Fall 2022

The African Christian History of American Songs of Slavery

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Elizabeth Adekale as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology.

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ABSTRACT

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Christianity is an African traditional religion that played a vital role in the formation of American songs of slavery, also known as spirituals. These songs were created by the enslaved Africans in America to express their longing for freedom and preserve African Christian tradition. Within the lyrics of spirituals are coded messages that provided secret information to the enslaved African population. The text of many spirituals came directly from the Bible and speaks of the Spirit working in and through God's people to set things right. Saint Augustine (354-430 AD) was an African Christian theologian and philosopher whose spiritual authority heavily influenced the development of Western Christianity. Augustine's writings helped bring together both the Hebrew and Greek parts of the Bible, and his traditional African teaching and interpretation of Christianity are made manifest in spirituals.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that there is an urgent need for postcolonial readings of African Christian history, and by extension, early African Church fathers, like Augustine, and the spirituals. There is an absence of scholarship that examines the African Christian tradition present in spirituals. The body of literature on the religious tradition of spirituals either emphasizes the adoption of Christianity by enslaved Africans in America or focuses on aspects of African traditional religion with no connection to Christianity. The works of African Christian leaders in the early church uphold traditional African principles that speak

to the African Christian heritage of spirituals. My study analyzes the text of spirituals in such a way that highlights the African Christian tradition within it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, thank you God, for calling me to do this work and giving me the insight, strength, and love to do it with integrity. I would especially like to thank my parents, Michael and Folashade Adekale, who instilled in me the importance of doing what is right. Who I am today is because of their example.

To the Claremont Graduate University, I owe gratitude for its financial support over the years. Thank you to my committee for their contributions. Lastly, thank you to my readers for not just reading this work, but doing the work it takes to leave this world a better place than how you found it.

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INTRODUCTION

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down…
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song;
and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? (Psalm 137: 1, 3)

Christianity is an African traditional religion that played an important role in the formation of songs of slavery, also known as spirituals. To understand the African form of Christianity one must look to early African Church fathers, such as Augustine, and take their African identity into consideration. Augustine (354-430 AD) was an African born in Thagaste, a town in Numidia (modern Algeria) during the time when Africa was under Roman rule and a part of the Roman Empire. By "Africa" I am referring to the whole region of northern Africa, the Roman province known as *Africa Proconsularis*.

Augustine's African identity is clarified in his writings, as he self-identified as an African. When Maximus of Madauros spoke out against his African/Punic heritage, Augustine took offense as he declared:

> As an African man, writing to Africans, and even as one abiding in Africa, you could not have forgotten yourself and thought of Punic [African] names as flawed…Should this language be disapproved by you, you must deny that in Punic [African] books produced by very educated men many wise teachings have been recorded; you must regret that you were born here, for this land is still-warm cradle of the Punic [African] language itself…You disrespect and snub Punic [African] names to such an extent, it is as if you had surrendered to the Roman altars.[1]

[1] Augustine, Letter 17.2: *neque enim usque adeo teipsum oblivisci potuisses, ut homo Afer scribens Afris, cum simus utrique in Africa constituti, Punica nomina exagitanda existimares…quae lingua si inprobatur abs te, nega Punicis libris, ut a viris doctissimis proditur, multa sapienter esse mandata memoriae; paeniteat te certe ibi natum, ubi huius linguae cunabula recalent…et tamen Punica nomina tamquam nimium Romanorum altaribus deditus contemnis ac despicis*. English translation by David E. Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. *An Introduction to a Unique Context and Tradition*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 254.

David Wilhite, a historical theologian, professor of theology at Baylor University and author of *Ancient African Christianity*, calls for scholars to take a postcolonial approach to reading and studying Augustine,[2] and when this happens scholars will discover that Africans in the Roman Empire were "operating from within multiple cultures and identities." Wilhite provides an example of such a circumstance:

> An indigenous Indian, for example, under the rule of the British Empire could easily accommodate English language, customs, values and even religion, a state described by colonizers as being "more British than the British," while simultaneously remaining fully Indian in their self-identity, a state described by Bhabha as "hybridity."[3]

Examples of postcolonial interpretations of Augustine can be found in the works of modern African theologians. Many of them recognize Augustine as an African, however, some have expressed concern over his relationship to the Roman Empire. For example, G.C. Oosthuizen sees Augustine as an African and a central figure in the early church who was working for the Romans leading a congregation with members that were "from the Roman and Greek middle classes, the colonists who lived apart from the indigenous peoples."[4] Nigerian theologian Akin J. Omoyajowo agrees with this view as she explains that Augustine is a "fellow African," but his lack of support for the African Indigenous Churches (or Donatists) against Roman authority speaks to his position. Omoyajowo believes that Augustine did not support the "truly African

[2] Postcolonial refers to a reading practice where historians view history from a perspective other than "the colonizers." It means that voice is given to those who cannot speak for themselves, as in the marginalized and oppressed groups in society.
[3] David E. Wilhite. "Augustine the African: Post-colonial, Postcolonial, and Post-Postcolonial Readings." *Journal of Postcolonial Theory and Theology* 5, no. 1 (2014): 12.
[4] G.C. Oosthuizen. *Post Christianity in Africa. London*: C. Hurst, 1968, 1.

church" with its members all "Berbers [Africans]."[5] African theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye holds a similar view:

> The history of Christianity in Africa does not substantiate the concept of a uniform or monolithic African theology in the past or present. I do not intend to disown Augustine, a true son of Africa. I only suggest that the truly African spirit apparent in all these controversies was that manifested by the Montanists [speaking of Tertullian] and the Donatists.[6]

Augustine was an African working under Roman authority as a Catholic bishop. However, the irony in this concern is Augustine's position as an outspoken critic of the Roman Empire. For example, in *The City of God*, Augustine confronts Rome for their imposition of the Latin language on the African people. He makes statements on imperialism and describes it as a form of colonialism. Augustine also discusses linguistic colonialism and places emphasis on the importance of shared language:

> But the imperial city has endeavored to impose on subject nations not only her yoke, but her language, as a bond of peace, so that interpreters, far from being scarce, are numberless. This is true; but how many great wars, how much slaughter and bloodshed, have provided this unity! And though these are past, the end of these miseries has not yet come.[7]

The second irony is the pelagian controversy during which Roman bishop Julian of Eclanum accused Augustine of bringing African teaching into the catholic church.[8]

Carthage was an ancient African city in modern-day Tunisia. It is important to note that this period is before the Arab invasion of north Africa in 641 AD. What we now call "North Africa " was just "Africa " in the ancient period, and Africans were indigenous to north Africa.

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[5] Akin J. Omoyajowo. "An African Expression of Christianity." in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Basil Moore. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973, 81-3.
[6] Mercy A. Oduyoye. *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986, 19.
[7] Augustine. *The City of God*. XIX.7.
[8] See Mathijs Lamberigts. "The Italian Julian of Aeclanum about the African Augustine of Hippo." in *Augustinus Afer*, 83-93, 2003.

Punic was African language and culture. Roman senator Cato (234-149 BC) ended every one of his speeches with the order, *Carthago delenda est*! "Carthage must be destroyed!" The Punic Wars were three wars waged by Rome against Carthage between 264 BC and 146 BC. The third Punic war destroyed Carthage and made way for Rome to take control of the city. As a result, the African population was sold into slavery and all of what is now northern Africa eventually came under Roman rule. Latin, the language of the Romans, became the official language spoken in Africa and the Roman culture was adopted by many Africans. Wilhite points out that this has led to scholars overgeneralizing and misrepresenting ancient African Christians:

> The topic of ancient African Christianity has too often been, if not neglected, then eclipsed by larger narratives. While most histories of Christianity include major African figures such as Cyprian and Augustine, few treat these subjects as Africans. Too often the fact that Africa was a western Roman province has meant that scholars can categorize African Christianity history into the history of western Christianity, without paying closer attention to the uniqueness of Christianity in this region.[9]

Ancient trade routes and migration across the Sahara desert going from north into west Africa and other sub-Saharan regions were the means by which African Christianity, and by extension, Augustine's Christian philosophy spread throughout Africa. For example, Yoruba traditional religious beliefs and practices include Christian ideas that traveled across the Sahara via migration. Brandl tells us that the Yoruba "are related to the pre-Islamic Berberdom [northern Africa] and to the Christian empires of the Nile [Egypt-Sudan region] and of Abyssinia [modern Ethiopia]." He further explains that the migrations which occurred between the 6th and 10th centuries, around the time of the fall of the Roman Empire and Arab-Muslim occupation of north Africa, were peaceful migrations that settled in the region of Ekiti (in modern Nigeria). Brandl

[9] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 3.

also informs us that a similar migration occurred between the 8th and 11th centuries that started in Upper Egypt via Kukwa to Gobir, meaning "country of the Akun," and Ife. The migratory experience is manifested in ancient African art. Such imagery calls attention to African Christian refugees making their way south of the Sahara.[10]

Sir Harry Johnston is quoted as saying, "The more one inquires into those intricate religions of West Africa, especially in the whole region of the Niger, the more we come irresistibly to the conclusion that they are founded on ideas which have traveled all the way from Egypt or from the Southern Mediterranean shores [north Africa]."[11] Thompson and Ferguson state that, "traces of Christianity are embedded in the pre-missionary culture of the Kanem tribes of Bornu" who inhabit regions throughout west Africa. The Kanem-Bornu Empire was a medieval African trading empire that existed from the 9th century through the 19th century. It encompassed areas belonging to the modern countries of Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, and Libya.[12]

As a result of the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries, Europe lost access to much of Africa. Although European merchants traded with the Arabs, they were generally not allowed to travel beyond the trading ports. Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) from Portugal sponsored voyages of exploration that took place across the Atlantic Ocean. His expeditions were able to map out much of west Africa and prepare European explorers to sail down the west coast of Africa. The *World History Encyclopedia* reports:

> Prince Henry the Navigator (aka Infante Dom Henrique, 1394-1460) was a Portuguese prince who famously helped capture the North African city of Ceuta,

[10] Ludwig Brandl. "Early Christianity in Africa: North Africa, The Sahara, The Sudan, Central and East Africa: A Contribution to Ethnohistory." *Présence Africaine*, no. 96 (1975): 469-70.
[11] Quoted in Lloyd A. Thompson and John Ferguson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity: Nine Studies*. Ibadan (Nigeria): Ibadan University Press, 1969, 2.
[12] Ibid. 14.

> sponsored voyages of exploration with the aim of building colonies in the North Atlantic and West Africa and began the Portuguese involvement in the African slave trade.[13]

In the 15th century, Pope Nicholas V of Portugal, head of the Catholic Church, issued a series of papal bulls (Dum Diversas) granting Alfonso V of Portugal the right to enslave Africans. This authorization allowed the Portuguese to trade in African men, women, and children. Britannica reports, "It has been argued that this [papal bulls],…issued by Nicholas in 1455, gave the Portuguese the rights to acquire slaves along the African coast by force or trade. The edicts are thus seen as having facilitated the Portuguese slave trade from West Africa and as having legitimized the European colonization of the African continent."[14] The Portuguese first began to capture people from west Africa and take the Africans they enslaved back to Europe. By the early 17th century, the enslaved Africans were being taken to British colonies in what would become the United States of America.[15]

Because enslaved Africans in colonial America through the birth of the United States were generally forbidden from reading and writing in English, and communicating in their own languages, their historical voice is often shrouded in mystery. Elijah Green, a slave in South Carolina, expressed, "For God's sake don't let a slave be cotch [caught] with pencil and paper. That was a major crime. You might as well had killed your master or missus."[16] Spirituals made sense of the slave experience and served as historical documentation. Frederick Douglass, a nineteenth century abolitionist author and former slave, described the spiritual as:

> A testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains…If anyone wishes to be impressed with a sense of the soul-killing power of slavery,

[13] Mark Cartwright. "Prince Henry the Navigator." *World History Encyclopedia* online.
[14] Joseph Gill. "Nicholas V." *Encyclopedia Britannica* online.
[15] The term "enslaved Africans" will be used throughout the dissertation to refer to the Africans enslaved in America and their descendants who were by law and experience not "American."
[16] Norman R. Yetman. *Voices from Slavery: 100 Authentic Narratives*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000, 150.

> let him go to Col. Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance day, place himself in the deep, pine woods, and there let him, in silence thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."[17]

Singing was profoundly important for enslaved Africans, who used the human voice in song to preserve African Christian tradition. Although they were deprived of their languages and other basic human rights, slave masters could not take away their songs of survival. The enslaved Africans persisted in expressing their unique culture and experiences through the creation of sacred music. Many of the enslaved Africans never gave up the traditional beliefs and practices of their African Christian ancestors. They brought African Christianity to America and later translated the faith into songs of slavery.

The songs that guided enslaved Africans in the South to freedom in the North were loaded with secret messages. Spirituals served as an important medium for teaching the nature of God as demonstrated in the African Christian tradition. They offered various ways to teaching African Christian culture. Just as the Bible requires proper interpretation of text, so too the spiritual. "For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."[18] It is important to note the word "Spirit" within "Spirit-ual," the title given to this body of repertoire by the African slave community in America. No one can read the spiritual for its intended meaning unless he understands the important role of the Spirit in the life of the enslaved African. The Spirit refers to the mind of God, and the enslaved Africans depended on the Spirit for every inch of progress in their pursuit of freedom.

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[17] Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. London: H. G. Collins, 1845, 20.
[18] *The Holy Bible*. 1 Corinthians 2:10.

Spirituals are an element of African Christian tradition.[19] W. E. B. Du Bois' work examines the African (Negro)[20] church in America and concludes that it originated in the African forests. In his view, the Baptist church served as a branch of the African Indigenous Church (AIC) because its teachings aligned with traditional African teaching.[21] Booker T. Washington, a former slave, tells how the enslaved were forced to accept the slave master's Christianity. They were made to join an American church and claim membership. The Baptist and Methodist were versions of the faith that most resembled African Christianity. Washington explains that enslaved Africans could easily identify with the Baptist faith in particular, because it spoke within the African context, reflecting African religious beliefs and practices. The Baptist and Methodist churches focused on the inner Being, that is, the Spirit within. This form of Christianity elevated the enslaved beyond the life and suffering of slavery. It was a religion of song.[22]

Augustine's works like *Confessions* is African teaching. His *Confessions* contain a worship philosophy that is embedded in spirituals. Philosophy is the whole reason behind what we do and why we do it. Augustine taught that the essential nature of music is communication with God. In traditional African societies, there is no separation between music and religion. God informs everything. We see this in the spirituals, which serve as the Bible in song. Enslaved Africans could easily identify with the Bible, because the events of the Bible were part of African Christian history. Spirituals were an important medium for preserving African Christian heritage. Spirituals teach African Christian values, such as the role of the Spirit—the mind of God and the practice of duality in song as seen in coded message spirituals. These songs contain

[19] Spirituals are also called religious "folk songs" of America.
[20] The term "Negro" is derived from the Latin word *niger*, which means "black."
[21] W. E. B. Du Bois. *The Negro Church. Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University*. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1903, ii.
[22] Ibid. 26.

biblical symbolism with double meanings. For example, to the slave master the Jordan River referred to death, freedom from the struggles of this world. Thus, crossing the Jordan River meant going to heaven to a better world. However, to the enslaved African the Jordan River could have been referring to any of the rivers that would have been necessary to cross over to freedom, like the Mississippi River, Ohio River, or even the Atlantic Ocean.

Spirituals are songs of trial and tribulation that not only express the great pains and sorrows of slavery, they also demonstrate God's power in action when one surrenders to be used by the Spirit. The term "spiritual" is derived from the King James Bible's translation of Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." African traditional music is functional in nature, that is, music plays an important role in traditional African society. Songs are often used for religious purposes as a means of communicating with God. Enslaved Africans received the English translation of the Bible with the African Christian beliefs and practices passed down to them by their ancestors.

There is a large body of scholarship on the historical tradition of spirituals. However, there is an absence of scholarship that analyzes the African Christian tradition present in spirituals. For example, Dena Epstein's book explores how music relates to every aspect of the enslaved African's life, including the experience of slaves ships and American plantations. Epstein also discusses how the songs of enslaved Africans reflected their new way of life.[23] James Cone and others like Earl, Kirk-Duggan, Hopkins and Cummings have examined the text

[23] Dena J. Epstein. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977.

of spirituals from a theological perspective,[24] placing emphasis on the theme or theology of freedom while others like Stuckey and Raboteau focus on psychological themes in relation to traditional African culture.[25]

The body of literature on the religious tradition of spirituals either emphasizes the adoption of Christianity by enslaved Africans in America or aspects of African traditional religion in spirituals with no ties to Christianity. This study examines the text of spirituals in such a way that highlights the African Christian tradition within it; the way in which the teachings of early African Church fathers, like Augustine, influenced the songs created by enslaved Africans in America. In *Black Song*, John Lovell focuses on proving that spirituals were original songs by the enslaved Africans in America and not imitations of White spirituals.[26] Lovell argues that African (Negro) spirituals can be traced back to as early as the 17th century when enslaved Africans first arrived on American soil, whereas White spirituals only go so far back as the 19th century during the Camp Meeting movement. Lovell concludes that since African (Negro) spirituals were in existence well before White spirituals, the former could not have derived from the latter.[27]

Lovell also sees the many parallels with elements of African traditional religion and the Bible as one factor that made it possible for enslaved Africans to adopt Christianity. In his book,

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[24] James H. Cone. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991; Riggins Earl. *Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs: God, Self and Community in the Slave Mind.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993; Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan. *Exorcising Evil: A Womanist Perspective on the Spirituals*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997; Dwight N. Hopkins and George C.L. Cummings. *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991.
[25] Sterling Stuckey. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
[26] The adjectives "White" and "Black" will be capitalized when they refer to racial identities in the dissertation.
[27] John Lovell. *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame; The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out*. New York: Paragon House, 1972.

African Religions and Philosophy, John Mbiti discusses various aspects of African traditional religion, including the Supreme Being who is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (all-good; perfect), and has less powerful spirits assisting Him.[28] Lovell considers this division of divine power as paralleled with the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, when we take a closer look at the text of spirituals we see the teachings of early African Church fathers embedded in them. For example, Tertullian (c.150-240 AD), an early African Christian leader and theologian,[29] developed the doctrine of the Trinity and coined the term 'Trinity" in order to, as the *Christianity* site explains, help us "understand the New Testament teaching about what God is like,"[30] and so the Trinity cannot parallel African traditional religion when it is itself an aspect of African traditional religion.

Most studies on spirituals view the role of the Bible in the life of the enslaved African as originating in America under the influence of White slave masters. The problem with this notion is that it reinforces the popular public misconception that Europe introduced Christianity to Africa and thus further disconnects Africans and the descendants of the Africans who were enslaved in America from their African Christian heritage. The primary focus of this study is to discuss the history of Christianity in Africa from the very beginnings of the Christian movement in order to highlight the African Christian tradition in spirituals. This study employs a postcolonial lens to analyze the text of spirituals, making it possible to trace the Bible in

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[28] John S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London: Heinemann, 1990.
[29] Tertullian clarified in his writings that he was an African. In the introduction of his *On the Cloak*, Tertullian addresses his African audience by stating, "Men of Carthage, ever princes of Africa, ennobled by ancient memories…the first men of Africa." Tertullian then advises his African people to abandon the Roman toga and wear their African attire: "Still you too of old time wore your garments, your tunics, of another shape," he then contrasts the Roman toga with the African "pallium…which used to be worn by all ranks and conditions among you"; *On the Cloak* 1.1. text in Vincent Hunink. *Tertullian*. De Pallio: *A Commentary*. Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 2005; Translation. ANF 4:5.
[30] Diane Severance. "Who Was Tertullian? His Writings and Significance." *Christianity.com* online.

spirituals back to Africa and demonstrate how spirituals serve as an embodiment of the enslaved Africans' Christian heritage.

