects their humanity. Haddon, in particular, articulates this frustration in a flashback moment when he is preparing for his marriage ceremony: “I don’t care if you know my dirt. I feel better ‘cause I don’t have to hide. Yes, I’m a man of God but I’m a human being.” These inner warring impulses are at least temporarily resolved during a performance moment on the first episode of the first season. Deitrick aptly entitled this performance his “comeback concert,” as this concert symbolized his effort to regain the trust of his Christian followers. As they are preparing for the concert, which takes place at Bishop Noel Jones’s church, an interview shows Haddon articulating the work that performance does for his reputation and identity: “Today, this is my

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comeback concert. It’s all happening at the City of Refuge. This is huge. When Dominique got pregnant, her church was the City of Refuge. This is the first time we are boldly stepping out as a couple and doing it big on this level. . . . It’s do or die time now.” Haddon later says that his fans were there to let him know that he has been forgiven. Considering that this was his first concert since his personal scandal and that City of Refuge was his fiancé’s home church when she got pregnant, this performance became a critical milestone in helping Haddon regain his confidence as a “man of God” before a conservative Christian audience. His performance at City of Refuge thus represented a therapeutic moment of forgiveness, redemption, and self-actualization.

Media studies scholar Mark Andrejevic discusses how reality TV is often a “staged spectacle” that functions to help celebrities “launch a comeback.” On this first episode, we see how the reality show narrative and performance work together as a “staged spectacle” to rebuild Haddon’s image and to enable his comeback. In addition to this reality show and the performance moment being a strategy of personal and public redemption, this performance also introduces to the world the choir that he founded, League of Xtraordinary Worshippers (LXW), as well as their new single, “Great God.” The appearance of Haddon’s choir on Preachers of L.A. not long before their debut album was released on April 22, 2014 doubtlessly functioned as a publicity move to showcase his group. Oxygen also aired a bonus concert of LXW in April of 2014, which most likely took place because of Haddon’s connection with the network through his involvement with Preachers of L.A. Because of LXW’s appearance on Preachers of L.A. and their subsequent performance concert on Oxygen in April, the album debuted at number one

Andrejevic, Reality TV, 3.

Although the private/public and divinity/humanity dualities are crucial themes that define the narrative of this show, the most provocative aspect of the show is the divisive duality of ministry and capitalism. Before the first episode of *Preachers of L.A.* even aired, the trailer alone caused a substantial amount of uproar from those in and outside of the church community. Many felt that the heavy emphasis that the trailer placed on the opulence and conspicuous consumption of the preachers as a promotional strategy for the show was a mischaracterization of preachers and of the church. Some of the most prominent figures from the black church and the gospel industry spoke out against the show. During a recorded church service, Bishop T.D. Jakes publically denounced the show and its display of hyper-consumerism:


Jakes’s public repudiation demonstrates how many pastors felt the need to defend their own economic and spiritual integrity for fear that viewers of the show would equate all pastors with those on *Preachers of L.A.* Gospel artist Donnie McClurkin has also expressed this same fear, claiming that *Preachers of L.A.* tarnishes the image of preachers and the church, mainly because of its focus on the flashy lifestyles of preachers:
There is no way in the world that I would be on *Preachers of L.A.* . . . There are certain things that I consider sacred. . . . There are millions of preachers that are great preachers. . . . We’re not all like that! We’re not all [flaunting] our stuff. We’re not all acting like we got all this stuff and showing the world. . . . We’re not doing that stuff. It’s a bad image. The Bible says this, all things may be lawful, but it’s not expedient for us.  

McClurkin’s simultaneous praise of *Mary Mary*, as mentioned earlier, and his condemnation of *Preachers of L.A.* prove that there is often a higher ethical standard placed upon individuals who claim to be preachers because of the Christ-like character that they are expected to espouse as the primary representatives of the church. It should be noted that there are also elements of *Mary Mary* that highlight the sisters’ capitalistic attainments and that show shots of their fancy homes. However, for Jakes and McClurkin, the fact that these are preachers flaunting their material abundance makes their displays of hyper-consumerism all the more transgressive. These comments made by Jakes and McClurkin also challenge statements made by Chaney and Haddon earlier, which claim that this show helps to “contradict negative stigmas” about the church. Contrastingly, this show has largely reinscribed many of those negative stigmas, most notably the stigma that preachers are avaricious and that the church is too money-oriented, critiques that are often articulated by those who feel alienated from the church.