Chapter one explains how European travel writings played a major part in the justification of the enslavement of Africans and gives a brief historical account of the songs that shaped the music of slavery, including the experience of enslaved Africans in America and the emotional pain of enslavement. This chapter also includes a brief discussion about the Slave Bible that was intended for use among enslaved Africans, and the motivation behind publishing a heavily reduced version of the Bible that removed 90 percent of the Old Testament and 50 percent of the New Testament.

Chapter two clarifies how Christianity was in Africa long before slavery, and thus demonstrates that spirituals were a recasting of traditional African Christian values and beliefs. This chapter discusses the history of Christianity in Africa, Roman colonization of Africa, and the legacy of the early African Church father, Saint Augustine. It has been said that all of Western theology is a footnote to the work of Augustine, "because no other writer, with the exception of the biblical authors, has had more influence on Christianity."[31] Augustine's writings helped bring together the Hebrew and Greek parts of Christianity. His writings also shaped the development of Western Christianity. This chapter examines Augustine's *Confessions* as African teaching that played an important role in the formation of American songs of slavery, known as spirituals.

Chapter three highlights the many parallels in ancient European travel literature with Nigerian tradition and the "Latinization" of African place names and tribes. This chapter also

[31] "Book of the Week: Augustine's Confession." *The Old Guys* online.

discusses ancient trans-Saharan trade and migration routes by which Christianity, and by extension, Augustine's ideas penetrate across the desert into regions south of the Sahara. For over two thousand years ancient trade routes served as a means for travel and the spread of Christianity across the Sahara between sub-Saharan, west and north Africa.

Chapters four and five examine the African Christian tradition in seven well-known spirituals and the coded messages within them.[32] Chapter four looks at the spirituals from a prophetic standpoint and chapter five focuses on how the prophecies translate to application in escape songs. The common thread in these songs is the use of African Christian practices and key biblical principles as metaphor to accurately relay the message of God and is the primary reason for my decision to include them. After the historical background of each song is the coded text, which discusses how African Christian heritage served a unique function in telling a story of adaptation and survival. Emphasis is placed on words and phrases for textual interpretation and to communicate the hidden messages within the spirituals.

In traditional African societies, music is passed on by memory, not by writing. It is important to remember that original spirituals were never written down or composed. They were sung and passed down orally over the generations. As early as the 19th century, observers of African (Negro) performance practice began to notate what they saw and heard. This becomes problematic since African music is so complex that it cannot be written down using Western music notation. Therefore, the historical collections, concert performances and audio recordings of spirituals used in this study are only interpretations of the music, not the original performance practice. Following the coded text of each song is an analysis of the musical arrangement

[32] *Elijah Rock, Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel*, *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit, Steal Away*, *Deep River*, *The Old Ship of Zion*, *Let Me Fly.*

selected. These arrangements were chosen specifically because they contain common themes of coded spirituals. Important musical elements used to enhance the meaning of the text will be discussed.

Learning about this rich history effectively broadens our understanding of the place and purpose of spirituals within the African slave community in America and the impact of these songs throughout this period to the present.

PART I: THE STUDY OF SLAVE SONGS

African traditional music is contrasted with European art music in that the music is functional in nature; it plays an important role in African society. Songs are often used for religious purposes. Thus, analysis of American songs of slavery must always consider the African traditional religious beliefs and practices to which the songs are attached.

Enslaved Africans in America came together in joint participation to rise above the oppression and suffering under slavery. They refused to abandon the African Christian tradition of their forefathers, and they never stopped praying for the grace to reach freedom. While they were yet enduring, enslaved Africans formed a resolution to escape slavery through the power of the Spirit in song. Knowledge of the history of this rich experience will bring to light a newfound appreciation for the spirituals.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SUFFERING UNDER AMERICAN SLAVERY LINKED TO EUROPEAN TRAVEL WRITINGS

Ancient Greek writer Homer (c.800 BC) was the first to mention the Aethiopians in his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It was the land of the "blameless Aethiopians" where Homer sends Zeus and his gods to join the Aethiopians in a feast. The word Aethiopian derives from the word *Aethiops*, meaning "people with faces burnt black" (i.e. Africans). It is a Greek word that was used by ancient writers to describe the indigenous peoples of north Africa and all known regions south of Egypt.

Herodotus (484-425 BC), who is called the "Father of History," was an ancient Greek historian and travel writer. His travels covered various parts of Africa, including Egypt.[33] Aethiopia is the word Herodotus uses to refer to the regions north of the Sahara and unknown regions south of the Sahara. According to Herodotus, the Nasamonians, also known as Garamantes (an African desert tribe), were the first northern people known to history to travel across the Sahara desert. Prior to the 19th century, Europeans learned about Africa mostly through the writings of ancient Greeks and Romans and detailed maps of Africa drawn out by European travel writers. These reports are believed to have created travel narratives that helped perpetuate the idea of Africans as barbarians in need of civilization. The Guardian Africa Network reports:

> In *Histories*, Herodotus (aka The Father of History) relates a cautionary tale about what happens in Africa. Five Nasamonians – "enterprising youths of the highest rank" – were off exploring southern Libya. After several days of wandering, they found some fruit trees and started helping themselves. Then, several "men of small stature", "all of them skilled in magic", seized and captured them, taking them for inscrutable and dastardly magic-dwarf purposes. In this way, Herodotus

[33] Records of his travel experience appear in his work. Herodotus. *The Histories.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

> suggested that Africa was not only different, but also more threatening, sinister and dangerous than Greece. Subsequent generations of European writers followed suit, substituting fantasy for fact in markedly antagonistic ways. Europeans created an image of Africa that was the perverse opposite of Europe's – its mirror image. Europe's general superiority would, by comparison with and in contrast to this image, be self-evident. Europe's own idea of itself was thus predicated on its image of Africa.[34]

Matthew Paris (c.1200-59), a British political writer and composer of the *Chronica majora* made documentation of significant events in Europe during the 13th century. His writings are said to "constitute one of the most important sources of knowledge of events in Europe between 1235 and 1259."[35] Matthew Paris' writings on his travel experience in Africa are also said to have contributed to the formation of stereotypes about Africa and its peoples. Paris writes, "This land, which is to the right, that is to say to the south, and is called Africa and is the third part of the world…where there are savage monstrous people…It supports and contains various bad tribes without law, faith or peace, most of whom live in underground caves on account of the heat…"[36]

Jean Barbot (1655-1712), a French traveler on slave ships to west Africa also documented his travel experiences. Attempting to attract and appeal to European audiences, Babot insists, "Sir, I have told you as much as I can about the customs, temperament, occupations and way of life of the peoples of Gold Coast, in general…I shall now satisfy your request by entertaining you with their dances."[37] Babot presents a scene of African music and dance, describing the African people "leaping and stomping their feet" while at the same time "running against each other, breast to breast, knocking bellies together very indecently…and

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[34] Robert Bates. "History of Africa Through Western Eyes." *Guardian Africa Network* online.
[35] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Matthew Paris." *Encyclopedia Britannica* online.
[36] Matthew Paris. *Itinerary from London to Jerusalem* (1250-59). Translated by Denys Pringle, in *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, 1187-1291. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012, 207.
[37] Katrina D. Thompson. "The Script: 'Africa Was but a Blank Canvas for Europe's Imagination.'" in *Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014, 13.

uttering some dirty mysterious words." Barbot states that the African people are "more like devils than men" who dance in "strange postures…as if they were possessed."[38]

Katrina Thompson states that Babot "was attempting to contribute an illustration of Africa and its inhabitants to an inquisitive European and North American audience. As a slaver and author, he well understood how to create a sellable product. He wanted to entertain, thrill, and educate his readers. In order to attract a publisher and potential readers, he added rich detail and vivid scenes to his travel narrative."[39] Thompson adds that "within travel narratives, black bodies became malleable objects shaped to serve the purposes of the writer" and the characteristics of Africans "were manufactured into serviceable goods for white consumers." Thompson further states, "The textual commodification of black bodies allowed the writers to garner power to subjugate…"[40] Thompson's view is that the dehumanization of Africans in European travel publications led to justifications for the enslavement of Africans as well as the inhumane treatment of enslaved Africans in America.

The Atlantic slave trade was a three-legged journey oftentimes referred to as the "triangular trade." In the first leg of the trade, goods, such as arms, textiles, and wine were transported from Europe to Africa. In the second leg, enslaved Africans were transported via the "Middle Passage" from Africa to the Americas, and in the third leg, sugar and coffee were transported from the Americas to Europe.[41] The Middle Passage was notorious for its brutal exchange of the African peoples. Enslaved Africans were forced into cramped spaces on slave

[38] Ibid. 13-14.
[39] Ibid. 13.
[40] Ibid. 20.
[41] James Walvin. *History Files: The Slave Trade. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011*, 22-31.

ships and packed tightly for a long voyage that lasted several months. They were branded with hot irons, chained together, and kept under unsanitary, inhumane conditions.

In his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano (c.1745-1797), an enslaved African who was born in Igbo (in modern Nigeria), describes the suffering endured on the journey across the Atlantic Ocean that brought enslaved Africans to America. Equiano writes, "The closeness of the place, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died."[42] On the slave ship *Zong* in 1781, Captain Luke Collingwood threw overboard more than 130 Africans because they were dying of a disease. Historians estimate that around 2 million enslaved Africans died during the Middle Passage.[43]

Since the opening of colonial America, enslaved Africans were transported as forced labor to work large American plantations and produce trade goods. Africans were thought to be more profitable than native workers, because they proved more physically strong and adaptable to the intense, backbreaking working conditions of slavery. Africans were thought to be more suited to the hard labor in tropical climates because of their place of origin. It was assumed that the enslaved Africans were resistant to tropical diseases.

A Spanish priest named Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) advised against the enslavement of the native people and advocated for the importation of enslaved Africans. This solution was rooted in the general thought that African (Negroes) were inherently inferior to

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[42] Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by Himself.* London: T. Wilkins, 1789, 51-54.
[43] Alan S. Rosenbaum. *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocides.* New York: Routledge, 2018, 132.

European Whites, and therefore Europeans should be dominant over them. Montesquieu, a French political philosopher of the Enlightenment Period, wrote that one main purpose of government is to maintain the property of the individual, and African (Negroes) were regarded as property. Montesquieu saw the enslaved African as an exemplification of Aristotle's "natural slave."[44] David Hume, a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, wrote:

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even an individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarian of the whites… have still something eminent about them… Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men.[45]

In 1455, Pope Nicholas V of Portugal, head of the Catholic Church, issued a series of papal bulls (Dum Diversas) granting Alfonso V of Portugal the right to enslave Africans. Explorers from Spain joined forces with those of Portugal in the enslavement of Africans. The Popes after Nicholas V granted permission to the Spanish to take the possessions of Africans and enslave them. The Papal Bull "Inter Caetera" was issued by Pope Alexander IV in 1493. This decree authorized Spain and Portugal to colonize the Americas.

Enslaved Africans were bought and sold throughout colonial America. This system of oppression was an ever-renewable source of hard labor. As their master's capital, enslaved Africans were made to work as field hands, denied basic human rights, and prohibited from interracial unions. From the time of their capture in Africa to their arrival on American soil, enslaved Africans were continually separated from their families. This mental and emotional pain added to their suffering of having to endure the harsh, inhumane conditions in which they

[44] Montesquieu. 'De l'esclavage des Nègres,' in *De l'esprit des lois*. Geneva: 1748, Book XV, ch. 5.
[45] David Hume. "Of National Character." in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. edited by Eugene Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987, 208 and 629.

lived and labored. The enslaved Africans who were lucky enough to make it out alive gave graphic descriptions of the suffering under slavery.[46] Another form of suffering was the distribution of the Slave Bible; a bible that omitted passages promising deliverance to the enslaved and oppressed.

I. Slave Bible

The Slave Bible, which is on display at the Museum of the Bible in Washington D.C., was originally published in the United Kingdom, Britain in 1807; a heavily-edited Bible that omits most of the Old Testament and half of the New Testament. Anthony Schmidt, PhD., associate curator of Bible and Religion in America at the Museum of the Bible, explains that "there are 1,189 chapters in a standard protestant Bible. This Bible contains only 232."[47] Brigit Katz reported for Smithsonian that the Slave Bible was commissioned on behalf of the Society for the Conversion of Negro Slaves for use among enslaved Africans to teach them to read with the ultimate goal of introducing them to Christianity."[48]

The publishers of the Slave Bible removed key biblical passages. Gone were the passages promising deliverance and verses that emphasized equality amongst different groups of people, as in, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."[49] The Slave Bible also excluded passages that contradict the institution of slavery, like the verse, "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him,

[46] The escaped slave and novelist, William Brown, described the brutality of American slavery as "democratic whips—its republican chains." William W. Brown. *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*. Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, no. 25. Cornhill, 1847, 110.
[47] Michel Martin. "Slave Bible From The 1800s Omitted Key Passages That Could Incite Rebellion," edited by Robert Baldwin III and Elizabeth Baker. *National Public Radio* online.
[48] Brigit Katz. "Heavily Abridged 'Slave Bible' Removed Passages That Might Encourage Uprisings." *Smithsonian Magazine* online.
[49] *The Holy Bible*. Galatians 3:28.

or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."[50] In contrast, verses that encouraged submission to authority remained intact. Schmidt refers to the verse, *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ*,[51] as "the most famous pro-slavery verse that many pro-slavery people would have cited."[52] The story of Joseph's enslavement in Egypt also remained. Schmidt describes how the teachings aimed at enslaved Africans portrayed Joseph as a faithful servant who "accepts his lot in life, keeps his faith in God and in the end is rewarded for it."[53]

The prevailing thought among slave owners was that only teaching certain parts of the Bible, which emphasize obedience to one's master, would maintain the slave's status. Schmidt reported that editors of the Slave Bible went so far as to erase the entire book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, "so there is no new kingdom, no new world, nothing to look forward to."[54] In addition, at the end of the book of Revelation, God issues a warning to anyone who changes or tampers with the biblical text:

> For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).

[50] Ibid. Exodus 21:16.
[51] Ibid. Ephesians 6:5.
[52] Amber C. Strong. "The Shocking 'Slave Bible': Here Are the Parts That Were Deleted to Manipulate Slaves." *CBN News* online.
[53] Becky Little. "Why Bibles Given to Slaves Omitted Most of the Old Testament." *History* online.
[54] Strong. "The Shocking 'Slave Bible.'"

CHAPTER TWO: CHRISTIANITY IN ANCIENT AFRICA

Christianity is an African traditional religion that was carried with the enslaved Africans to America and then translated into songs of slavery, known as spirituals. Christianity in ancient Africa dates from the beginning of the Christian movement. For the sake of clarity, it will help to explain the meaning of the words "ancient" as it relates to Christianity and "Africa." The word "ancient" refers to the very beginnings of the Christian faith in the 1st century AD or late antiquity into the middle ages. Wilhite notes, "The first undisputed evidence for Christianity in Africa dates to the mid-second century, which itself is evidence that Christianity had probably been established in some way previous to this—perhaps with ties to the first century."[55]

The word "Africa" refers to the whole region of northern Africa as well as Egypt.[56] This period is before the Arab invasion of Africa in 641 AD. The term "North Africa" is a modern term that was not used by ancient writers. The Roman province of northern Africa was known as *Africa Proconsularis*, and "Africa" (used by Latin/Roman writers) or "Libya" (used by Greek writers) referred to this entire region, sometimes excluding Egypt. Wilhite argues that the history of Christianity in Africa has either been neglected or drowned by larger narratives. Wilhite recognizes that, "While most histories of Christianity include major African figures such as Cyprian and Augustine, few treat these subjects as Africans. Too often the fact that Africa was a western Roman province has meant that scholars can categorize African Christian history into the history of western Christiantity, without paying closer attention to the uniqueness of Christianity in the region."[57]

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[55] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 2.
[56] The term "Egypt" comes from the Greek word *Aegyptius*. The Greeks colonized Egypt in 332 BC under the leadership of Alexander the Great.
[57] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 3.

I. Scholarship on the History of Christianity in Africa

Many African scholars have bought into the stereotype that Christianity came to Africa with Western European missionaries during colonialism. Thomas C. Oden, Ph.D., Yale University, director of the Center for Early African Christianity and former Professor of Theology, calls this view "narrow" and "modern." Oden explains that through the lens of stereotype, Africa is seen "as only two or three centuries deep, not two or three millennia." He describes this approach as a "false start" because it ignores "Christianity's first millennium, when African thought shaped and conditioned virtually every diocese in Christianity worldwide."[58]

African theologians today separate theology *in Africa* from theology *of Africa*. They understand theology in Africa as theology that is produced primarily by written traditions while theology of Africa has its basis in African oral traditions. Oden sees this distinction as originating "in the Eurocentric tradition of Hegel to Harnack that penetrated deeply into the assumptions of Bauer, Bultmann and Tillich" with no connection to "indigenous African sources." Oden points to the Enlightenment period in eighteenth century France as the main source from which this idea of a separate theology in Africa derives. In Oden's view, these ideas are dominating modern African theology and have been "camouflaged as if to assume that these prejudices were themselves African."[59] Wilhite holds a similar view as Oden. He explains, "It has been well documented that many of the earliest modern histories of ancient African Christianities were written by French scholars who unwittingly employed their own colonialist lenses to read the ancient African sources."[60]

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[58] Thomas Oden's works on Africa shed light on the many contributions of Africans in the early church to the shaping of Western Christianity. See Oden's, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 25.
[59] Ibid. 70-71.
[60] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 7.

For Oden, there is no distinction between Christianity in Africa and African Christianity. He combines theology *in Africa* and theology *of Africa* and classifies both as "African theology." Some African scholars regard African theology as a response to the presence of Western European missionary activities in Africa. However, historical records show that Christian missions in Africa did not originate with Western European missionaries. Christian missionary work in Africa can be traced back to the beginnings of the Christian movement during the first few centuries of Christianity, and these missionary activities were carried out by Africans in the early church.

A. Missionary Work of Africans in the Early Church

Hildebrandt claims that the first church in Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) was established in the 4th century by two Syrian Christians named Frumentius and Aedesius who brought the faith to the king of Aksum.[61] However, historical accounts confirm that the introduction of Christianity to the regions south of Egypt, including Abyssinia, happened in the 1st century. In Acts 8:26-40, we read of an African who is referred to as "Ethiopian," which, in ancient texts like the Bible, means "people with faces burnt black" or simply Africans. This African was a Jew and high court official under the Candace or Kandake (meaning queen of the Ethiopians) who, on his way home, became a Christian. He then took the faith back to his people.

In 325 AD, King Ezana turned the Jewish kingdom of Aksum (in modern Ethiopia) into a Christian kingdom. Claims have been made that Frumentius converted the king, but records show that King Ezana was in fact raised Christian by his parents.[62] Frumentius traveled to Egypt

[61] Jonathan Hildebrandt. *History of the Church in Africa*. Achimota: Christian Press, 1981, 21.
[62] Socrates's *Ecclesiastical History*, I.19, in *A. C. Zenos*, "The ecclesiastical history of Socrates Scholasticus", in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, *Second Series*, Vol. II, *Socrates, Sozomeus*: *Church Histories*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995, 23.

to visit Athanasius (c.293-373 AD), an African Church father and bishop of Alexandria, to request for priests and bishops to be sent to Abyssinia. Because Athanasius found Frumentius suitable for the position, he "ordained Frumentius bishop and commissioned him to initiate the cultural adaptation of Greek Christianity's biblical-liturgical texts to Ethiopic symbols and languages." The Greeks colonized Egypt in 332 BC, thus Greek became the language of scholarship in Africa during the time of the writing of the New Testament (from around 50 to 100 AD). Therefore, in addition to Latin, African Christian leaders and theologians of the early church wrote in Greek. Britannica further states that Athanasius' initiative established "the link between the Egyptian [African] Coptic and Ethiopian [African] churches."[63]

Parrinder's view is similar to Hildebrandt's regarding the presence of missionaries from the Syrian Church in Abyssinia. Parrinder considers the work of nine of these missionaries to be highly influential in the development of Christian dogmas among Abyssinian/African Christians during the 6th century. However, according to historical records, it was African missionaries from Cyrene (in modern Libya) who took the gospel of Christ to Syria in the 1st century and established the first church there.[64] So in actuality, the two Syrian Christians, Frumentius and Aedesius, were helping spread African Christianity that was introduced to them by Africans. On top of that, they were working under the leadership of Africans like Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria.

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[63] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Saint Frumentius." *Encyclopedia Britannica* online.

[64] Cyrenaica (or Cyrene) was an African region colonized by the Greeks in 631 BC. The inhabitants of Cyrene were indigenous Africans, and the Greeks referred to them as "Cyrenians" or "Libyans." In his *Histories*, Herodotus records that the Cyrenians had African customs that were considered cultural taboos in Europe. He writes, "Even at Cyrene, the women think it wrong to eat the flesh of the cow." (4.186). Historical records also show that Simon of Cyrene was an African Jew who helped Jesus carry the cross to Calvary. After meeting Jesus, Simon traveled to Antioch (in Syria) to help start the church there. Mark, who was also from Cyrene, mentions Simon's sons, Alexander and Rufus, in Mark 15:21. Paul greets them in Romans 16:13.

Groves traces the origins of the Church in Nubia (modern Sudan) to the 6th century during the reign of Justinian I (527-565 AD). Longinus from Alexandria was sent to the region of Nabodae in 508 AD to establish a church there, and in 543 AD, another group of missionaries were sent under the leadership of Julian, a monophysite priest from Egypt.[65] Groves, Parrinder and others attempt at explaining the reason for the decline of African Christians in north Africa after the Arab-Muslim invasions of the 7th century. The African Church is believed to have only survived in Egypt and Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) to this day. All other African churches in the north were supposedly dramatically wiped away by the Muslim presence. Modern historians describe the decline of African Christianity in the north as a result of the Arab military force. Some even claim that African Christians were targeted by Muslim rulers and forced into conversion. This view has very little support to back it up. So, the question remains: What really happened to the African Christians in the north? Did they all suddenly disappear? Did they leave no descendants or did their descendants disappear along with them?

Wilhite explains that historians "struggle with this period more than any other" because these years of African Christian history suddenly disappear from Western historical records. In Wilhites's view, the claim that Christianity disappeared in Africa at the arrival of Muslim forces stems from "the fact that African Christian voices fall silent at this time" and Europe loses access to much of Africa. Consequently, as Wilhite further explains, "the literary record ceases almost entirely, and there is certainly nothing like the bodies of literature produced in the earlier periods."[66] Historians cannot answer the question of what happened to the African Christians during this time because, as Wilhite puts it, historians simply "do not know the answer."[67]

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[65] C.P. Groves. *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*. vol 1. London: Lutterworth Press, 1948, 50.
[66] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 321.
[67] Ibid. 338.

Western scholars provide almost every possible theory concerning the so-called "disappearance" of Christianity in Africa except the one about an African Christian exodus from the northern regions of Africa to the southern regions of Africa as if Africans were bound to the north with no access to the south of their own continent. Massive evidence shows the ongoing migrations of Africans from north to south over centuries of foreign invasions in Africa. Some of the theories often used by scholars to explain the "disappearance" of Christianity in Africa include the following:

The *political power theory* is based on the idea that, "He who rules, his religion." This concept assumes that under Muslim rule, African Christians had no other choice than to become Muslim due to an overwhelming Muslim authority. This explanation is problematic in that it contradicts early Christianity in Africa. The earliest records reveal that there was in fact strong resistance by African Christians towards their Roman rulers. This resistance resulted in the deaths of many Africans.[68] We see this with the great number of African martyrs in the years of the early church, among the well-known are Mark the Evangelist who wrote the gospel of Mark, the Scillitan martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas, and Cyprian bishop of Carthage.

The *house divided theory* takes out of context the words of Jesus that state, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." This theory claims that African Christianity somehow disappeared due to a lack of unity within the African Church. The implication is that Christianity in Africa was already in decline at the time of the Muslim invasion due to internal division, and so African Christians abandoned their ancestral religious traditions for a new religion. In his work *The Donatist Church*, William H. C. Frend offers his opinion on the council's decision

[68] Ibid. 340. See also L. R. Holme. *The Extinction of the Christian Churches in North Africa*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1895, 4.

against the Donatists, the African Indigenous Churches of early Christianity. Frend claims that the council's decision in favor of the Catholics at the Conference of 411 resulted in the disappearance of the Donatist Church and decline of African Christianity. He is implying that the African Church was made vulnerable by the council's decision to the point that it could not stand in the midst of Muslim presence.[69] There is no evidence to support this claim. In fact, evidence shows that despite the natural conflicts and disagreements that arose within the early church, African Christianity continued to prevail to this day.

The *Christian exodus theory* refers to the belief that African Christians fled Africa to Europe in search of refuge as if leaving family, friends, and all they've ever known to a foreign place was the one and only option. Wilhite clarifies that, "There is certainly no evidence of a mass exodus [out of Africa] at this time," he continues, "and even in the so-called Dark Ages one would expect more literary records were such an event or events to have taken place."[70] The assumption that Africans would choose to live abroad in a foreign land rather than in their own African ancestral homeland should be put to rest and scholars should instead give voice to the descendants of the early African Christians who are living in the west Africa of today and other regions south of the Sahara.

African tradition tells us that the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Togo, and Benin originated in ancient Egypt, migrated west (Libyan region) and then moved south.[71] Ancient European travel literature on Africa further confirms the early migration of Africans from east to west. In the fourth book of *Aeneid* (written between 29-19 BC), Virgil presents Yarbas (or Irabas) as "the son of the Libyan [African] god Hammon, who was identified with Jupiter, and whose desert shrine

[69] William H. C. Frend. *The Donatist Church*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
[70] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 341.
[71] The term "Libya" refers to the entire region north of the Sahara, what is today known as "North Africa."

Alexander visited during sojourn in Egypt."[72] The origin of Yarbas, as Thompson and Ferguson state, is "in the mists of tradition." They add that Yarbas "appears as the local divine chief" and is represented as "introducing the worship of his divine father to the people of Numidia."[73] They conclude, "this can hardly be anything else than the dim reflection of a historical migration from east to west." The various migrations of Africans from north to south of the Sahara that occurred after Roman rule are said to be absent in European travel writings due to the eventual disappearance of Europeans from north Africa at this time.

In *Early Christianity in Africa: North Africa, The Sahara, The Sudan, Central and East Africa*, Brandl tells us that the Yoruba "are related to the pre-Islamic Berberdom [northern Africa] and to the Christian empires of the Nile [Egypt-Sudan region] and of Abyssinia [modern Ethiopia]."[74] He further explains that peaceful migrations which settled in the region of Ekiti (in modern Nigeria) occurred between the 6th and 10th centuries at the time of the Arab occupation of north Africa. Brandl tells us that another migration took place between the 8th and 11th centuries that started in Upper Egypt via Kukwa to Gobir, which means "country of the Akun," and Ife. The first leader and founder of the tribe, Brandl says, "was a certain Odudua who became the progenitor of seven kingdoms in this region." Brandl tells us that Yoruba also means "Akun," and the Akan are the people living in Ghana today. He further states, "There are connections to be seen between Coptic Egypt and the Benin, the Yoruba and Yebba art."[75]

The migratory experience is manifested in ancient African art. Such imagery calls attention to African Christian refugees making their way south of the Sahara. These arts embody

[72] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 2. See also Virgil. *Aeneid*. IV, 36; 196.
[73] Numidia was an ancient kingdom that originated in present-day Algeria, later expanding across the modern-day countries of Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco. Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 2.
[74] Brandl. "Early Christianity in Africa ." 469-70.
[75] Ibid.

core African Christian values and beliefs to serve as reminders of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian imagery of Coptic art derives from ancient Egyptian art. Thompson and Ferguson tell us that the Ashanti (a tribe of the Akan) "storeyed house" headpieces of the Dogon "echo ornament on the Axum obelisk" and the Dogon carvings that show a seated couple with the man's right hand placed on the woman's right shoulder is inherited from ancient Egypt. Thompson and Ferguson explain that, "The Dogon divinity Nommo who is torn in pieces like Osiris, and represented praying for rain with arms above his head" reflects the ancient Egyptian God Osiris.[76]

Coptic Christian art uses vine leaves and grapes that symbolize rebirth and the God Osiris. The "Pharaoh's Cross," also known as the "Ansate Cross" is a sacred Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol of "Ankh," an Akan language word for "Life." Thompson and Ferguson also mention, "The mourning for Nzeanzo among the Bachama, and joy in his resurrection; the Isoko *osiwi* 'savior' and…the Yoruba *orisa*."[77] Brandl says that within African tribes, "Holy symbols were chains," and the people "were very skilled in the manufacturing of copper, glassware and in leather work." They were also highly skilled at weaving and building dugout-canoes. Brandl informs us that weaving and plush weaving were invented by vassals of *Isa*, meaning Jesus.[78]

Africa was called the "Dark Continent" for centuries. The most common explanation for the use of the phrase is that up until the 19th century Europe had little knowledge about Africa and so the term "dark" was used to mean "mysterious." This answer is said to be misleading and disingenuous in the sense that European countries were in trade with African kingdoms for over

[76] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 3.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Brandl. "Early Christianity in Africa." 471.

two thousand years and had in their possession drawn out maps by early African travelers.[79] The idea of Africa as "dark" seems to have been used to help justify the enslavement of Africans and colonization of Africa altogether, as it portrayed and represented the African peoples as "inferior," "savages," "in darkness" and thus in need of light (salvation).

B. Christianity and Colonialism

Christianity and colonialism are often said to go hand and hand due to the deliberate misinterpretation of the command by Jesus to share the gospel of Christ and "make disciples of all nations."[80] The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines colonialism as "a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another." Jo Luehmann describes colonialism as "the imposition of religious, cultural, economic, and linguistic practices over Native peoples."[81] In other words, it has been argued that Western missionaries linked spreading Christianity in Africa with colonialism efforts. However, true mission work does not seek to "fix" different cultures as every culture is created by the work of God's hand. Nevertheless, many attempts were made by colonial powers to introduce the Western form of Christianity to Africa starting from the 15th century. Prince Henry the Navigator from Portugal began exploring west Africa during the 15th century. Some scholars claim that the reason for the prince's journey was rooted in a strong missionary desire to spread the gospel of Christ to the unevangelized Africans.[82] Following Henry's trip, Portugal developed and enforced a policy of Christianizing

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[79] European explorers were often led by African guides through existing trade routes. Herodotus in the 5th century BC spoke about a group of Africans, whom he called "Nasamonians," guiding him along existing trade routes to the Sahara desert where he was unable to cross due to the extremely hot climate. *Histories*. 4.127; Europeans were also in contact with representatives of Prester John, an African Christian king, from the 12th to 16th century.
[80] *The Holy Bible*. Matthew 28:18-20.
[81] Jo Luehmann. "Missionary Work and Colonialism." from *Our Bible App* online.
[82] Mammam Dauda and J. N. Gbule. *An Outline of the History of Christianity in West Africa*. Zaria: Missions Press & Publishers, 2000, 1.

all of west Africa. The "Padroado" arrangement granted Portugal the right to appoint Roman Catholic bishops, clerics, and missionaries to ecclesiastical positions in west Africa under the Crown of Portugal.[83]

Shortly after, the Roman Catholic Church began dispatching missionary officials on trading ships to west Africa. The Islands served as a base for the development and establishment of a system of missionary efforts in this region. In 1482, Don Diogo d' Azambuja was sent to Elmina (coast of Ghana) to establish the first Portuguese church. Don Diogo made an attempt to introduce Western Christianity to the chief and natives of Elmina. The chief of this African tribe is said to have accepted Don's offer for the sake of building ties and securing commercial gains.[84] Oshitelu tells of a similar situation that occurred in Senegambia with the Wolf tribe. Political motives are said to have been the driving force behind the chief's acceptance of Western Christianity.[85] In the 17th century, Jesuit missionaries were sent to Sierra-Leone under the leadership of Father Borgerius. The king of this region was given the title King Phillip III of Spain after receiving baptism for him and his sons. The Danish and the Dutch dispatched missionaries to their commercial forts, joining the Portuguese in west Africa, and then the Italians sent their Capuchin missionaries to Congo.[86]

Portugal, Spain, and Italy sent missionaries to Nigeria starting from the 15th century to the 19th century. The Prince of Warri in Nigeria received the title of Saint Sebastian for accepting the faith and getting baptized. His son, Domingo, was offered a Western education in

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[83] Emmanuel A. Ayandele. "Traditional Rulers and Missionaries in Pre-Colonial West Africa." in *Tarikh* 3, no. 1. 1969, 23.
[84] Dauda. *An Outline of the History of Christianity in West Africa*. 20.
[85] Gideon A. Oshitelu. *Expansion of Christianity in West Africa*. Ibadan (Nigeria): Oputoru Books, 2002, 19-20.
[86] Richard Gray. "The Origins and Organization of the Nineteenth-Century Missionary Movement." in *Tarikh* 3, no. 1. 1969, 14.

Portugal, which he accepted. Domingo's son, Don Antonio, known as Olu, studied Christian theology in Portugal. He then took his Western training in Christianity back home to Nigeria to spread it among his people.[87] In the 18th century, the Protestant communities in Europe and America formed the Christian Missionary Societies, which was motivated by the abolition of slavery in Britain and a renewed evangelical spirit. Wesley from England was a leading figure during this period, and he pushed the idea of conversion by choice rather than by force or under corrupt motives. As a result, Europe and America sent missionaries to Africa in the 19th century for the sole purpose of introducing this new idea.[88]

During this period, the Roman Catholic Church became heavily influenced by the Protestants, so much so that they established the Catholic Missionary Societies, planting branches in various countries throughout Europe. Shortly after, the Roman Catholic Church sent missionaries from societies like the Associations for the Propagation of the Faith, the Society of African Missions, and the Holy Ghost Fathers to west Africa. Other institutions involved in this launching of missionaries were the Church Missionary Society, Universities' Mission to Central Africa, Scotland Missions, Society of Holy Ghost Fathers, and the United Missionary Church.[89] Colonialism is believed to have played a major role in the initial success of these missionary efforts.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, also known as the Scramble for Africa, called together major European nations to negotiate plans for the expansion of Europe's control of Africa and ultimate colonization of the entire continent. Dube writes, "There was such high

[87] Dauda. *An Outline of the History of Christianity in West Africa*. 4.
[88] Stephen Neill. *A History of Christian Missions*. London: Penguin Books, 1986, 214. See Gray. "The Origins and Organization." 15.
[89] See Roland Oliver. *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952.

competition and tension between colonial powers that it necessitated regulation to avoid a war [over African territory]."[90] We are told that at this conference, "Rules were established between the colonizing states, including free trade access to the major African river basins and the obligation to actually occupy a territory before claiming it." We are further informed that the "British, French, Germans, Belgians, Portuguese and Italians then moved into the heart of Africa and divided it up in less than fifteen years."[91] Dube concludes, "The scramble to get Africa back from the colonial clutches was and still is waged through the Bible…"[92]

The colonial powers are said to have redrew the ancient map of Africa in order to divide the peoples of Africa and colonize the continent. African groups from different backgrounds with different histories were forced together into one region while Africans with the same background and Christian history, for example, were divided into different regions. From this we get the modern term "North Africa." Africa was divided into two separate territories: North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. The modern construct of the geography of Africa, as Oden points out, has "shaped the fact that African Christianity first appeared north of the Sahara in the first millennium, and then its second millennium saw exponential growth in the south." Oden emphasizes that both the north and south of Africa "have been blessed by an enduring heritage of centuries of classic Christianity."[93]

In the work, *Christian Missions and Colonial Rule in Africa*, Dr. Etim Okun states that, "Colonial administrators occasionally rendered much help and even security to missionaries." He adds, "Colonial image of the missionary enterprise actually affected the reception of the gospel

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[90] Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango. *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, 3.
[91] "Berlin Conference on Africa." *citeco.* online
[92] Ibid. 4.
[93] Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. 13.

message by the African." Okun further explains that Western missionaries entered Africa together with "colonial administrators and traders" to enforce "civilization," a term that African scholars have replaced with "colonization."[94] In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney insists that missionaries were working for the colonial powers. He states, "The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders, and soldiers…missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light."[95] In a review of Rodney's work, Okun seeks to clarify his view, stating, "While British traders were exploiting their African customers, the missionaries preached peace, forgiveness and good neighborliness, which actually prevented genuine rebellion, self-preservation and determination." In Rodney's view, the primary goal of missionaries was to "preserve the status quo," and to uphold and maintain the "master-servant relationship between Africans and Europeans."[96] Rodney writes:

> The church's role was primarily to preserve the social relations of colonialism... the Christian church stressed humility, docility and acceptance. Ever since the days of slavery in the West Indies, the church had been brought in on condition that it should not excite the African slaves with doctrine of equality before God.[97]

Oden sees Western missionary work in Africa as a distraction from the African's Christian birthright and heritage. Oden believes that not only Westerners, "but tragically many African scholars and church leaders also have ignored their earliest African Christian ancestors." Oden states that Africans have been more focused on issues of colonialism and missionary rule in Africa rather than their lost Christian heritage that "awaits their discovery." Oden's concern is

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[94] Etim E. Okun. "Christian Missions and Colonial Rule in Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis." *European Scientific Journal* 10, no. 17 (2014): 198.
[95] Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: L'ouverture, 1972, 277.
[96] Okun. "Christian Missions and Colonial Rule in Africa." 199.
[97] Ibid. 278.

that some African scholars "have been so intent on condemning nineteenth-century colonialist missionary history that they have hardly glimpsed their own momentous premodern patristic African intellectual heritage."[98]

African theology was born out of an urgent need for independence from Western Christian theological domination. Many African theologians regard African theology as a personal calling to search for identity within the African context. The main struggle for the African theologian is believed to be the African traditional religions of his people. Kwame Bediako maintains that this struggle is the reason African theology functions as "something of a dialogue between African Christians and primal religions and spiritualities of Africa."[99] In Edward Schillebeeckx's view, since theology is bound by the cultural context of its place of origin this makes every theology by nature "regionalized" no matter if it had no prior knowledge of that. Therefore, any theology that is "imported" from some other place is "a colonialist undertaking, even if it could not have been experienced as such to begin with."[100] This concept applies to Western theology in Africa. African theology is understood by many African scholars to be a different type of theology in that it is a product of the African context. However, Oden argues that what is assumed to be Western theology is in fact African theology.