Throughout this show, viewers get a glimpse of how preachers navigate and attempt to reconcile the controversial dualism of capitalism and ministry. During the first season there are multiple shots of their million dollar homes, tailor made suits, luxury automobiles, and captions that appear at the bottom of the screen indicating the high membership numbers of their churches, thereby solidifying their megachurch, celebrity pastor status. In order to reconcile the two seemingly antagonistic concepts of capitalism and ministry, the preachers on this show often


569 Richard J. Krejcir, “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline,” The Francis A. Schaffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, accessed February 9, 2016, [http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid = 43346 &columnid =4545](http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid = 43346 &columnid =4545). This article states that the church being too “money-oriented” is one of the reasons contributing to the decline in the church’s popularity.
sanctify their material acquisitions and posture them as a sign of God’s blessings. Equating economic wealth with God’s blessing does the work of decoupling material abundance from materialism. For example, during episode 1, amid camera shots of his Bentley and California mansion, an interview cuts in of Bishop McClendon using the Bible to defend his material abundance: “The Bible says that I wish above all things that you would prosper and be in health. I believe that.” McClendon invokes this scripture from the New Testament book 3 John to yield spiritual credibility to his wealth. This is also one of the quintessential scriptures commonly used by televangelist to legitimize the prosperity gospel, and in this instance, is used strategically by McClendon to Christianize capitalism and to sanctify his wealth.

One moment during episode 4 shows how Haddon reconciles ministry with material abundance. During this episode, Haddon surprises his fiancé and reveals that he bought a new house. However, this is no ordinary house. In typical Preachers of L.A. style, Haddon is sure to communicate that the house has six bedrooms and seven bathrooms. To provide spiritual legitimation for his big home, Haddon says to his fiancé: “We deserve this, when you work hard for the kingdom.” Scholars of reality TV such as Nick Couldry and Laurie Ouellette have acknowledged how neoliberal themes and discourses are often foregrounded on American reality TV in order to construct templates for individual agency and American success. This statement by Haddon thus exemplifies the ways in which reality TV is often bound up with neoliberal ideology—which idealizes individual choice and personal responsibility—and mythological constructions of the American dream. Preachers of L.A. therefore contains narrative moments that capitulate to the typical American success story by presenting a romanticized and simplistic correlation between individual initiative and economic prosperity.

Frederick, “Rags to Riches,” 223.
571 Ouellette, “ ‘Take Responsibility for Yourself,’ ” 223-242; Couldry, “Reality TV, or the Secret Theater of Neoliberalism,” 3-13;
During episode 1, Bishop Jones also confirms this narrative of American success: “I like to go to exquisite restaurants. I like to go fast in my cars. I like it. It’s a part of being successful.” Bishop Ron Gibson, who is the most overt about his material abundance on the show, even stated on the trailer for the show that Christians should be entitled to the same amount of financial success as secular celebrities: “P. Diddy, Jay Z, they’re not the only ones who should be driving Ferraris and living in large houses.”\(^{572}\) The reconciling of ministry and conspicuous consumption is, according to Marla Frederick, an extension of what is taking place in many churches that have been influenced by the prosperity gospel, which is a subcomponent of the Word of Faith movement. These theological teachings propagate the belief that living a godly life according to biblical principles will naturally yield material abundance.\(^{573}\) Frederick notes that “the latter half of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century have witnessed a dramatic rise in the numbers of ministries linking religious ideology with rising capital.”\(^{574}\) These instances when Haddon, Jones, and Gibson equate success with conspicuous consumption and exquisite cuisine represent moments when the message of Christianity is mistakenly reduced to opulence. While these kinds of narratives are intended to give audiences a means to imagine their own upward mobility, instead, these narratives potentially give audiences the false hope that their faith practices will yield the same material results.

During the first episode of the show’s debut, the duality of ministry and capitalism reaches a climactic moment when all the preachers come together and debate controversial theological issues at an event that they refer to as the “man cave.” As they arrive at the event, all of the preachers are shown driving in luxury: a Cadillac Escalade, Range Rover, and a Mercedes


\(^{573}\) Marla Frederick, “Rags to Riches: Religion, Media, and the Performance of Wealth in a Neoliberal Age,” in **Ethnographies of Neoliberalism**, edited by Carol J. Greenhouse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 222; Jonathan Walton, **Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism** (New York: New York University, 2009), 76, 94-95. Also see chapter on multiculturalism for a more in depth discussion of Word of Faith theology.