Oden briefly discusses the scientific discourse on the ethnic background of early African Christian theologians and leaders like Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine. Since Latin was the language of the Romans who had colonized Africa during early Christianity, there is a term called "Latinization," which means the modifying of foreign names to fit the language of the

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[98] Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. 11.
[99] Kwame Bediako. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture on Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. Cumbria, UK: Regnum Books, 1999, 1. See also Adrian Hastings. *African Christianity*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976, 50-51.
[100] Edward Schillebeeckx. *Christ: the Experience of Jesus as Lord*. New York: Seabury Press, 1980, 650.

colonizers, in this case the changing of traditional African words, names, and phrases into a Latin-style. This has oftentimes led scholars to assume that the Latinized names of early African Christian writers is indication of their European roots.

It is common for the colonized to bear names in the language of their colonizers, since they are often required to receive an education in the colonizers' language. For example, many Nigerians today bear English names because Nigeria was colonized by the British whose language is English. Oden points out that there is evidence showing "a gradual transition" of traditional African names like "Berber, Libyan and Punic family names into their Latin or Greek equivalents during the centuries prior to and during the growth of Christianity." Oden further explains that this "did not affect their ethnicity or skin color, only their names." He adds, "Thus it would not be extraordinary if a person with tribal and family ties reaching thousands of years back into indigenous African history might have a Latin-sounding name."[101]

Oden presents seven astounding ways in which Africa shaped the Christian mind. He informs us that the Western idea of a university, the Christian exegesis of Scripture, early Christian Dogma, early Ecumenical decision making—conciliar patterns, worldwide monasticism, Christian neoplatonism, and rhetorical and dialectical skills were born and matured in Africa. Oden argues that the brightest intellects of theology, literature, philosophy, physics and psychology, as well as the great thinkers, teachers and writers of the early church were born and matured in Africa. For example, Augustine of Hippo and Cyril of Alexandria, who Oden regards as "colossal figures of African theology," clarify the way in which Christianity developed and matured from its inception in the 1st century to the early fifth century. Oden acknowledges that

[101] Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. 67.

Augustine and Cyril "brought to fruition the maturing processes that had been early planted in Africa, according to the Marcan tradition, from the first century."[102]

Oden argues that Western Christianity originated from African seeds. He describes how Western dogmatic formulations and definitions of Christology and the Trinity were "profoundly shaped by definitions and concepts that were defined decades earlier in Africa by Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Augustine and Cyril."[103] The extensive, meticulous works of these Africans who hammered out and settled many conflicts of Christian dogma, and the dogmatic and exegetical formulas by "those mostly anonymous African religious leaders who represented the whole laity in the early African regional councils," Oden says, "came to define Christianity in both Asia and Europe." He further states that, "In many cases we barely know anything more than their names."[104] Oden explains:

> Among conflicts that were first settled in African synods before Nicaea were issues on penitence, diocesan boundaries, episcopal authority and ordination as well as issues on the person of Christ and triune teaching. The main voices in these debates were African. They sorted out the ecumenical acceptability of the views of Sabellius, Tertullian, Arius, Athanasius, and Origen—all Africans. Ecclesiology and penitential patterns that became normative for Europe were first tested in Africa with the issues first raised by Demetrius of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, Optatus of Milevis, and Augustine of Hippo.

Oden informs his readers that, "The vast African church today still prays that the uniting work of the Spirit may reenergize African Christian unity in both the north and south, and remold them into a new whole."[105]

Christianity in Africa has a history tracing back to the days when Jesus walked the earth, so it is certainly an African traditional religion, "assuming that religions that have sustained over

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[102] Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. 125.
[103] Ibid. 47.
[104] Ibid. 51.
[105] Ibid.

a millennium of continuity surely must be called traditional," as Oden states.[106] Christianity followed the African Christians who, owing to ongoing foreign invasions, migrated from the north to the south of Africa at various points in time. Oden insists that Christianity is an indigenous African religion and challenges anyone who would beg to differ. He further states that, "If ancient Christianity is not yet indigenous, then the seventeenth-century arrival of many Bantus in Zululand is not yet indigenous." He continues, "If fourth-century Ethiopian Christianity is not yet native to African culture, then the ninth-century arrival of the camel is not yet native to African culture."[107] Oden concludes his point by calling for a redefinition of the various terms used to categorize what is and is not regarded as original or long-established. He maintains that this has become problematic, and therefore states, "at stake here is a more consistent definition of the terms *indigenous*, *traditional*, and *native*." Oden sets forth some important questions to consider when deciding whether or not Christianity is an African traditional religion. He asks, "If two thousand years of Christian history still fall short of being regarded 'at home' in Africa, then what could qualify as African? What else has lasted two thousand years?"[108]

C. Origin of African Indigenous Churches (AICs)

Another basis for the popular misconception that Christianity arrived in Africa less than 200 years ago can be found in the statistical data suggesting the percentage of the African population that was Christian in the early 20th century to be at only 3 percent. The Pew Research

[106] Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. 95.
[107] Ibid. 30-31.
[108] Ibid.

Center shows the percentage "climbed from 9% in 1910 to 63% in 2010."[109] This is tied to the claim that the history of African Indigenous Churches, also called African Initiated Churches or African Independent Churches (AICs), traces back no more than 200 years. African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria, for example, include the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C & S), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and the Church of the Lord (Aladura).

African theologians, like the late Ogbu Kalu, believe the origin of AICs stretches back only as far as to the late 18th and early 19th century when Africans began to resist colonial missionary presence in Africa. Ethiopianism was the term used to refer to this resistance and is based on the prophecy in Psalm 68:31 that says, "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." Kalu explains: "the Ethiopian movement believed that Africa could be redeemed through Christianity."[110] Anderson states that the AICs see themselves as "a reformation of over-Europeanized Christianity." He insists that "the entire AIC movement in all its many forms throughout the continent, but particularly in its most prominent Pentecostal-type churches, represents such an indigenous Reformation and transformation of Christianity on a continental scale unprecedented in the history of the worldwide church."[111]

The goal of the Ethiopian movement was to indigenize the church in Africa to a greater extent than had been before in order to differentiate African Christianity from the Western form brought to Africa by colonial missionaries. In *Towards an Indigenous Church*, Idowu's primary focus is on the church in Nigeria. Idowu presents the various questions asked by Nigerians

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[109] "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population." *Pew Research Center* online.
[110] Ogbu Kalu. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, viii.
[111] Allan H. Anderson. *African Reformation: African-Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*. Trenton, NJ, and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2001, 5.

concerning Christianity and the need for the church to clarify its place and purpose in Nigeria. The purpose is to prove that the church in Nigeria is independent from any aspect of the colonial missionary agenda to subjugate and control by the imposition of Western languages, culture, and religion. Idowu explains, "The various questions are all of a piece: they arise from the basic question as to whether Christianity is not, after all, a European institution which has no beneficial relevance for Nigerians, but which has nevertheless been imposed upon them as an instrument of colonial policy by their European overlords." Idowu continues, "And if that is so, what is the need for Nigerians to continue to accommodate the imposition at this time of day when they are wide-awake to their independent status as a nation."[112]

In *The History of African Indigenous Churches*, Sibusiso Masondo argues that the confusion of whether or not Christianity is relevant to Africans is in the label "Christian" itself. Masondo states that, "the term 'Christian' as used by missionaries and theologians is loaded with a European religio-cultural content." He explains that, "Their definition of a Christian, therefore, excluded any practice that did not conform to their formula." In Masondo's view, the plan of Western colonial missionaries was to erase Africa and Africans from the history of Christianity altogether. Masondo speaks about a second phase in the process that "was dominated by anthropologists who implemented ethnographic tools of investigation." He says that the researchers assigned to this job not only "actively collected data on these churches" they also recorded their belief systems, and the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) were labeled as syncretic: "an illegitimate mixing of Christianity and African beliefs and customs." Masondo insists that this practice of discrimination against AICs has been in existence since the emergence

[112] Bolaji Idowu. *Towards an Indigenous Church*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965, 1-2.

of the African Church. He recognizes that AICs "have always been treated ethnographically while the mission churches were treated historically," which resulted in the AICs "being perceived as exotic."[113] Gerald West took on a case study that showed a significant difference in the way colonial missionaries interpreted the Bible compared to indigenous Africans. Dube explains that, "While colonial missionaries opened and read the Bible, the indigenous people brought their own questions to the Bible and engaged it in their own terms, from the very beginning."[114] From this concept, West recognizes that "the Bible would not always speak as the ones who carried it anticipated."[115]

The response of AICs to colonial missionary domination was the further strengthening of African Christianity. Modern AICs are heirs to the early church of Africa. The origin of AICs can in fact be traced back to early Christianity and the time of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (c.200-258 AD). The term "Donatists" is used by historians today to refer to the AICs of early Christianity. It is important to note that Africans in the early church did not call themselves "Donatists." This is a category that was given to them by modern historians and is linked to the Donatist controversy that arose during Roman Diocletian's persecution (303-313 AD).[116] The Donatists were the AICs at the time of Roman colonialism and are considered by scholars to be heirs to Cyprian. The Donatists themselves lay claim to Cyprian.[117]

The Donatist controversy stemmed from the disagreement between Cyprian of Africa and Stephen of Rome (254-257 AD) over the treatment of the *lapsi*, Christians who denied their faith

[113] Sibusiso Masondo. "The History of African Indigenous Churches in Scholarship." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 18, no. 2 (2005): 1.
[114] Dube. *Postcolonial Perspectives*, 75.
[115] Ibid. See also Gerald West. *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in South Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995.
[116] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 195.
[117] Ibid.

under persecution by Roman authorities. Cyprian insisted that the Church was called by God to forgive those who repented. Britannica explains that "Stephen threatened to excommunicate bishops in Africa (including Cyprian)…unless they discontinued the practice of rebaptizing heretics."[118] In the wake of Roman persecution against Christians, Stephen assumed the authority to oversee the African Indigenous Churches. In response, Cyprian wrote a treatise against Stephen that was supported by other African bishops at the Council of Carthage in 256. Cyprian sent African representatives to Rome warning of a schism or separation between the AICs and Rome. Britannica explains, "Against Cyprian's argument that each bishop controlled his own see, Stephen staunchly asserted papal supremacy, and he regarded Cyprian's envoys as heretics."[119]

Around 312, when the bishop of Carthage at the time died, many Africans were in disagreement over whether his successor, Caecilian, should take the position of bishop since he had been ordained by a *lapsi* and therefore had committed idolatry. Caecilian's opponents appointed Donatus as "the rival bishop to Caecilian," and thus—as Wilhite explains it—"the Donatist party was said to have formed a schism over and against their opponents, the 'Catholics.'" This tells us that both parties were originally African and "claimed to be heirs to Cyprian" during the Donatist controversy. Wilhite states that, "A consensus of scholars today find that the 'Donatists' have a better claim to his legacy," and author Jean-Paul Brisson "concluded that this party could very well have been labeled 'Cyprianism' instead of 'Donatism.'"[120]

[118] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Saint Stephen I." *Encyclopedia Britannica* online.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 195.

Both parties called themselves "Catholic." The difference was that the Caecilianists were operating under Rome, claiming "the majority of the overseas churches support them"[121] as they were the minority churches in Africa. For example, like Cyprian before them, the Donatist continued the practice of "rebaptizing." The Caecilianists, however, continued "the Roman practice of accepting heretical baptism and required only the confession of sin and the laying on of hands."[122] Therefore, historians label the Caecilianists as the "Catholic" party. As Wilhite points out, "the label 'Donatist' was meant to identify this party as a schismatic group" and its rival party, the Caecilians, "claimed to be the 'Catholic' party, that is, the party in communion with the 'universal' church." Wilhite further states that, "Despite the widespread agreement among historians that the label 'Donatist' carries an inherent bias as well as historical inaccuracy, no plausible alternative has emerged."[123]

Another difference between the Donatists and Caecilianists (or "Catholics") is that the Donatists placed high value on martyrdom, so much so that they held feasts to celebrate "venerated saints who died for their faith." This is said to be an important characteristic of Donatism. Wilhite explains that "the Caecilianists continue to honor the saints, but they attempt to curtail the excesses they detect in the Donatist practices."[124] When Augustine and his mother Monnica visited Milan, Monnica who was a Donatist, was rebuked by Ambrose the bishop of Milan for her traditional African practice of having feasts at the shrines of martyrs/saints. Rebecca Moore offers her perspective concerning this incident:

> Monnica's piety and practice seem to reflect the African Christianity that Augustine subsequently tried to replace with catholic, or Romanized, Christianty…Although Monnica compiled with Caecilianist Christianity – a

[121] Ibid. 199.
[122] Ibid. 216.
[123] Ibid. 196.
[124] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 215.

> minority church movement that rejected the Donatists' insistence on the rebaptism of those whose sins required it –she continued her North African traditions until Ambrose admonished her to stop.[125]

The Conference of Carthage in 411 was presided over by Roman officials. Scholars assume that the council's decision in favor of the Caecilianists resulted in the end of Donatism (or African Indigenous Churches) and the ultimate decline of African Christianity. Historical evidence proves that after the conference of 411 the Donatists continued to exist even to this day. The Donatists were the churches of Africa in early Christianity, and these AICs continued to flourish even after the fall of the Roman Empire. On the origin and survival of the Donatists, Robert A. Markus explains:

> Donatism was no new creation. It was the representative in the fourth century of an older African theological tradition with deep roots in its characteristic religious mentality…Donatism was, quite simply, the continuation of the old African Christian tradition in the post-Constantinian world. It was the world that had changed, not African Christianity.[126]

Markus later states that it is the "disappearance of Roman rule in 430, that constitutes the anomaly in African Christianity."[127] Brent Shaw holds a similar view as Markus. He argues that the confusion is in the label "Donatist":

> If, as has been argued, the so-called "Donatists" never existed except insofar as the Catholic Church, backed by the power of the Roman state, was able to label and to define them, then, logically, when the latter no longer had the authority and the sheer force to keep that definition alive, no more "Donatists" would exist.

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[125] Rebecca Moore. "O Mother, Where art Thou? In Search of Saint Monnica." in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith C. Stark. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2007, 159. For more on Monnica's Donatist African Christian faith, see James J. O'Donnell. *Augustine: A New Biography*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005, 55. Also see Augustine's cousin, Severinus, who was a Donatist (*Letter* 52).

[126] Robert A. Markus. "Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Works." in *Schism, Heresy, and Religious Protest*, edited by Derek Baker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, 28-29.

[127] Ibid. 35.

> Rather, the traditional Christians of north Africa would continue to exist as they always had.[128]

Wilhite argues that if the Donatists were "in fact the traditional expression" of Christianity in Africa, and "the Caecilianists gained 'Catholic' status only because of their ties to Rome and to the emperor," then certainly "it is the Caecilianists who must be said to disappear in the early fifth century when the Vandals take over North Africa and persecute the pro-Nicene Christians." [129] AICs, and by extension African Christianity, were in existence since the beginning of the faith and are still alive and well today. The Romans lost control of Africa when the Arabs took over. Consequently, the Romans lost access to the movement of AICs. This is the period when African Christian history suddenly disappears from Western historical records.

Many African Christians migrated south during the various foreign invasions, including the Vandal, Byzantine (Eastern Roman Empire), and Arab-Muslim periods in order to escape religious persecution and possible death. What happened to the AICs? Western literary records can only provide some detail about the AICs at the time of Roman colonialism. These sources reveal that the Donatists (or AICs) established their own churches throughout Africa as well as overseas churches, and African bishops were planted in places like Rome.[130]

Western sources know little about the movement of the AICs and their new establishments in the southern regions of Africa. The African Christians established churches in the regions where they settled. Since Western sources from this period are absent, AICs in regions like west Africa during the Arab occupation of north Africa are worth examining. Future

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[128] Brent Shaw. "African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions, and 'Donatists.'" originally in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent*, ed. Malcolm R. Greenshields and Thomas Arthur Robinson. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, 33.
[129] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 212.
[130] Ibid. 204.

studies will need to take seriously the African Christian sources from this period, be it written or oral. In addition, these studies will need to focus on one region at a time and devote enough attention to the entire history of the AICs in that region.

II. Roman Colonization of Africa

Carthage was an African city in modern Tunisia that was invaded by Rome in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. Cato the Censor (234-149 BC), a Roman senator, ended every one of his speeches with the order, *Carthago delenda est*! "Carthage must be destroyed!" In response, Rome waged the third Punic war against Carthage. The Punic Wars were three wars initiated by Rome against Carthage between 264 BC and 146 BC. The third Punic war destroyed Carthage and made way for the Romans to take control of the African city.[131] As a result, the African population was sold into slavery and all of northern Africa eventually came under Roman rule.[132] Punic was African language and culture, and the Punic Wars mattered to Africans. Wilhite states that, "Famous African Christians like Tertullian and Augustine knew of Cato's famous speech, referencing the Roman senator by name."[133] Wilhite adds:

> Allusions to the Punic wars and to Africa's heritage can be found in many of the North African church fathers, and in addition to an implicit non-Roman identity, or other-than-Roman identity, which can be detected in most of the works from this region, these writers often explicitly described themselves as "African."[134]

Latin, the language of the Romans, became the language of the urban African population and continued as the language of the African Church. However, the local African population

[131] Africans were the natives of the land and considered to be "Carthaginians" by Romans. See an inscription of a statue honoring flamen of Divus from Carthage that reads "by the decree of the Africans" in Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire*, vol. 3: "Provincial Cult," part 2: "The Provincial Priesthood." Brill: Leiden, 2002, 199.
[132] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 14.
[133] Ibid. 1.
[134] Ibid.

continued to speak their native languages of Punic, Libyan and Berber. Despite the Roman invasion and destruction of the city, Carthage remained a proud African heritage.

Apuleius (c.124-180 AD) was an African Platonic philosopher, rhetorician, and scholar who wrote in the Latin language. Apuleius praised Carthage as "the venerated teacher of our province…the celestial muse of Africa."[135] As a way to uplift the African population in the midst of the wars with Rome, African leaders would point to some positive aspects of the wars. Tertullian, an African Christian theologian and writer from Carthage, addressed the people of Africa as he declared, "Men of Carthage, ever princes of Africa, ennobled by ancient memories, blest with modern felicities, I rejoice that times are so prosperous…These are the 'piping times of peace' and plenty. Blessings rain from the empire and from the sky."[136] Tertullian immediately changes his tone and speaks reality, stating, "Draw we now our material from some other source, lest Punichood either blush or else grieve in the midst of Romans."[137]

The Punic empire was the only African empire that fell under Rome. Wilhite points out that "even though the Roman sources largely depicted the Punic presence as having crumbled to dust along with Carthage's walls, the sources from later centuries reveal an ongoing presence of the Punic-speaking population."[138] Wilhite draws attention to the way in which the spread of the Latin language in Africa and the adoption of aspects of Roman culture by Africans have in the past made scholars view Africa as Rome, thus representing African leaders in the early church, African writers, philosophers, scholars, etc., as Roman. Wilhite observes, "Rome's influence in Africa was once seen by scholars to be ubiquitous, almost totalizing in its effects on the

[135] Apuleius. *Florida* 4.20.
[136] Tertullian. *On the Cloak* 1.1.
[137] Ibid. 2.1.
[138] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 14.

surrounding region." He adds that "no province was as Romanized as Africa." Wilhite sees the reason for this to be based "primarily in the linguistic spread of the Latin language and the architectural evidence of Roman presence that peppered the landscape." Wilhite continues, "Some of Rome's most impressive architectural artifacts can still be seen in modern Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya."[139] According to Wilhite:

> Scholars now understand Africa to have retained its pre-Roman heritage throughout the Roman period (roughly until around 650 AD). Africa was not as much Romanized as it was *legionized*. In other words, despite Roman colonization, which was meant to facilitate trade for Rome's economic improvement, African languages (like Libyan and Punic), African religions [like Christianity], and African practices survived and even thrived."[140]

A. Persecution of African Christians in the Early Church

When Christianity first began, it was illegal to be a Christian in the Roman Empire. It is believed that in the early stages of the Christian movement, Rome perceived Christianity to be a political threat, and therefore set out a policy for handling Christians. Since Africa was a part of the Roman Empire, this law applied to Africans. Trajan (98-117 AD), the Roman Emperor, issued a decree that required Africans to worship and offer sacrifices to the Roman gods. If they did not follow this policy, it was considered a crime. Trajan's rescript reads:

> They (the Christians) are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it, that is, by worshiping our gods, even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance.[141]

In *Ad Nationes*, Tertullian denounced the policy as he stated, "Your sentences, however, report only that one has confessed himself a Christian. No name of a crime stands against us, but only

[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Pliny the Younger, *Epist*. 10, 96; Translated from *Roman Civilization: the Empire*. edited by N. Lewis and M. Reinhold. New York, 1955.

the crime of a name." In François Decret's view, the policy was only "drawing attention to the absurd procedure in which the magistrates applied Trajan's rescript…condemning only those Christians denounced by a known accuser."[142]

The Scillitan Martyrs were one of the earliest documented African martyrs. On July 17, 180 AD, seven men and five women from Scillium, a town in Numidia (Augustine's hometown), were condemned to death and executed at the order of the Roman governor Proconsul Vigellius Saturninus. The names of the Martyrs were—Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Veturius, Felix, Aquilinus, Laetantius, Ianuaria, Generosa, Vestia, Donata, Secunda. Thompson and Ferguson point out that "some of these names are those of indigenes, not of Roman colonists, and it seems probable that those which have a Latin air are in fact Latinizations of African names."[143] Thompson and Ferguson write that following the death of these 12 African Christians from Scillium, "the next twenty-five years saw more martyrdoms."[144]

Vibia Perpetua was a young noblewoman from Carthage who was killed for her faith. She was 22, a wife and mother of a young son. Around 203 AD, Perpetua was executed in the Carthage Amphitheater alongside her friends Felicitas, Revocatus (Felicitas' husband), Saturninus and Secundulus. All five of them were caught practicing Christianity under Saturus, their spiritual mentor, and all five of them were arrested. Saturus turned himself in to share their punishment. Thompson and Ferguson highlight the significance of their names:

> Perpetua could represent the type of meaningful African name, and it is suspicious that her brother bears a Greek name popular among Africans…Perpetua spoke Greek. Her fellow-martyr, the slave Felicitas, who had a husband Revocatus, sounds African. With them was a presbyter named Saturus, who seems to have brought Perpetua into the church, and catechumens named

[142] François Decret and Edward Smither. "Tertullian: The 'Master.'" in *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 1st ed., 36.
[143] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 182.
[144] Ibid.

> Saturninus, Secundulus, and Rusticus. We know of another presbyter Aspasius, deacons Tertius and Pomponius, and the bishop Optatus, the first we can name, with a name surely translated from Punic or Berber.[145]

Cyprian studied the works of Tertullian his "master" and was greatly influenced by him. Jerome of Stridon (c.347-420 AD) recorded that Cyprian "was accustomed never to pass a day without reading [the works of] Tertullian, and that he frequently said to [his secretary] 'Give me the master," meaning Tertullian."[146] Decret explains that, "When referring to Cyprian, Jerome simply called him an African (*Cyprianus Afer*)," meaning Cyprian the African.[147]

Cyprian followed in the footsteps of Tertullian by advocating for the African Church's independence from Rome. Throughout his years as bishop, Cyprian hosted many African church councils in Carthage that included bishops from various parts of Africa. They would all gather to address the problems facing their communities and then defend their right to deal with these problems in Africa under African church leadership. In the September council of 256, eighty-six African bishops gathered in one accord to communicate to Rome the African position concerning independence. The bishops called themselves "beloved colleagues" who had, from different parts of Africa, "come together as one body" with priests, deacons, and "the greater part of the people being present likewise."[148] Decret believes that African Christian leadership was seen as a threat to the Roman Empire and so the goal was to "destroy the leadership of the church—particularly the bishops—which, through its development and organization, had become regarded as a rival power and threat to the Roman state."[149]

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[145] Ibid.
[146] Jerome. *De vir. ill*. 53.3.
[147] François Decret and Edward Smither. "Cyprian the 'Pope' of Carthage." in *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 1st ed., 69.
[148] François Decret and Edward Smither. "Mid-Third-Century Persecution and Crisis in Africa." in *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 1st ed., 46.
[149] Ibid. 50.

In 257, Roman Emperor Valerian issued an edict ordering all African church leaders to submit to Roman authority by attending the pagan ceremonies. Valerian also confiscated church property, thus African church property gradually became Roman state property. Valerian's edict affected Cyprian as bishop. Cyprian sent a letter to one of his colleagues informing him of the edict, writing:

> The Emperor Valerian has added to his address a copy of the letter which he has written to the governors of the provinces concerning us. We are daily awaiting the arrival of this letter, resolved as we are to stand in all firmness of faith ready to endure a martyr's suffering.[150]

On September 14, 258, Cyprian was arrested and taken to a place called the *Ager Sexti*, the Roman governor Maximus' vacation home, and there he was beheaded by the sword.[151] The *Acta proconsularia* is a document that provides detail about the edict, Cyprian's arrest and interrogations, and his martyrdom.

The Roman persecution of Christians lasted for almost 300 years until the reign of Constantine who, in 313, issued a decree (Edict of Milan) that granted religious toleration for Christians under Roman authority. The Roman Empire was already in decline at the time of Augustine (354-430 AD). During this period, blame was placed on the African Christians for the fall of Carthage, so Augustine stepped in to defend his people. Augustine clarified to the Romans that the reason for the fall of Rome was not on the Africans but on the Romans and their destruction of the African city of Carthage.[152]

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[150] Cyprian *Letter*. 80.3.
[151] Decret. "Cyprian the 'Pope' of Carthage." 80.
[152] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 52.

III. Augustine the African

Augustine (354-430 AD), who is called the "Father of Western Christianity," was an African Christian theologian and philosopher. Western theology is considered to be a footnote to the work of Augustine, "because no other writer, with the exception of the biblical authors, has had more influence on Christianity."[153] Augustine's writings helped bring together the Greek and Hebrew parts of Christianity. His *Confessions* maintains and upholds a worship philosophy rooted in traditional African teaching. VanZanten recognizes Augustine's *Confessions* as "an African text…that eventually played its part in the formation of modern African literature."[154]

With so much scholarly attention being paid to Augustine as a Roman-educated African who is then considered Roman, there remains a shift in focus away from Augustine's African background and self-identification as an African. David Mattingly agrees that, "More work is urgently needed on tribal settlements and on the exploration of African and Punic influences in Roman-period Africa."[155] Wilhite advises scholars to take a postcolonial approach to reading and studying Augustine and when this happens scholars will discover that Africans in the Roman Empire were "operating from within multiple cultures and identities." Wilhite provides an example of such a circumstance:

> An indigenous Indian, for example, under the rule of the British Empire could easily accommodate English language, customs, values and even religion, a state described by colonizers as being "more British than the British," while simultaneously remaining fully Indian in their self-identity, a state described by Bhabha as "hybridity."[156]

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[153] "Book of the Week."
[154] Susan VanZanten. "Introduction: African Narrative and The Christian Tradition: Storytelling and Identity," *Christianity and Literature* 61, no. 3 (2012): 369.
[155] David J. Mattingly. "From One Colonialism to Another: Imperialism and the Maghreb." in *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives*, ed. J. Webster and N . J. Cooper. Leicester: University of Leicester, 1996, 62.
[156] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 12.

Augustine admitted that he had a strong African accent when speaking Latin. He described where he came from as a place where "Punic" is the spoken language and in the cities one would find Africans speaking Latin. Augustine says, "they speak Punic, that is, African."[157] Augustine's father, Patricius[158] was an African elite who made many attempts to elevate his social status in the Roman Empire without success. Instead, he became a part of the local *curia* and used his networking connections to link his son to other African elites who were well acquainted with Roman culture. Wilhite writes that, "Such a practice is consistent with earlier African elites, such as Fronto and Apuleius who invoked *hospital iura* (the rights of friends) in order to further themselves and fellow Africans in Roman society."[159]

It seems scholars are unanimous on the fact that Augustine's mother came from an African background. Wilhite argues, "the very fact that Patricius would marry her suggests that he was not Roman, given the studies of marriage in Roman Africa that have found intermarriage to be rare."[160] Augustine mentioned that it would be difficult for his mother to speak Latin without an accent if she ever tried.[161] Wilhite points out a similar situation with Septimius Severus, "who was the first African emperor and who was embarrassed by his sister's African accent."[162]

Monnica also had a Donatist background. Wilhite makes a point that if the study of W.H.C Frend, which argues for a correlation between Donatism and native Africans, is true, then

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[157] Ibid. 14
[158] Patricius's name is said to derive from the African god "Liber Pater" (i.e. equivalent to Dionysos/Bacchus). Ibid.
[159] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 250.
[160] Wilhite. *Ancient African Christianity*. 250; see David Cherry. "Marriage and Acculturation in Roman Algeria." *Classical Philogogy* 92. 1, 1997, 71-83.
[161] Augustine. *De ordin*. 2.17.45.
[162] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 15.

"this ecclesiastical connection further suggests Monnica's indigenous ethnicity."[163] Augustine mentions that his mother held on to some traditional African customs from "her own local practices."[164] Another point is that his mother's name, Monnica, is said to be based on the African/Libyan god "Ammon" or Yoruba *mon* or *mimon* meaning "holy," and Augustine's name is said to be "a typical version of a Berber [African] honorific name."[165] Augustine reveals that both he and his son spoke Punic, but were not the best at speaking the language. Wilhite suggests that, "Perhaps, both of them learned Punic from their mothers, who continued to speak the indigenous language to their sons, despite their fathers' preference for the Roman language."[166] He explains, "Patricius appears as an African who trained his son to pursue *Romanitas*."[167]

Latin was Augustine's first language as he states in the *Confessions*.[168] However, Augustine admitted that he spoke Latin with an African accent, which annoyed the Romans.[169] Like Augustine, Apuleius struggled with his African accent, as he stated, "For who among you would forgive me for a single solecism? Who would allow me one ignorantly pronounced syllable? Who would permit me to jabber any wild and uncouth words like those that well up in the mouth of the insane?"[170] Wilhite sees the African accent as one of many challenges Africans had to face under Roman rule. He explains that, "The new elite of Africa struggled to transcend their Africanity and to assume romanitas, which required their speech to be…'more Roman than

[163] Ibid. 16.
[164] Ibid. ref. *Conf*. 6.2.2.
[165] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 184.
[166] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 18.
[167] Ibid. 16.
[168] conf. 1.14.23
[169] *De ordin*. 2.17.45.
[170] Apuleius. *Florida*. 9.6-7.

the Romans'…the common phrase in postcolonial discussions wherein one is said to be 'more English than the English.'"[171]

A Roman or classical education was one of a few ways to success for Africans under Roman rule. Africans could become citizens if they earned it by a Roman education in Latin.[172] A Roman education consisted of three levels: Literatus, Grammaticus, and Rhetoric. The first level was elementary learning to read and write in Latin. The second level was grammar school where African students learned Latin grammar. The third level known as *tertiary* was rhetoric, the study of communication and law.[173] Augustine and many other Africans followed the path of pursuing a higher Roman education in order to elevate their social status in the Roman Empire. Augustine completed the first level of elementary learning in his hometown of Thagaste. At the age of 15, he left to the nearby town of Madura for grammar school and then took a year off to raise funds for a higher education in rhetoric. After saving up enough money for school Augustine moved to Carthage to complete the final level.[174]

Early African Christian literature is in the Latin and Greek languages because African Christian leaders and theologians were writing under their Roman and Greek colonizers. Even within the Latin language, Africans remained loyal to their own African culture and tradition. Augustine clarified that he was an African first, as he stated, "Remember that I am an African, writing for Africans, even as one living in Africa."[175] Tzvetan Todorov, a French historian

[171] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 22.
[172] An African's ability to speak Latin proved their level of education, rank, and social status.
[173] Calvin L. Troup. "Augustine the African: Critic of Roman Colonialist Discourse." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 25 (1995): 98.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Peter Brown. *Augustine of Hippo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, 134.

explains that, "Language has always been the companion of empire."[176] Augustine discusses the effect of Latin on Roman-educated Africans as himself:

> But the imperial city has endeavored to impose on subject nations not only her yoke, but her language, as a bond of peace, so that interpreters, far from being scarce, are numberless. This is true; but how many great wars, how much slaughter and bloodshed, have provided this unity! And though these are past, the end of these miseries has not yet come.[177]

There are a few times when Augustine's opponents used his African heritage to degrade him. For example, around 404 AD, Augustine made a request asking for Jerome to explain his reasoning for choosing the Hebrew text over the Septuagint. Jerome quickly shuts the conversation down and warns Augustine, "If, however, you assiduously hammer me to engage, then I remind you of that historical event where Quintus Maximus in his patience shattered Hannibal in his youthful pride."[178] Wilhite recognizes that, "By likening Augustine to Hannibal who was defeated by Quintus Maximus (i.e. Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus Cunctator), Jerome evokes the Punic wars and Africa's tragic hero, in effect demarcating Augustine as an over-zealous African." He adds, "Augustine does not explicitly address Jerome's allusion, but the rhetorical point would certainly not have been missed, especially since Augustine had earlier written to Jerome explicitly speaking on behalf of 'all the African churches.'"[179]

In another instance, Augustine and Secundinus the Manichaean were in a heated discussion. Secundinus, who self-identifies as a Roman, attacks Augustine's Punic/African heritage as he, like Jerome, calls Augustine "Hannibal."[180] During the Pelagian controversy, Julian of Eclanum made an accusation that Augustine was bringing African teaching into the

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[176] Tzvetan Todorov. *The Conquest of America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1984, 220.
[177] Augustine. *City of God*. XIX.7.
[178] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 18. ref. Augustine. *Ep*. 72.3.
[179] Ibid. 19. ref. *Ep*. 28.2. [CSEL 34.1: "*omnis Africanarum ecclesiarum*."]
[180] Ibid. ref. Secundinus, *Ep*. 2.

catholic church. Julian uses the phrases "Numidian stubbornness" and "Punic reasonings" to degrade Augustine and then refers to Augustine as "the Punic Aristotle."[181] In response, Augustine educates Julian on his own background, demonstrating that Julian would be nothing without the African Punics:

> Wish not to disparage this "Punic"…Even given the fact that Italy birthed you, it still remains that you think the Punics are bested by your blood-line, when in reality they have not been bested by your brain-power. Flee not the "Punic" but the penal. For you cannot avoid Punic respondents so long as you adore your own power. After all, even the blessed Cyprian was Punic.[182]

Wilhite explains that Augustine is "echoing earlier African elites who could not deny their African patria and so instead rhetorically appealed to so-called barbarians such as Anacharsis the Scythian who, the Africans Fronto (*Epistula ad M. Caesarem 5*) and Apuleius (*Apologia 24*) both insisted, was wiser than the Greeks."[183]

Around 428, Quodvultdeus, the African bishop of Carthage and friend of Augustine, asked for Augustine's advice, calling it, "African bread isolated from any foreign flavors."[184] Wilhite states: "Quodvultdeus' imagery alludes to the fact that Africa had become the breadbasket of the Roman Empire…[his] request for "African bread" that remains in Africa is meant to be complimentary to Augustine, because Augustine's fellow Africans desire this bread "pure of any foreign [= Roman?] flavors."[185]

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[181] Lamberigts. "The Italian Julian of Aeclanum."
[182] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 20: *"Noli istum Poenum…spernere. Non enim quia te Apulia genuit, ideo Poenos uincendos existimes gente, quos non potes mente. Poenas potius fuge, non Poenos; nam disputatores Poenos non potes fugere, quamdiu te delectat in tua virtute confidere, et beatus enim Cyprianus Poenus fuit*." ref. C. Iul. 6.18.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid. ref. *Ep*. 223.3.
[185] Ibid. 20-21.

Around 390, Augustine wrote a letter to African Bishop Aurelius of Carthage and in it he prays that God may heal "the African church."[186] When making a comparison between Christ (in who Augustine identifies) and famous magicians as Apollonius and Apuleius, Augustine points to an important trait they both share, that is, the African heritage. Augustine writes, "It is best to speak of Apuleius, who is known as an African among us Africans." [187] Wilhite explains that "Augustine's *apud nos*, or "among us," is explicitly "us Africans."[188]

The influence of Augustine's thought impacts all disciplines of life, and yet his African identity should not be overlooked. It is Augustine's African background that is the base upon which his life, works, teachings, and theology are clearly understood.

A. The Nature of God

As Augustine says, God is "most hidden and most present" (*secretissime et praesentissime*).[189] This understanding of God's nature means for Augustine that God is both transcendent and immanent. That is to say, the universe cannot contain God, for he exists above and independent from it while at the same time is fully present within it. In Genesis it states that God was before all time and all worlds, that is, he brought the universe into existence (1:1), and the book of Romans indicates that God is all around us in nature and "understood through what has been made" (1:20).

"For You made them not out of need of them," says Augustine, "but out of the plenitude of Your goodness, holding them together and converting them to form, but not as though Your

[186] Ibid. 24. ref. *Ep*. 22.2; See Frank L. Cross. "History and Fiction in the African Canons." *Journal of Theological Studies* 12 (1961): 229.
[187] Wilhite. "Augustine the African." 24. ref. *Ep*. 138.4.19.
[188] Ibid. 26. *Ep*. 138.4.19.
[189] Augustine. *Confessions*. 1.4.4.

joy was somehow completed from them" (*non ex indigentia fecisti sed ex plenitudine bonitatis tuae, cohibens atque convertens ad formam, non ut tamquam tuum gaudium compleatur ex eis*). [190] In 1 John, we are told that God is perfection and all that is good (1:5). God is by nature perfect; an infinite perfection of fullness. The biblical meaning of perfection refers to a state of completeness or absolute wholeness. In *The City of God*, Augustine refers to this absolute being in absolute perfection as the "God of gods" who is on top of the ontological hierarchy. In traditional African society, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence are believed to be divine attributes of God that are exclusive to his nature and make him unique and worthy of worship.[191]

1. Omnipotence

In the *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine writes that God is "omnipotent and not changeable in any particular way…" (*omnipotentem atque ex nulla particula commutabilem…*)[192] God is the only being who possesses omnipotence. The word "omnipotent" derives from the Latin words for total (omni) and power (potent). In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of omnipotent is "all-powerful" or having unlimited power. Simply put, God has total power over both the physical and spiritual realms and by his power he perfectly accomplishes all that is good.