\(^{574}\) Frederick, “Rags to Riches,” 222.
Benz are among the vehicles that the viewers see, giving the audience a glimpse into their wealthy, high profile lifestyles. During “man cave,” the preachers argue that ministry is reconcilable with capitalism because many pastors are entrepreneurial with multiple streams of income and are not always exclusively reliant on the financial support of the people. Deitrick Haddon then challenges the other preachers about requesting honorariums when they are asked to preach and specifically confronts Bishop Clarence McClendon about his use of an entourage when he travels. McClendon makes the claim that because of the nature of his ministry, which includes miracles and healings, he needs the extra assistance of four or five people. Haddon questions whether a smaller church with a limited budget would be able to afford McClendon and his entourage. McClendon then responds and says: “If you want my ministry, you need what I bring. . . . I need men around me to help the anointing flow uninterrupted because somebody’s healing depends on it.” McClendon thus justifies his entourage by claiming that it helps to facilitate the miracles and healings of God in other people’s lives. Although McClendon attempts to spiritualize his need for an entourage, Haddon maintains that McClendon “can make adjustments to accommodate smaller churches” because ministry should ultimately be about addressing the needs of the people.

This exchange then intensifies to an argument as Haddon yells: “When God anointed you, you didn’t have an entourage! . . . You didn’t have nobody to pay! You had you and your voice and a word from the Lord! That’s why we’re in the dilemma we’re in right now in the church.” In this heated exchange, Haddon again postures himself as one who is invested in salvaging the reputation of the church. As the exchange continues, the argument almost escalates from a verbal altercation to a physical conflict, at which point McClendon leaves the house and questions Haddon’s intelligence and biblical knowledge. The conflict between Haddon and
McClendon again demonstrates how the show is transformed into a site of theological contestation in which preachers debate the spiritual integrity of honorariums and capitalistic attainments. Theological contestation in this instance also involves varying biblical interpretations of the social ethic of Jesus, as revealed through Haddon’s question to the other preachers: “Would Jesus have charged a fee?” This debate reveals that the duality of ministry and capitalism is not only a contentious issue for the viewers of the show, but also a hotly contested concern even among the show’s participants.

Marla Frederick discusses how the conspicuous consumption embraced by leading televangelists can alienate them from many of their followers. While preachers often spiritualize their material acquisitions and attempt to empower their followers to achieve upward social mobility through “godly” living, Frederick notes that their narratives of success are only “variably replicable in the lives of their viewing audiences.”575 She goes on to say that their agency and material abundance do not “easily or necessarily translate into the lived experiences” of everyday people.576 The show’s display of wealth is therefore at odds with the discourses of relatability that these preachers readily embrace. While trying to portray themselves as “human,” such presentations of neoliberal American ideals actually make the preachers less relatable and do more to elevate them above their followers. In fact, it is likely that the reason as to why Preachers of L.A. and other reality shows that showcase the wealth of celebrities are so immensely popular is precisely because of how “unrelatable” such wealthy lifestyles are to the average viewer. The attraction to the “unrelatability” of wealth might be due to its ability to empower some to imagine their social existence differently and to escape temporarily from their realities, while for others, it serves merely as an object of fascination. The fascination among

575 Frederick, “Rags to Riches,” 231.
576 Ibid.
viewers with wealthy celebrity culture, which is most certainly induced by the overt displays of material abundance on the show, only constructs a more impenetrable barrier between the preachers and the audience.

Although the conflict that ensued between McClendon and Haddon was advertised widely through the previews and portrayed as one of the “realest” moments in order to attract viewers, an interview with Haddon grants insight into how such conflicts are often times staged. In this interview, Haddon discusses his desire for *Preachers of L.A.* to become a franchise and expand into different cities. However, he reveals that the expansion of the franchise is determined by whether or not preachers are willing to engage in heated conflict:

Haddon: We tryin’ to hit all the cities man. You know, but we need some preachers that’s willing to toss some water on one of the other preachers. [*laughs*] That way it’ll get you to season two man. People ain’t trying to watch no preachers just quoting scriptures and looking at each other and laying hands on each other and praying for each other. They wanna see how you really feel. They wanna know who you really are.