For Augustine, the nature and incredible beauty of creation is a small reflection of the power of its Creator. Augustine spent a great deal of time writing on the nature of creation and

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[190] *conf*. 13.4.5.
[191] In *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti describes different aspects of African traditional religion like the Supreme Being who is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (all-good; perfect). John S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London: Heinemann, 1990.
[192] Augustine, and Carroll Mason Sparrow. *De libero arbitrio voluntatis; St. Augustine on free will*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1947, 1.2.

the book of Genesis in particular. He wrote three commentaries on the first chapter of Genesis in his works, *On Genesis against the Manichaeans* (389 A.D.), *Letter of Genesis, Unfinished Book* (393 A.D.), and *The Letter of Genesis* (401-415 A.D.) and summarized his commentaries with some modifications in *The City of God* (413-427 A.D.). In the book of Genesis, the first chapter describes in detail the power of God in creation:

> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep… And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear." And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants, yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years…"[193]

Augustine sees the 6-day process of creation as representing a logical framework that is not only good but ordered and hierarchical; it is a light which illumines everything else. Augustine writes, "with respect to their own nature…the creatures are glorifying to their Artificer."[194] He adds that, "all natures, then, inasmuch as they are, and have therefore a rank and species of their own, and a kind of internal harmony, are certainly good. And when they are in the places assigned to them by the order of their nature, they preserve such being as they have received."[195]

The first chapter of Genesis reveals what had been desired by God from the very beginning. Augustine understands that the purpose of this revelation is to explain the order of existence and provide created beings with a sense of purpose. In the first and second verse we have the starting process of creation. A chaos was the first matter. This immense mass of matter

[193] *The Holy Bible*. Genesis. 1:1-3, 6, 9, 11, 14.
[194] Aug. *The City of God.* 12.4.
[195] Ibid. 12.5.

was "without form and void" or in confusion and empty. Augustine writes, "the primal abyss was almost nothingness, for it was still totally without form, although it did exist, since it had the capacity to receive form."[196] He continues, "For you, Lord, made the world from formless matter, and that formless matter that was almost nothing at all you made from nothing at all, intending to create from it all the great things which fill us humans with wonder."[197]

Augustine understands this creative power is ongoing and constantly flowing as it is often actively showing up in miraculous ways. God had the option to make the work of creation perfect initially, but instead, he chose this gradual process to show the long-established system of order and the work of creation as both purpose and intelligence. There was nothing until God said something. He spoke creation into existence and his power was conveyed by the words of his mouth. All the power and everything else belongs to Him as Deuteronomy explains it, "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it (10:14)." Isaiah made an attempt at describing the exceeding greatness of this power:

> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? (Isaiah 40:12)

For Augustine, creation is marked by "measure" (*mensura*), "number" (*numero*) and "weight" (*pondus* or *ordo*). He refers to measure when he speaks of the nature of created order, "in Your word, by which they are created they hear: 'From here' and 'up to here'" (*in verbo enim tuo, per quod creantur, ibi audiunt, 'hinc' et 'huc usque'*).[198] The passages from the book of Isaiah preserve God's ongoing instruction to humanity. Isaiah paints a portrait of God to help people

[196] *conf.* 12.8.8.
[197] *conf.* 12.8.8.
[198] *conf.* 4.10.15.

comprehend the magnitude of absolute perfection.[199] The picture (framed as a rhetorical question) speaks of paying careful attention to detail, as in "measuring out just the right amount of dirt." In this particular passage we have what has been done (measured), the object of the action (the dust of the earth) and how it was accomplished (using a balanced scale).

In the *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine writes that God is "the creator of all good things, in regard to which he himself stands before as more excellent, the most just ruler of all that he created; nor was any other nature a helper in creating, as if he were not sufficient unto himself…"[200] Isaiah indicates that humanity owes its existence to the Absolute Perfection because His creative power alone takes credit for originating creation. As the opening chapters of Genesis reveal, God as the creator did everything and is the one to receive the glory. Psalm 104 poetically speaks to this powerful, creative force:

> You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
> they flow between the hills;
> they give drink to every beast of the field;
> the wild donkeys quench their thirst. (10, 11)
>
> You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
> and plants for man to cultivate,
> that he may bring forth food from the earth
> and wine to gladden the heart of man,
> oil to make his face shine
> and bread to strengthen man's heart. (14, 15)

For Augustine, the heart yearns to express what is naturally being drawn out of it: "But I myself, with the mind you gave me, my God, with various cries and sounds and the various motions of

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[199] *The Holy Bible*. Isaiah 40:12.

[200] "*Omnipotentem atque ex nulla particula commutabilem…bonorum etiam omnium creatorum, quibus est ipse praestantior, rectorem quoque iustissimum eorum omnium quae creauit, nec ulla adiutum esse natura in creando, quasi que non sibi sufficeret. ex quo fit ut de nihilo creauerit omnia*). Augustine. *De libero arbitrio*. 1.2.

my members, I wanted to express the sense of my heart."[201] Augustine yearned for God with a yearning that had overcome him and longed with a longing that had become pain. He writes, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."[202]

God works to protect, provide, and care for all creatures, and there is a natural worship they render to him. The works of creation reveal God's incredible, incomparable power and point human beings beyond themselves to God himself. In Psalm 148 we have the call for all of nature to join in praising the Creator:

Praise the Lord from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!

Mountains and all hills
fruit trees and all cedars!
Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children…(7-12)

Augustine held to the truth that all that exists, regardless of their state of being, worship first and foremost by thirsting and hungering after God above all things:

> Yet even these privations of things are so ordered in the universe of nature, that to those wisely considering, they not unfittingly have their vicissitudes. For by not illuminating certain places and times, God has also made the darkness as fittingly as the day…Whence also in the hymn of the three children, light and darkness alike praise God, that is, bring forth praise in the hearts of those who well consider.[203]

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[201] "*Sed ego ipse mente quam dedisti mihi, deus meus, cum gemitibus et vocibus variis et variis membrorum motibus edere vellem sensa cordis mei*)." *conf*. 1.8.13.
[202] *conf*. 1.1.1.
[203] Augustine. *On the Nature of Good*. 16.1.

In this passage, Augustine refers to the appropriateness of all creation rendering worship to God. In the opening verses of Psalm 148 we find specific instructions to all that exists, in both the physical and spiritual realm, to give praise, *Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts*. The principle that all are designed to worship the All-Powerful also has an apparent opposite, which Augustine points out in his writings concerning the problem of the flesh. He experienced a great deal of pain and suffering in his life, mostly involving the lusts of the flesh. Augustine writes:

> I propose now to set down my past wickedness and the carnal corruptions of my soul…I collect my self [*sic*] out of that broken state in which my very being was torn asunder because I was turned away from Thee, the One, and wasted myself upon the many. Arrived now at adolescence I burned for all the satisfactions of hell, and I sank to the animal in a succession of dark lusts [*silvescere ausus sum variis et umbrosis amoribus*]: my beauty consumed away, and I stank in thine eyes, yet was pleasing in my own and anxious to please the eyes of men.[204]

Augustine believes the world is in a state of darkness and our world is a collective reflection of each individual. Human beings are called to be the light of the world. For Augustine, loving God is first and foremost. A person cannot love God if they seek to satisfy "self" over pleasing God. In the book of Matthew it states, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (6:33). In his writings, Augustine insisted that a "self" mentality is self-destructive and only brings out the worst in an individual. He confesses, "it had pleased my pride to be free from a sense of guilt, and when I had done anything wrong not to confess that it was myself who had done it, that You might heal my soul."[205] Augustine was adamant that lasting change starts from within.

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[204] *conf.* 2.1.1.
[205] *conf.* 5.10.18.

2. Omniscience

For Augustine, God is the supreme authority and all things are under his control. Nothing takes God by surprise. He is sovereign over all that exists, be it seen or unseen. God is the only one who possesses limitless knowledge. As the psalmist wrote, "He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding has no limit."[206] In 1 John we read, "God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything" (3:20). The Bible ascribes omniscience to God. The word "omniscient" derives from the Latin words *omnis* meaning "all" and *scientia* meaning "knowledge." Augustine understands this to mean God has perfect knowledge and knows everything, including our past, present, and future offenses against him. He writes, "We assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass."[207] Simply put, the entire universe is an open book.

The omniscience of God is a knowing beyond knowledge. It is a complete knowledge that provides answers the learned intellectual mind cannot. Augustine admits that one's worst battle is between what one knows and what one feels. He also admits that his pride was preventing him from experiencing a true awakening: "I was not in any state to be able to enter its mysteries, or to bow my head to climb its steps."[208] For Augustine, reality is created by the mind but his pride was restricting his access to reality. It had once demanded that he discover truth in the wisdom of men:

> Yet it was no wonder that I fell away into vanity [*Quid autem mirum, quod in vanitates ita ferebar*] and went so far from Thee, my God, seeing that men were held up as models for my imitation who were covered with shame if, in relating some acts of theirs in no way evil, they fell into some barbarism or grammatical solecism [*si cum barbarismo aut soloecismo enuntiarent*]: yet were praised, and

[206] *The Holy Bible*. Psalm 147:4-5.
[207] Robert C. Solomon and Clancy W. Martin. *Morality and the Good Life: An Introduction to Ethics through Classical Sources*. 4th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004, 165.
[208] *conf*. 3.1.

> delighted to be praised, when they told of their lusts [*libidines suas*], provided they did so in correct words correctly arranged.[209]

Augustine learned much about the wisdom of God by observing the world around him. He could see that this "knowledge of God" gives direction and protects from destruction. The importance of self-examination is exemplified in Augustine's writings. He inquired of God about the void in his life: "My life being such, was it life, O my God?"[210] God concerns most the soul, not the body; to what is invisible, not visible. For Augustine, no one could solve the problems in his life but God himself. Rather than going to the source, he sought out solutions in fleshly desires. He writes, "…in Him I shall exalt for all the good qualities that even as a boy I had. But in this lay my sin: that I sought pleasure, nobility, and truth [*voluptates, sublimitates, veritates*] not in God but in the beings He had created, myself and others. Thus I fell into sorrow and confusion and error […*in dolores, confusiones, errores*]."[211] Augustine understood God to be the legitimate real solution—the only one who could unlock the mystery of the disorderly desire.

In Psalm 139, the knowledge of God is depicted in personal, intimate language. The psalmist admits:

> O Lord you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it (1-6).

The concept of resonance in physics speaks to the relationship between soul and Spirit. Resonance is the increase in the power of a vibrating force under the influence of another vibrating force at specific frequencies. An object will vibrate strongest when the vibrations of

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[209] *conf.* 1.18.28.
[210] *conf.* 3.3.5.
[211] *conf.* 1.20.31.

another object operate at a frequency equal to its natural frequency. Simply put, when the frequency of one force (soul) equals the natural frequency of another force (Spirit) so as to match frequencies the end result is a force to be reckoned with. According to Augustine, the soul is already tuned to match the frequency of the Spirit, it's only a matter of resonating with it. As he explains, "Your gift sets us afire and we are borne upward; we catch this flame and up we go. In our hearts we climb those upward paths, singing the songs of ascent. By your fire, your beneficent fire, we are inflamed."[212] Augustine is describing the process of acquiring knowledge of God, that is, truth."[213]

According to Plato, we can change our reality by changing our mind. Proximity matters. When one draws near to the Spirit those frequencies will match and the individual will begin to experience a renewing of the mind. Augustine understood and clearly articulated the nature of the human mind and its similarity to, and dissimilarity from, the nature of God. Nothing else in creation reaches the height of the human mind, because its capabilities are nearly unlimited. God has granted human beings everything and the motivation behind this is His glory. Roman 11:36 says, *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen*. For Augustine, the phenomenal power of the human mind is great, but if it doesn't roll past itself and onto the creator of it, then it is vanity.

The knowledge of God is the principle of the human mind. The nature of human rebellion is pride, which generates self-sufficiency. Augustine refers to this as the City of God versus the City of Man: "Mankind is divided into two sorts: such as live according to man, and such as live

[212] *conf*. 13.9.
[213] Van Deusen states, "the process of acquiring truth has a stepwise ascending order. Nancy Van Deusen. *Theology and Music at the Early University: The Case of Robert Grosseteste and Anonymous IV*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995. 80.

according to God. These we mystically call the 'two cities'…"[214] Augustine views it as the Creator sent along with the human mind an instruction manual on how to "live according to God," and it comes in two distinct forms: The first form is the inborn knowledge of God and his law, that is, the Spirit that lives within or consciousness of the moral goodness. As the book of Romans describes it, "the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (2:15). The second form is the first form in written Word, that is, the Bible. The knowledge of God, which he has caused to be written, is explained in Isaiah, "Seek and read from the book of the LORD: Not one of these shall be missing; none shall be without her mate. For the mouth of the Lord has commanded, and his Spirit has gathered them" (34:16).

Only after a humble submission to the Creator could Augustine turn with greater intensity to the Word. He writes, "I was astonished to find that already I loved you…But I was not stable in the enjoyment of my God. I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight…I was in no kind of doubt to whom I should attach myself, but was not yet in a state to be able to do that."[215] The biblical coloring of Augustine's thoughts is evident in his writings as he states, "I began reading and found that all the truth I had read in the Platonists was stated here together with the commendation of your grace, so that he who sees should 'not boast as if he had not received' both what he sees and also the power to see."[216]

For Augustine, principles are concentrated truth. As he sought the knowledge of God, he searched for principles of instruction. A person who instructs must first have knowledge, and as a person is instructed they gain knowledge. In Proverbs, the instruction is to "apply your heart to

[214] Augustine. *The City of God*. 14.1.
[215] *conf*. 7.17.
[216] *conf*. 7.21.

instruction and your ear to words of knowledge" (23:12). Augustine realized that very few apply themselves to learn knowledge because they are more concerned with pleasures motivated by self-interests. Augustine believes that humility is a key virtue, but pride can unknowingly be disguised as humility. He admits, "I was inflated with self-esteem, which made me think myself a great man."[217] Augustine describes pride as an entrapment in self that forces one to feed on themselves in search for fulfillment: "Who can unravel that twisted and tangled knottiness? It is foul. I hate to reflect on it. I hate to look on it. But Thee do I long for."[218]

For Augustine, the ideal life is marked by humility. He understands that victory comes through an awareness of the conflict described in Galatians: *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do* (5:17). We are dealing with conflicting tendencies. To attain the knowledge of God one must reconcile these conflicting tendencies. The purpose of acquiring knowledge of God is to lead people to light; a place of tastefulness and goodness. For Augustine, this path is "the way which leads to the home of bliss, not merely as an end to be perceived but as a realm to live in."[219]

3. Omnibenevolence

God bears a unique relationship to the world. God is the source of all that is good and creates the world (and therefore human beings) in his own goodness. Augustine considers the Creator to be one thing and his creation another and believes that the soul (human being) "feeds"

[217] *conf*. 3.5.1.
[218] conf. 3.8.16.
[219] *conf*. 7.20.

on God. In De *moribus Manichaeorum*, Augustine says, "what is corrupted is perverted; and what is perverted suffers the loss of order, and order is good" (2.5.7).[220]

The nature of God is goodness; a perfection of his character and description of his very essence. The biblical meaning of the "goodness" of God refers to everything He is, everything He has, and everything He does. It represents God's special love for his creation, and it is personal. Omnibenevolence is a divine attribute of God. Omnibenevolent means all-loving or infinitely good. Augustine explains this goodness as the foundation of all that is good. He believes human beings are not inherently good and that any sense of goodness in character comes from God. In *De moribus Manichaeorum*, Augustine writes:

> One good which is good supremely and in itself, and not by the participation of any good [*non participatione alicuius boni*], but by its own nature and essence [*propia natura et essentia*]; and another good which is good by participation, and by having something [bestowed] [*habendo*]. Thus it has its being by the supreme good, which, however, is still self-contained, and loses nothing [*manente illo nihilque amittente*]. This second kind of good is called a creature [*creaturam*], which is liable to hurt through falling away [*noceri per defectum potest*] (2.4.6).

For Augustine, the goodness of God surpasses anything the world has to offer. In James it says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (1:17). This verse speaks to God's gracious generosity in giving many gifts to mankind. The phrase, "Father of lights" points us back to the process of creation in Genesis where "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light"[221] and the creation of the sun, moon, and stars.[222] In the Bible, light and darkness are used

[220] "Item qoud corrumpitur, profecto pervertitur; quod autem pervertitur, privatur ordine; ordo autem bonum est."
[221] *The Holy Bible*. Genesis. 1:3.
[222] Ibid. 1:14-18.

as metaphors for opposites: good and evil, order and chaos, joy and sorrow, life and death. First John says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1:5).

For Augustine, the conflict between light and darkness was a lifelong internal struggle he desperately sought to resolve. He connects his suffering to his separation with God. Although Augustine views suffering as an unfortunate reality of human existence, his focus on God's apparent goodness and love for humanity brought him to conclude that humans exist for something greater than themselves, that is, for God's glory. Augustine writes, "In their perverted way all humanity imitates you [God]. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you and exalt themselves against you. But even by thus imitating you they acknowledge that you are the creator of all nature and so concede that there is no place where one can entirely escape from you."[223]

The omnibenevolent God has a perfect and complete desire for goodness. He is the measure of all that exists, and all that is good glorifies him. This is the ultimate in goodness. *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*.[224] In the book of Matthew, we read:

> You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.[225]

Fruit is found in one's character. Human beings are called to bear fruit and remove anything that would hinder one's ability to bear fruit, "So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."[226]

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[223] *conf*. 2.6.
[224] *The Holy Bible*. 1 Corinthians 10:31.
[225] Ibid. Matthew. 5:14-16.
[226] Ibid. Colossians. 1:10.

Augustine understands the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness, but acknowledges that human weaknesses make it difficult to be pure channels of the light. Augustine's fear of failure was rooted in his inability to maintain a hold on the light due to his weakness. Augustine paints an interesting portrait of this experience: "As for me, when I deliberated on serving the Lord my God as I had long planned to do, it was I myself who wanted to and I myself who did not want to--the same I. I neither wanted it completely, nor did I refrain completely from wanting it…This devastation was against my will indeed."[227]

Augustine believes that human beings are mysteriously driven to act in opposition to goodness, even against their better judgment. In Romans, we see Paul desires to do good but is confronted with an inward constraining force determined to prevent him, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."[228]

For Augustine, goodness is the human experience of order. Augustine believed he was fighting against dark forces within himself and observed that these dark forces always wound and the wound is a deprivation of good. "All which is corrupted is deprived of good," says Augustine.[229] King David of ancient Israel and "a man after God's own heart"[230] wrote the book of Psalms. In his state of darkness, King David penned these inspiring words: *I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*.[231] Augustine was a lover of the Psalms and believed David was the unique author of all the psalms.