Interviewer: So you wanna have some drama?

Haddon: Yeah.577

While this statement may not prove beyond a doubt that McClendon and Haddon’s conflict was a total fabrication, it does shed light on the artificial nature of reality shows and exposes what are often times intentionally constructed conflicts. In this interview, Haddon mistakenly conflates realness with conflict, implying that the lack of contention does not demonstrate realness. This conflation exposes the contrivances of the reality world and how reality TV producers often use discord to convince audiences of reality TV’s authenticity. Haddon’s response then stands in direct contradiction to his other statements mentioned previously about using the reality platform as a means to prove that he is “not being fake and

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phony,” as there are clearly factors involved in constructing reality TV that are both “fake and phony.” It also exposes the fact that there is often more attention placed on constructing a controversial narrative than there is on leading people to God. These kinds of narratives do more to focus on the eccentric personalities of the show’s participants, rather than on helping people to cultivate a deeper relationship with God—the opposite of what they often claim.

Haddon also implies in this statement that conflict boosts ratings, which as a consequence, guarantees the return of the show for another season. Because of its conflict driven narrative, *Preachers of L.A.* was the number one show on Oxygen and scored over one million viewers for its debut episode, the strongest Wednesday premiere in the history of Oxygen. The success of *Preachers of L.A.* has precipitated a “Preachers franchise,” spawning two other reality shows centered around preachers: *Preachers of Detroit* (premiered February 20, 2015), on which Haddon also made an appearance, and *Preachers of Atlanta* (premiered February 3, 2016).

Haddon’s appearance on *Preachers of L.A.* also led to his participation on the faith-based reality show *Fix My Choir* alongside R&B songtress Michelle Williams from Destiny’s Child. The success of *Preachers of L.A.* and its spin-offs prove that these reality shows are more than an evangelistic platform to “win souls,” as the participants would often have us to believe; they are commercially viable programs and have especially proven to be an economically beneficial career endeavor for Haddon in particular.

In his study on the religious marketplace, Shayne Lee discusses how spiritual leaders, particularly preachers, have capitalized on confessional culture: “A new flock of evangelical innovators attract many people by presenting themselves as vulnerable and by removing elusive

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holy masks.” As briefly referenced in chapter one on my discussion of neo-Pentecostalism, Lee supports his argument by citing successful televangelists, like Joyce Meyer and Juanita Bynum, who during the turn of the century began advocating a muddy version of spirituality. Bynum became famous for her sermon “No More Sheets,” which she delivered at Bishop T.D. Jakes’s Woman Thou Art Loosed Conference in the late nineties. During this sermon she spoke candidly about her past sexual relationships and how she received financial benefits from offering sex. Likewise, Joyce Meyer has been outspoken about the many years that her father sexually abused her and the subsequent emotional and relational dysfunctional patterns that she fell prey to as a consequence of her past abuse. The enormous success of these two televangelists, which has been largely predicated upon their transparent persona, proves that confession and realness have economic and professional benefits in the religious marketplace.

The success of these televangelists also proves that the idea of preachers engaging in muddy authenticity is not a totally new concept, but rather a repackaged manifestation of the same thematic trends. Preachers of L.A. is thus a continuation of a theological pattern set in the late nineties and early 2000s that glorifies the idea of preachers “airing their dirty laundry” as a sign of authenticity.

**Conclusion**

*Mary Mary* and *Preachers of L.A.* demonstrate a radical deconstruction of the self, which involves the eradication of dualistic binaries that separate public persona from private reality, divinity from humanity, and the demands of ministry from capitalistic consumerism. Throughout the narratives of both shows, the viewers are promised a glance into the private lives of the pious

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580 Ibid., 107.
and are granted insight into how they navigate a multiplicity of subjectivities that result from internally conflicted impulses. Gospel artists reveal intrasubjective conflict as a strategy to appear more real to their viewers and to consequently draw them closer to God by portraying God and themselves as more tangible. Their intentional display of transparency along with their negotiation of multiple subject positions, which is often confronted and temporarily reconciled through performance, function to demystify religious leaders in the church. Mary Mary and the L.A. preachers believe themselves to be especially targeting those who believe that their relationship with God is compromised because of imperfections. The demystification of the pious, according to the show’s participants, enables their followers to see that they are real people with real flaws, yet still capable of maintaining a real relationship with God.