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[227] *conf*. 8.10.22.
[228] *The Holy Bible*. Romans. 7:22-23.
[229] *conf*. 7.12.18.
[230] *The Holy Bible*. 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22.
[231] Ibid. Psalm. 27:13.

He wove the psalms into his life story and used them as the source of power to confront his problems. The impact the Psalms had on Augustine's life is described in his own words:

> What utterances sent I up unto you, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, those faithful songs and sounds of devotion which exclude all swelling of spirit, when new to Your true love…What utterances used I to send up unto You in those Psalms, and how was I inflamed towards You by them, and burned to rehearse them, if it were possible, throughout the whole world, against the pride of the human race!…I read the fourth psalm in that time of my leisure -- how that psalm Psalm wrought upon me…when I spoke by and for myself before You, out of the private feelings of my soul."[232]

According to Augustine, the most important part of self is internal, and human nature is at war with the internal. Augustine explains that the desires of the heart are toward the pleasures of the world as a result of the inherited chaos. The Psalm reads, "They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one."[233] It is a struggle for control with created beings, a control game with them and their Creator. Augustine desires that people could see what praying Psalm 4 "had made out of me."[234] The healing and empowering words of the Psalms connect the mind and heart in a rich and vivid way that, for Augustine, takes human chaos and gives it structure, order, and purpose. "By joining our voice with the praise given in the psalms our status as creatures before God the Creator is actualized in the very performance. Our re-creation is advanced."[235]

Augustine establishes that God is good because all that he created is good. "You are our God, supreme Good, the Creator and Ruler of the universe." He continues, "Therefore, the God

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[232] *conf*. 9.4.8. Augustine adds that the Psalms are faithful songs that reveal to human beings the truth about who they really are. 9.4.9.
[233] *The Holy Bible*. Psalm. 53:3.
[234] "Quid de me fecerit ille psalmus." *conf*. 9.4.8.
[235] Michael C. McCarthy. "Creation through the Psalms in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*." *Augustinian Studies* 37, no 2, 2006, 217.

who made me must be good and all the good in me is His."[236] Augustine makes an important point that when God created the world he did not abandon it to fend for itself, but "by Him it was created and in Him exists."[237] Augustine explains that God's goodness and relentless love is what the soul longs for, and he doesn't force his love on the objects of his affection (human beings). God is persuasive. The psalmist prays, "You are good and do good; teach me your statutes."[238] That is to say, keep me under the guidance and influence of your law. "Everything takes place according to Your law," says Augustine.[239]

For Augustine, there is no greater purpose than for God to be glorified. This is why we move and breathe and ultimately exist. "My desire," Augustine says, "was not to be more certain of you but to be more stable in you."[240]

[236] *conf*. 1.20.
[237] *conf*. 4.12.
[238] *The Holy Bible*. Psalm. 119:68.
[239] *conf*. 1.7.
[240] *conf*. 8.1.18.

CHAPTER THREE: ANCIENT TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE

The *Aeneid* is a Latin epic poem in 12 books written by the Roman poet Virgil between 29 and 19 BC. It tells the story of the travels of Aeneas, a Trojan who escaped the burning ruins of Troy and sails the Mediterranean in search of a new home. He travels to Italy where he found a new civilization in Rome and became the ancestor of the Romans. The *Aeneid* has been called "the best poem by the best poet," and the most famous work in Latin literature. In it we get a detailed description of Roman culture, values and beliefs as well as an understanding of Roman perception of Africa and its peoples in classical antiquity.

In the fourth book of *Aeneid*, an African king named Yarbas (or Irabas) is introduced. In *Africa in Classical Antiquity*, Thompson and Ferguson describe the way in which Virgil presents Yarbas, as "the son of the Libyan [African] god Hammon, who was identified with Jupiter, and whose desert shrine Alexander visited during sojourn in Egypt."[241] Yarbas is also represented as "introducing the worship of his divine father to the Numidian [African] people."[242] The Yoruba are an ethnic group located in western Africa. Their ancestral homeland extends through the modern-day countries of Nigeria, Togo and Benin. The oral history of the Yoruba tells of a Yoruba divine king who is the ancestor of all people. Scholars have pointed out that the name Yarbas bears a strong resemblance to the name Yorubas and the traditions of the Yoruba people. Thompson and Ferguson write, "A strong movement of contemporary speculation favours locating the origin of the Yorubas in Ancient Egypt." They add that, "there are too many parallels for mere coincidence. What of the Philaeni and the Fulani? The Ausees and the Hausa? What of Ammon himself? Among the Tuareg we find the divine name Amana, among the Jukun Ama.

[241] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 2. See also Virgil. *Aeneid*. IV, 36; 196.
[242] Ibid.

Ammon's ram's horn motif is found associated with Sango, and among the Yoruba *mon* or *mimon* means 'holy.'"[243] As previously mentioned, Augustine's mother's name, "Monnica," is said to derive from the African god "Ammon" or Yoruba *mimon*, meaning "holy." This is an indication that the people called "Nigerians" today were most likely the indigenous peoples of northern Africa who were in contact with the Greeks and Romans during classical antiquity.

I. Trade Routes to West Africa & Augustine's Nigerian Roots

Herodotus (484-425 BC), who is called the "Father of History," was an ancient Greek historian and travel writer of the first great narrative history of the Greco-Persian war produced during classical antiquity. His travels covered various parts of Africa, including Egypt. Herodotus' comprehensive work, *The Histories*, provides a detailed look at how movement in the ancient world functioned. To Herodotus, there is no "Sub-Saharan." The people south of the Sahara and all known peoples south of Egypt were called "Aethiopians." The word Aethiopian (or Ethiopian) derives from the word *Aethiops*, meaning "people with faces burnt black," i.e. Africans. The term Ethiopia means "land of the Blacks."[244] It is a Greek word that was used by ancient writers to refer to the indigenous peoples of north Africa, northwest Africa, and all known regions south of Egypt.[245]

Herodotus believed that no human existed south of the Sahara. To Herodotus, south of the Sahara was an uninhabitable region because it was too hot. Thus, Libya is the name Herodotus uses for modern-day west Africa, and Ethiopians are the sub-Saharan Africans or west Africans indigenous to north Africa. Herodotus informs us that the Ethiopians were indigenous to the

[243] Ibid.
[244] It does not refer to the present-day country of Ethiopia in Africa.
[245] Aethiopians are indigenous to "Libya," the word Herodotus uses to refer to all regions north of the Sahara and unknown regions south of the Sahara.

northern regions of Africa. In addition, Augustine's mother's name, Monnica, is said to come from the African/Libyan god "Ammon" or Yoruba *mimon*, which means "holy," and the name of Augustine's son, Adeodatus, is a Yoruba name with the latinized "tus" ending. Ade means crown (royalty) in Yoruba. It is often short for names such as Adeola, Aderonke, Adekale, and so forth. Ade in Yoruba language can also mean "my arrival brought joy" or "God-given" depending on the context. This shows a strong possibility that Augustine was what we now call "Nigerian," as many of the northern Africans migrated south for various reasons, especially during the early days of the Christian movement.[246]

According to Herodotus, the Berber Nasamonians, also known as the Garamantes (an African desert tribe),[247] were the first northern people known to history to travel across the Sahara desert. The word Berber derives from the Greek word *barbaros* meaning "barbarians," a term used by the Romans to describe the indigenous Africans of northern Africa. Ancient writers described the appearance of the peoples of north Africa prior to the Arab invasion in 641 AD. In his work *Johannis*, the 6th century African poet, Corippus, describes the look of the Berber peoples as "facies nigroque colorus," which means "faces of the black color."[248] The term "Moor" comes from the Greek word *mavro* meaning "black." The Latin term for it is *maurus*, which means "dark-skinned" and was specifically used by the Romans as an identity marker in reference to the indigenous Africans. The 6th century Greek scholar, Procopius in Book IV of the

[246] During early Christianity, Africans migrated south to escape persecution. Thompson and Ferguson add that the migration of Africans in the 4th century happened "during the internal struggles of the Church when Christian was to Christian more hateful than a foe," and in the 5th century during the Vandal invasions. Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 15.

[247] Berbers were Africans from today's sub-Saharan region. Garamantes was the term used by the Greeks to describe Africans who lived in the Sahara desert. The Garamantes were also called "Cave-dwellers."

[248] Corippus was a native of Africa who moved to Constantinople, the capital of the Roman Empire, which is why he is often called a "Berber-Roman" epic poet.

History of the Wars, described the difference in physical appearance between the Vandals (a Germanic people) who invaded north Africa in 429 AD and the indigenous Moors.[249] Procopius stated that the Vandals were not "black-skinned like the Moors."[250]

The Nasamonians occupied the Tripoli region of Libya. Herodotus informs us that five young Nasamonians were selected by the King of the Ammonians to guide Herodotus along the ancient trade routes across the Sahara desert to the west. Herodotus was unable to make it far enough into the desert due to the extreme heat. As Thompson and Ferguson point out, the Nasamonians are called "the Negroes of Ammon."[251] It is important to note that the term "Negro" is derived from the Latin word *niger*, which means "black." Thompson and Ferguson summarize Herodotus' journey with the young Nasamonians on the trans-Saharan trade routes:

> Their first halt was at Aujila, which the tribe knew well. Then they struck further to the west and after many days reached the savanna on the southern fringe of the desert. There they met with some pigmies, who guided them through extensive swamps to a city inhabited by Negroes and watered by a large crocodile-haunted river flowing from west to east. If the evidence is reliable—and there is no good reason to doubt it—this must be the Niger. The city cannot be far from the present site of Timbuctu, which we know once stood on the Niger's northern arm. The swamps are unidentifiable, but their common attribution to the neighborhood of Lake Chad seems a little topsy-turvy; there are plenty about Timbuctu. The black-skinned pigmies are of peculiar interest, for the modern African pigmy is not black but light brown, and is not found north of the Cameroons. But there have been extensive migrations since the time of Herodotus. One attractive suggestion is that these pigmies are ancestors of the Mahalbi. Whatever the details this is a most exciting expedition. We can trace the most probable route. They must first have reached the oasis of Murzuk. This is of major importance to the land-route, for there the trail leads on either to Lake Chad or further west to Nigeria.[252]

[249] The Vandals occupied parts of what is now northern Tunisia and northeastern Algeria from 429 AD to 534 AD when their kingdom collapsed in the Vandalic War of reconquest by the eastern Roman Empire.
[250] Procopius. *History of the Wars*. Translated by H.B Dewing. Vol 2, Book IV. 1916.
[251] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 2.
[252] Ibid. 10.

Thompson and Ferguson describe how the Nasamonians represent modern-day Nigerians. Herodotus reports that "the Nasamonians are polygamous" and engage in promiscuous relationships. Herodotus further states that, "the sign that such a relationship is taking place is a staff planted outside the house."[253] Thompson and Ferguson explain how the religious practice of polygamy by the Nasamonians are found in Nigerian tribes today. They state, "Herodotus is failing to understand a custom unfamiliar to him. The relationship is not promiscuous. It is found in many Nigerian tribes as a semi-formal paramour relationship—and the paramour indicates his presence by a staff set at the threshold of his lady's door." Thompson and Ferguson further explain, "Herodotus notes the ululation of joy uttered by Libyan [African] women, and familiar enough in Nigeria."[254] This further demonstrates that the indigenous peoples of northern Africa during Greek and Roman colonialism migrated south at some point and settled in modern Nigeria and other countries in west Africa.

Ancient trade routes and migration across the Sahara desert going from north into west Africa and other sub-Saharan regions were the means by which African Christianity, and by extension, Augustine's Christian philosophy spread throughout Africa. Early African Church fathers and theologians, like Augustine, were spiritual ancestors to many of the Africans who were captured during the course of the transatlantic slave trade and taken to America. In traditional African societies, God informs all aspects of culture, including music. We see this in the spirituals—the songs created by the enslaved Africans in America. Spirituals served as the Word of God (or Bible) in song.

[253] Thompson. *Africa in Classical Antiquity*. 2.
[254] Ibid.

As an African, Augustine understood music to be a direct copy of the soul. He taught that the essential nature of music is communication with God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine shares his thoughts on music:

> When I realize that nowadays it is not the singing that moves me but the meaning of the words when they are sung in a clear voice to the most appropriate tune, I again acknowledge the great value of this practice. So I waver between the danger that lies in gratifying the senses and the benefits which, as I know from experience, can accrue from singing. Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.[255]

[255] Augustine. *Confessions. Translated with an Introduction by R.S. Pine-Coffin*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961, 238-239.

PART II: SLAVE SONGS AS EVIDENCE

American songs of slavery were created by the enslaved Africans in America to express their longing for freedom and preserve African Christian tradition. The enslaved Africans created a community space where their history would survive. Secrecy was key, and musical language coded with secret information was the safest, most effective method of communication even for conductors working the Underground Railroad.[256] Spirituals were a secret system used by the enslaved Africans to provide inspiration and support as well as information about escape routes to freedom. The coded text in spirituals often conveyed multiple meanings to its listeners to cover up the real message. Verbal communication was prohibited, and so biblical symbolism in song as coded instruction for escape was highly effective. An escape song, also known as "signal song," was sung to provide secret information about escape plans from American plantations.

Enslaved Africans came into the English translation of the Bible with the African Christian traditions of their forefathers. They could easily identify with the Bible, because the events of the Bible were part of African Christian history. The enslaved Africans were motivated and uplifted by a faith that had been transmitted to them by their African Christian ancestors. VanZanten recognizes that Augustine's *Confessions* is "an African text…that eventually played its part in the formation of modern African literature."[257] His *Confessions* also played a vital role in the formation of the songs created by Africans who were enslaved in America. Spirituals served as an important medium for teaching the Word of God as demonstrated in the African

[256] Underground Railroad was the symbolic name for secret routes of escape used by the enslaved community to get to freedom. Conductors of the Underground Railroad were people who provided escaped slaves with financial, spiritual, and material support as they traveled along the Underground Railroad.
[257] VanZanten. "Introduction: African Narrative." 369.

Christian faith. An example is the role of the Spirit, that is, the mind of God. "For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."[258] It is important to note the word "Spirit" within the "Spirit-ual." To properly interpret the spirituals one must understand the important role of the Spirit in the life of the enslaved African.

In traditional African societies, music is passed on by memory, not by writing. It is important to remember that original spirituals were never written down or composed. They were sung and passed down orally over the generations. As early as the 19th century, observers of African (Negro) performance practice began to notate what they saw and heard. This becomes problematic since African music is so complex that it cannot be written down using Western music notation.

Because contemporary singers have to learn spirituals by score or reading sheet music arranged in a Western classical style, misconceptions on various aspects of the original performance have been presented. For example, spirituals were believed to have been sung in proper English, but enslaved Africans did not know proper English and so the diction was different. Also, some of the many complexities that come with African (Negro) performance involve both rhythmic and melodic improvisation, which are often lost on paper. Rhythmic improvisation of spirituals includes performance practices, such as swaying the body, hand clapping, and foot stomping. The vocal style of spirituals is highly freeform and melismatic. Melodic improvisation utilizes vocal ornamentations (or flourished vocal lines), as in slides, glides, humming, shouts, groans, as Burleigh describes, "the particular inflections of voice that

[258] *The Holy Bible*. 1 Corinthians 2:10.

are natural with the colored people [African Negroes]."[259] Therefore, the historical collections, concert performances and audio recordings of spirituals used in this study are only interpretations of the music, not the original performance practice.[260]

[259] Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949) was a composer who was well-known for his arrangements of spirituals for the concert stage. H. T. Burleigh. *Negro Spirituals: Oh Peter Go Ring Dem Bells*. Sheet Music. New York: G. Ricordi, 1918.

[260] In *Negro Spirituals*, Burleigh reminds performers that success in singing the spirituals "is primarily dependent upon deep spiritual feeling" and that "the voice is not nearly so important as the spirit."

CHAPTER FOUR: PROPHETIC SONGS

The text of many spirituals came directly from the Bible. They told stories from Genesis to Revelation with the main characters representing those who had to overcome great tribulations. Spirituals are songs of trial and tribulation that not only express the great pains and sorrows of slavery, they also demonstrate God's power in action when one surrenders to be used by the Spirit. The term "spiritual" is derived from the King James Bible's translation of Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." As previously noted, the word "Spirit" is of great importance when trying to comprehend the purpose of the "Spirit-ual." The Holy Spirit or simply "Spirit" played an important role in the lives of enslaved Africans. To the enslaved African, the way to communicate with God and receive guidance was by his Spirit. The Spirit was to guide them to freedom.

In spirituals, the enslaved Africans were depicted as the ancient Israelites from the Bible, the beloved children of a just God destined for freedom. Calling themselves the Israelites is of prophetic significance. They were drawn into the stories of the Bible because a part of them was in these stories. Spirituals are songs that speak of the souls of enslaved Africans "stretching out into the outskirts of God's eternity," affirming that the Spirit was working in and through them to set them free.[261] The text of spirituals is sacred. They deliver explanations to the mysteries of this world and the meaning of life.

To Augustine, the essential nature of music is communication with God. His *Confessions* is African teaching that is manifested in spirituals. As Augustine states, God is "most hidden and

[261] See Cone. *The Spirituals and the Blues*.

most present."[262] The path to freedom came into the minds of the enslaved Africans by divine revelation through the Spirit. God reveals himself as Lord through divine revelation. When this occurs, knowledge of God that formerly had been hidden from the receiver (mankind) is now revealed.[263] This revealed body of knowledge is called "the mystery," and the mysterious message was revealed to the enslaved Africans in song.

I. Elijah Rock

> Oh Elijah, oh Elijah. Elijah rock, oh.
> Come on sister, help me to pray, tell me my Lord done pass dis way.
> Elijah rock, shout, shout. Elijah rock, comin' up, Lawdy.
> Elijah rock, comin' up, Lawd.
> Satan ain't nothin' but a snake in the grass.
> He's a conjur. He's a liar. Hallelujah, Lord.
> If I could I surely would, stand on the rock where Moses stood.
> Elijah Rock. Hallelujah, Jesus. Rock Elijah. Comin' up, Lawdy. Comin' up Lord.

Historical Background

"Elijah Rock" is a spiritual that tells of the heroic prophet Elijah from the Old Testament who had to face many challenges in his life and with whom the enslaved Africans could identify. The enslaved Africans understood that the biblical characters who were empowered by the Spirit to be impactful here on earth were ordinary people as themselves. This was a regular subject of the spirituals. "Elijah Rock" describes the prophet Elijah as a leading figure who sought God to overcome great tribulations. Elijah was made aware of the value and motivation behind spiritual development and so he provided people with spiritual tools for thought that they may hear God's voice.

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[262] *conf*. 1.4.4.
[263] *The Holy Bible*. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Ephesians 3:3-11.

Chieftaincy or prophecy plays an important role in traditional African societies. Chiefs are mediators between man and God as well as messengers in the law of God.[264] Chiefs and prophets in the Bible were placed in communities by God to deliver divine messages to the people of God. Moses and Aaron, his brother, were both chiefs and messengers of God. In the book of Numbers we read, "And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be chief over the chief of the Levites, and have the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary."[265] The concept of prophecy was relevant to the enslaved community. Enslaved Africans could easily identify with the prophets of the Bible, because they were already familiar with their stories.