The spiritual and evangelistic impulses that gospel artists purportedly claim to be motivated by are often clouded by the more overt economic, marketing agendas that are just as real, if not more so, than the motives they publically profess. While trying to portray themselves as human and relatable, their lavish lifestyles and capitalistic attainments exalt them far above the average viewer. As these artists portray themselves as those who “keep it real” and capitalize on idealizing desires for truth, what we often witness are constructed scenarios that intentionally create conflict for ratings and strategically market their latest music for popular consumption. As a consequence, a façade of realness is often embraced that has more to do with professional expedience and less to do with real evangelism. These shows nonetheless conform neatly to a neo-Pentecostal theological paradigm, which seeks to expand Christianity’s reach beyond the confines of the church and appropriate the mechanisms of popular culture to appeal to those who have grown weary of the church’s traditional religious customs. For these gospel artists, the reality show is divinely ordained by God and functions as a strategic evangelistic method: it
presents the Gospel message with contemporary relevance, redeems the image of the church, and helps to “win souls to the kingdom.”
Postlude

Throughout much of my research, I conducted a number of personal interviews with professional gospel artists—none of which actually made the cut into my dissertation, as my research eventually went in a different direction than what was initially anticipated. Gospel legend Edwin Hawkins, songwriter V. Michael McKay, Jason Nelson, and Charles Jenkins were among the gospel artists with whom I had the privilege of having very rich discussions. Although these discussions were not fully unpacked in my dissertation, there were patterns that regularly emerged in each conversation that can further inform the theme of my dissertation. Regardless of the subject of discussion, artists consistently expressed a concern for sincerity while often implicitly suggesting that they were in fact one of the genuine ones.

One salient moment in particular stands out to me involving a phone conversation that I had with Edwin Hawkins. Edwin Hawkins is the eldest sibling of the iconic gospel family, The Hawkins, as well as the arranger of the 1969 gospel hit, “Oh Happy Day,” which spawned the beginning of the contemporary gospel music era. After having a discussion with him in March of 2013 that lasted over an hour about the meaning and current state of gospel music, I asked Hawkins if he had any advice for me going forward for my research. He responded:

Well, It’s important with artists to know and recognize whether or not they have relationship with the Lord. . . . You’d be amazed I think [at] the number of people that are singing gospel music and don’t have real experience, a born again experience with the one who gospel is about. . . . In your interviews with some of them, you might find that some of them are not born again. . . . I mean if they’re living anything but a godly life you can speculate. You don’t have to judge it, but you can speculate whether or not this person has a real relationship with the Lord or not.582

During this exchange, Hawkins revealed his suspicion and disappointment about the presence of spiritual charlatans in the gospel industry, even to the point of admonishing me to beware of them lest I be deceived. Hawkins surmises that many are simply singing the Gospel

with no revelation of whom the Gospel is about because they have not yet had a real, born again experience. This, and many other conversations with gospel artists, exemplifies the preoccupation with real spirituality that gospel artists exhibit in their discourses and theologies. The concept of realness is regularly portrayed as a crucial part of their underlying motives and used to measure the credibility of others. As bolstered by Hawkins’s comments, they are not merely concerned about the genuineness of their own presentation, but also tend to critique the sincerity, or the lack thereof, of other Christians and fellow gospel artists who they believe fall short of an ethic of realness. In fact, there is often a tone of rebuke or admonition that colors their discourses, as though they feel an urgency to instruct their followers of a “better way” or the “right way.” Each practice that has been discussed therefore reveals how gospel artists critique other Christians for impeding upon the real spiritual expression that they believe God intended. In all of these practices, gospel artists are shifting the theological terrain and attempting to show their followers what the immaterial world desires from the material world—what is real and what is not real.

Within the cultural zeitgeist of the twenty-first century, performances of realness have become highly marketable. Especially during the current heyday of reality TV and social media, which allow greater and easier access to private reality, realness continues to grow in its marketability, as audiences seem to have an increasingly insatiable desire for the uncensored and the unmediated. Audiences are urging politicians (consider the surge of Donald Trump and his “tell it like it is” persona), church leaders, and entertainers alike to take off the masks and “just be real.” Gospel artists are thus attempting to discover their own branding niche in the marketplace of realness.
Discovering their placement in the realness marketplace gives them crossover appeal and avails their music to audiences outside of the black church and gospel music communities, thus increasing their market share. Deborah Smith Pollard argues that despite the growing platforms and entertainment mediums that are available for gospel artists to market and publicize their music and message, crossover success remains a rarity in the world of gospel music: “Although today’s gospel music is well-produced and sonically compatible with urban radio, almost always, crossover hits are a surprise; some say they are an act of God, while others see them as the right songs at the right time. In the hyper-sexual music industry, gospel songs that are about faith, salvation, inspiration, and Jesus Christ are not the major focus of most secular programmers.”

An emphasis on realness then, and its common intersection with sex as indicated in the first and last chapters, would seem a fitting strategy to gain visibility beyond sacred platforms and spaces. While gospel artists do not always overtly express a desire to gain crossover appeal through their presentations of realness, it can certainly be stated that a preoccupation with realness reflects the current cultural milieu and thus increases the potential for gospel artists to be competitive and maintain relevance within the contemporary moment.

As gospel music attempts to be more edgy by espousing an ethic of realness through the practices discussed, it also regrettably reinscribes the reality that gospel music and many black churches, particularly those of a more Pentecostal nature, focus disproportionately on individual initiative—a personal change of heart and spiritual understanding, as opposed to a more corporate effort in enacting change. Marla Frederick says it best: “The black church has historically done well in emphasizing the need for individual transformation, a rejuvenation of self that places one in right relationship with God and one’s neighbors. The ongoing work of the church will involve understanding how parishioners’ individual struggles connect to larger

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structural problems.” In his study on gospel music, theologian Obery Hendricks critiques gospel music more directly and decries the lack of social critique in gospel lyrics: “The social orientation of gospel music today is unmindful of the ongoing social, political, and economic dilemmas that confront black people in America. At worst, gospel music today actually undermines collective social efforts—especially among African Americans—to address those dilemmas.”

These critiques that emphasize the lack of a prophetic, social orientation in gospel lyrical content becomes most evident in the multiculturalist practices of gospel artists. As stated in the second chapter, these practices do not critique institutional structures that oppress, but instead focus more on individual agency as a strategy to end discrimination. Similarly, a great amount of worship music and discourse focuses disproportionately on individual transformation. Aside from the warfare rhetoric that often makes pleas and petitions for international peace and the intersubjective acts of worship that emphasize corporate worship, the devotional act of worship is also largely preoccupied with consecrating individual hearts in order to access the ethereal realm and experience personal transformation. Moreover, the reality show participants, while purportedly intending to communicate relatability, embrace neoliberal discourses of upward social mobility that do not explicitly engage structural inequality. These preachers offer the overly simplistic message that “living right” and “working hard for the Lord” are the primary methods for achieving financial success.

Despite the various critiques that may arise from these practices, these artists believe that they are nonetheless creating new models for how to construct gospel music and how to conceptualize spirituality. Examining gospel music through the conceptual lense of real

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584 Frederick, Between Sundays, 218.
spirituality allows us to see the ways in which interpretations of God are steadily evolving in both the gospel music and black church communities. These artists are challenging traditional theologies and redefining how to conceive of God, the Bible, and one’s personal relationship with God. Each practice that I have examined proves that the musical and discursive landscape of gospel music is shifting. I believe that these practices function as prognostications of what is to come: more conversations about sex (especially considering current rising calls for the church to be more inclusive and engage in dialogue about sex, desire, and identity); more conversations about multiculturalism, race, and ethnicity (especially in light of the Black Lives Matter Movement); and more discussions about how far Christians should go and how edgy their presentations should be in order to “win sous to the kingdom” (particularly as it pertains to the church’s continual decline in popularity.) As the church and the gospel music community become more discursively transparent, there will remain a clarion call for the heart to be genuine and for personal transformation to be the primary focus, as exemplified in the worship chapter. Gospel music will unquestionably continue to arouse heated discussions about what is spiritually proper and will most certainly continue to be an artistic site of theological and ideological contestation. The competing and conflicting notions of spirituality examined throughout this dissertation are indications that gospel music remains an ever-evolving genre that will continue to define and redefine the way Christians interpret and conceptualize God.
Discography


**Videography**


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