In the *Negro Church*, Du Bois discusses a time in the early 19th century during the great awakenings when Christianity was being spread through emotional preaching and revivals in order to "revive" church attendance. Du Bois views this period as a defining time for the enslaved Africans in America.[266] Enslaved Africans were made to accept the slave master's Christianity by claiming American church membership. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), who was born into slavery and became a leading figure, stated, "When I meet a Negro who is not a Baptist or a Methodist, I know some white man has been tampering with his religion." Du Bois and Jackson explain how at the time the Baptist and Methodist were versions of Christianity that most resembled the African Christian tradition. The Baptist and Methodist churches focused on the inner Being—the Spirit within, providing a safe space where the enslaved African could be free in the Spirit and free from the oppressor. It was a religion that elevated the enslaved African

[264] John Pobee. "Aspects of African Traditional Religion." *Sociological Analysis* 37, no. 1 (1976): 2-3.
[265] *The Holy Bible*. Numbers 3:32.
[266] Du Bois. *The Negro Church.* 26.

beyond the life and sufferings of slavery to a direct experience with the Divine. It was a religion of song, a religion composed of members who sang rather than spoke their truth.[267]

Enslaved Africans brought to America the stories of the Bible passed down to them from their African Christian forefathers. When they arrived in America, the enslaved Africans were presented with these stories in an unfamiliar language—the English language. Jones makes light of this in his work on spirituals:

> Symbolically, the stories of the Old Testament held particularly special meaning. In their African-derived spiritual cosmology, the captives constructed a life-consciousness that included ready connections to figures of the ancient past. In their spiritual imagination they lived and breathed the experiences of such biblical heroes as David, Daniel, Moses, and Joshua, all engaged actively in divinely inspired battles for freedom. To Africans in America, the stories of the Bible had obvious meaning, very much connected to the reality of their struggles as a community.[268]

"Elijah Rock" is rooted in African Christian tradition. The text is not actually telling a story, but rather expressing a sentiment. The message being conveyed in "Elijah Rock" is captivating and timeless. It describes the supernatural event in 2 Kings 2:11 where prophet Elijah entered the kingdom of heaven by a transformation of the soul and heart, translated as a change in the way people (the enslaved Africans) think, the way people (the enslaved Africans) handle their emotions, and the way people (the enslaved Africans) treat each other. The laws of the kingdom of God not only forbid what is wrong, they move the people of God to act in the best interest of others, thus, the line in the song that requests for assistance from another believer, "Come on sister, help me to pray." The final phrase highlights the mountain where Moses saw God face to

[267] Ibid. See also George P. Jackson. *White and Negro Spirituals: Their Life Span and Kinship*. New York: J. J. Augustin, 1943, 286.
[268] Arthur Jones. *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 42.

face after fulfilling his responsibility to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and the final statement praises God's faithful as a message of hope to those seeking deliverance.

Coded Text

The spiritual "Elijah Rock" was passed down through generations, thus the original author is unknown. The song resurfaced in the 1960s as a popular arrangement by Jester Hairston who worked as a choral director, composer, and arranger. Hairston helped preserve many songs of slavery by arranging over three hundred spirituals. Du Bois points out that spirituals are songs rooted in African tradition. He also recognizes that spirituals "sprung from the African forests, where its counterpart can still be heard," and from the experience of slavery they were "adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip" these songs transformed into "the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope."[269]

The text of "Elijah Rock" is telling of the passage in 2 Kings 2:11 where the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. Right before this happens Elijah and his assistant Elisha have crossed the Jordan River when the chariot of fire appears. In spirituals, chariots represent a network of escape routes or a way of moving from point A to point B on the Underground Railroad. Reference to Elijah's chariot is a central theme in many spirituals and could be interpreted as a means of travel to freedom. Courlander explains:

> It is readily evident that songs of this kind could be interpreted in more than one way by the slaves. It is a safe assumption that all Negro religious songs were understood by the slaves in the light of their own immediate condition. Every reference to crossing the Jordan could be interpreted to mean escape to the

[269] W. E. B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*: *Essays and Sketches*. Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett, 1961, 141.

> North...every reference to Elijah's chariot or the gospel train could be seen as allusion to the Underground Railroad.[270]

The language of spirituals contained double meanings to the enslaved community. It is for this reason the messages were highly effective. This practice of duality in song can be found in traditional African music. For example, the text of a song by the Akpafu people of Ghana is as follows:[271]

> *Kuka gogbe b'ommre ne mi ledzai ka kukako si*
>
> This song is sweet, so sing it again well so that
>
> *mi silo oduduu ku mi kanya si ka kote.*
>
> All of your voices and your mouths agree
>
> *Mawe otregu kuka kekei*
>
> Some people ran away with the song

Agawu explains that, "To the Akpafu, the song's sweetness would invoke the sweetness of berries or sugar. It could also mean delicious, as one might say of palm soup or bean stew...the remark about running away with the song suggests that singing with others is like running with them, but not competitively, not so as to win. The ethos is communal rather than competitive."[272]

Sociologist Edward F. Frazier (1894-1962) argued against the connection between African tradition and American songs of slavery. He believes that enslaved Africans "were practically stripped of their social heritage"[273] through the process of enslavement. Franklin agrees with this view as he states, "it is impossible to establish any continuity between African

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[270] Harold Courlander. *Negro Folk Music USA*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1963, 39.
[271] Kofi Agawu. "African Music as Text." *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 2 (2001): 11.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Edward F. Frazier. *The Negro Church in America*. New York: Schocken, 1963, 1-2.

religious practices and the Negro church in the United States."[274] The works of renowned scholars before Frazier disprove his argument. For example, Du Bois saw a direct connection between the priests who are also called "medicine men" of Africa and the African (Negro) church leaders in America as he argued, "the Negro church is the only social institution of the Negroes which started in the African forest and survived slavery."[275] Anthropologist Herskovits insists that the reason enslaved Africans were drawn especially to the Baptist church in America is because its practices aligned with traditional African teaching. Herskovits agrees with Du Bois and Washington that the Baptist faith spoke within the African context and reflected African religious beliefs and practices.[276] Herskovits concludes that, "in the very foundations of Negro religion, the African past plays full part."[277]

In *Soul Praise*, Jordan recognizes that throughout the text of spirituals "there are references to many different modes of travel—realistic and otherwise. Included are chariots, trains, water, ships, and even wings." Jordan points out that the idea of sweet chariot "comes directly from the story in Second Kings of the prophet Elijah being caught up by God swept away in a chariot to heaven." He adds, "We know that 'chariot' was coded language for train, which at the time was the most modern means of transportation."[278]

The line in "Elijah Rock" that reads, "If I could I surely would, stand on the rock where Moses stood" refers to the Spirit working in and through God's chosen. In African traditional

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[274] Ibid. 6.
[275] Du Bois. *The Negro Church*. ii; cf. 3-5, 84.
[276] Melville J. Herskovits. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon, 1958, 232. See also Herskovits. "Social History of the Negro." in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Carl Murchison. Worcester, Mass: Clark University Press, 1935, 256-57.
[277] Ibid. 207; cf. chap 7.
[278] Ronald Jordan. *Soul Praise: Amazing Stories and Insights behind the Great African American Hymns and Negro Spirituals*. Colorado Springs, CO: Honor Books, 2005, 27.

religion, aspects of nature, as in rocks, trees, wind, water, etc., are considered active agents of God's plan. These elements can be found in African Christianity, an African traditional religion with a history of two thousand years. As Knighton says, "Spirit is an involution of God in the form of wind, rain, thunder, lightning, rainbow, a certain tree, grass, the crocodile, flood, and spring."[279]

Musical Arrangement

"Elijah Rock" is a popular spiritual that has been arranged by a number of composers, including Moses Hogan (1957-2003).[280] It is a piece that has been set many times. This particular arrangement is unique in that it was set by a pupil and admirer of Jester Hairston, the first arranger of "Elijah Rock." The song is written for SATB chorus (8 part divisi) and in a minor key (https://youtu.be/UEyaIDO7sjI).[281] Female voicing is in multiple parts (m.25). To heighten the minor mood, the men (basses and baritone) sing in fifths for almost the entire song. There are also sections within the music that indicate for men to only sing or women to only sing. In general, the music is driven by the combination of all the voices singing together. We know this to be a traditional African performance practice where everyone present, including the audience, is a part of the performance.[282]

The music is arranged to highlight the meaning of the text. Moses Hogan sets the phrases over against one another, changing the texture by having the voices either enter into or leave the

[279] Ben Knighton. "The Meaning of God in an African Traditional Religion and the Meaninglessness of Well-meaning Mission: The Experience of Christian Enculturation in Karamoja, Uganda." *Transformation* 16, no. 4 (1999): 122.
[280] Moses Hogan. *Elijah Rock*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1994.
[281] Concert performance. Corey Galloway. "Alabama State University Choir Singing Elijah Rock by Moses Hogan." May 4, 2017. YouTube video. 3:27.
[282] Amon Saba Saakana. "Culture, Concept, Aesthetics: The Phenomenon of the African Musical Universe in Western Musical Culture." *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 332.

sound. These layered sounds reveal that there is much more to the meaning. They call for freedom of expression. When all the voices sing together, a syncopated rhythmic "feel" is produced. Pervasive syncopation appears in the soprano and alto parts, but the tenor goes in and out of it. It is important to note that the message being conveyed in this spiritual is not lost and remains the primary focus. In the midst of melodic and rhythmic flexibility, the repeated line "Elijah rock" declares the central theme.

Moses and Elijah are important biblical heroes referenced in "Elijah Rock." Although there is enormous variation in the backgrounds of Moses and Elijah (both chiefs and prophets of God), the common theme remains the same—God's chosen. Hogan presents this Perfect Harmony in word painting by vocal setting using sound to advance the intent. As a reference to the Underground Railroad, Hogan sets the vocal parts to produce sounds that imitate the sound of a train. As Adegbite tells us, "Sound, to the traditional African peoples may be described as the vehicle for articulating an abstract idea in concrete form (i.e., for communicating "thought" as matter)."[283] The basses and baritones start the imitation by singing the words "oh-E-li-jah" in quarter notes. The tenors join in singing repeated sixteenth notes to increase the pace in reference to the train's movement.

In the verse, the sopranos and altos change the rhythmic pattern to paint the train making stops, then the train picks up the pace again by returning to the rhythmic and melodic patterns created by the men earlier. When the train reaches its destination the voicing changes. The vocal parts sing individually. For example, the sopranos sing on the vowel "ah" to imitate the squeal sound a train makes when preparing to stop. This style of singing is known as the "wordless

[283] Ademola Adegbite. "The Concept of Sound in Traditional African Religious Music." *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 1 (1991): 45.

chant" in traditional African music.[284] For the final section, Hogan paints Elijah entering the kingdom of God by having the voices sound one at a time on top of one another until they reach the end of the spiritual.

II. Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?

> Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, then why not every man?
> He deliver'd Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale,
> And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace, and why not every man?
> Hallelujah!
> The wind blows east and the wind blows west, it blows like the judgment day.
> And ev'ry poor soul that never did pray will be glad to pray that day.
> I set my foot on the Gospel ship, and the ship it begin to sail.
> It landed me over on Canaan's shore, and I'll never come back anymore.
> He deliver'd Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale,
> And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace. Tell me why not every man?

Historical Background

"Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" refers to the Old Testament story of Daniel in the lion's den and other similar biblical stories conveying messages of deliverance. An important aspect of this text is the repeated phrase "Why not every man?" Warren says this spiritual "is a classic example of the double or coded meaning that is a key to understanding the lyrics and the role songs played in daily slave life."[285]

Several studies have argued the case that spirituals are only imitations of White religious music having no African influence.[286] George P. Jackson spent his entire career trying to prove

[284] Agawu. "African Music as Text." 8.
[285] Gwendolin Warren. *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit: 101 Best-Loved Psalms, Gospel Hymns & Spiritual Songs of the African-American Church*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1999, 42.
[286] Guy B. Johnson. *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina*. Hatboro, Pa: Folklore Associates, 1968; Erich M. von Hornbostel. "American Negro Songs." *International Review of Missions* 15, 1926, 748-53; Newman I. White. *American Negro Folk-Songs*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928.

this case by comparing the music of Whites to the music of the enslaved Africans. In his "Farewell to Africa," Jackson formed his conclusion:

> The successive waves from other cultures…have been absorbed and transmuted by a racial metabolistic process and have thus become a part of the race organism without changing its essence. The sturdy self-continence of our culture is nowhere clearer than in its songs. No western people can show a body of folk music ancestrally truer…and less mixed with foreignities…In all my source searching in the religious folk-song field I have found less than half a dozen tunes which originated within modern times, if not in America itself, elsewhere than in Britain; and these few have come to us via Britain.[287]

Richard Waterman criticized Jackson's view and explains why this mentality is common within the academic sphere. On Jackson's conclusion, Waterman points out that he "systematically denied both the fact and the possibility of [the] persistence of African tradition"[288] within the African slave community in America. LeRoi Jones argued in favor of the heavy African influence on spirituals, and therefore, its originality. He insists it is "only religion and the arts" that remained original and "were not completely submerged by Euro-American concepts." Jones explains, "Music, dance, religion do not have artifacts as their end products, so they were saved. These nonmaterial aspects of the African's culture were almost impossible to eradicate."[289]

We remember that spirituals emerged from the context of slavery and oppression. In many songs of slavery, as in "Go Down Moses," "Elijah Rock," and "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit," there is reference to heroic figures of the Bible as a reminder of God's promises. Just as God rescued these leading heroes from various trials and tribulations, so too he would for the enslaved population. This concept resonated throughout the African slave community in America. On the surface, "Why not every man?" seems direct. However, it is not asked in order

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[287] Jackson. *White and Negro Spirituals*." 293.
[288] Richard A. Waterman. "African Influences on the Music of the Americas." in *Acculturation of the Americas*, ed. Sol Tax. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1952, 210.
[289] LeRoi Jones. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: William Morrow, 1963, 16.

to receive an answer. The short phrase is a rhetorical question stated over and over again to lay emphasis on the main point of trust in God. The phrase is indirectly stating, "Why are you worrying? Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?"

Coded Text

The spiritual "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" can be found in the *Jubilee Singers and Their Songs*, with additional text shown in italics:

> Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, d'liver Daniel, d'liver Daniel, and why not every man?
> He delivered Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale.
> He delivered the children from the fiery furnace, and why not every man?
> *The moon run down in a purple stream, the sun forbear to shine,*
> *And every star disappear, King Jesus shall be mine.*
> The wind blows East and the wind blows Wet, it blows like the judgment day,
> And every poor soul that never did pray, I'll be glad to pray that day.[290]
> I set my foot on the Gospel ship, and the ship it begin to sail,
> It landed me over on Canaan's shore, and I'll never come back anymore.

"Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" also appears in "The Story of the Spirituals" by Edward Boatner, with additional text in italics:

> Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, and why not every man?
> He delivered Daniel from the lion's den, Jonah from the belly of the whale.
> He delivered the children from the fiery furnace, and why not every man?
> *If you cannot sing like the angels, if you cannot preach like Paul,*
> *You can tell the love of Jesus and you can say He died for all*.[291]

In "The Story of the Spirituals" Boatner explains that the point of the enslaved singing "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" was to relate the story of Daniel in the lion's den to the living reality of the enslaved population.[292] The enslaved African faced similar circumstances to Daniel who was waiting on the workings of God. This spiritual sends the message that what we live in of what

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[290] J.B.T. Marsh. *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003, 169.
[291] Edward Boatner. *The Story of the Spirituals: 30 Spirituals and Their Origins*. Miami, FL: Belwin Mills, 1973, 29.
[292] *The Holy Bible*. Daniel 6:22.

God has promised is based upon our knowledge of Him. An important traditional African belief is that God is self-evident. Atheism, the lack of belief in the existence of God, does not resonate in traditional African societies. Pobee describes this concept using the proverb: *Obi nnkyere abofra Onyame*, i.e., no one teaches a child to know God as he states, "In other words...the Supreme Being is self-evident."[293]

Religion dominates every aspect of African life, and so the spirituals like "traditional African music," Schuller says, was born "in a total vision of life, in which music, unlike the 'art music' of Europe, is not a separate, autonomous social domain." He adds, "It is not surprising that the word 'art' does not even exist in African languages. Nor does the African divide art into separate categories." All aspects of life in African culture, such as "folklore, music, dance, sculpture, and painting operate as a total generic unit," which serves religion.[294] Enslaved Africans knew the more they identified with and learned from God's faithful in the Bible, the more of what God had promised they would live in and enjoy.[295] The book *12 Years a Slave* tells of the story of Solomon Northup, a man who was born free but kidnapped and sold into slavery. Northup shares his experience stating, "The goodness of God was manifest in my miraculous escape from the swamp. As Daniel came forth unharmed from the den of lions, and as Jonah had been preserved in the whale's belly, even so had I been delivered from evil by the Almighty."[296]

As for the hidden meaning within the text of "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," the line "I set my foot on the Gospel ship, and the ship it begin to sail" references the path to freedom by way of the Underground Railroad, including secret routes, shelter, and aid to escaped slaves. It is

[293] Pobee. "Aspects of African Traditional Religion." 4.
[294] Gunther Schuller. *Early Jazz: It's Roots and Musical Development*. Oxford University Press, 1986, 4-5.
[295] *The Holy Bible*. 2 Peter 1:3-4; Philippians 4:13.
[296] Solomon Northup. *12 Years a Slave*. London, UK: Penguin Books, 2013, 96.

important to note that a ship sails on water, and in African traditional religion water is one of many active agents in nature used by God to fulfill his purpose. In African societies, water spirits are responsible for various divine interventions, such as "bringing rain, being sent by God."[297] The line, "It landed me over on Canaan's shore, and I'll never come back anymore" refers to the final destination—free states in the North, Canada, or Africa. The word "Lord" is said to have a deeper meaning than Jesus as explained in the verse, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."[298] In the Bible, heaven is described as God, who is Spirit, [299] setting all things right.

Knighton references Prof. Kwame Bediako to demonstrate the significance of the Trinity in African traditional religion: "Christian theology does have something to offer the meaning of God in Africa, for the latter is neither seamless nor complete nor static. However, to accept the transcendence of the African God and reject His immanence in Africa is fraught with danger."[300] Tertullian, an early African theologian, coined the term 'Trinity," in order to help us "understand the New Testament teaching about what God is like,"[301] and so the Trinity is an important element of African traditional religion.

The enslaved Africans' interpretation of God righting all wrongs is as follows: Jesus commands us (the African slave community) to go and "bring heaven to earth"—to set things right. Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Jesus promised that the Spirit would lead us (the African slave community) to freedom saying, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will

[297] Knighton. "The Meaning of God." 122.
[298] *The Holy Bible*. 2 Corinthians 3:17.
[299] Ibid. John 4:24.
[300] Knighton. "The Meaning of God." 125.
[301] Severance. "Who Was Tertullian?"

speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."[302] This is how many enslaved Africans were able to escape to freedom. Lovell tells us that:

> The Lord in the spiritual is somewhat more comprehensive than Jesus and definitely farther away. But he is power beyond all the needs of the slave. The Lord readily cuts through laws, conventions, power structures, and all other socio-political forms to make things right for those he favors, for those who return his trust. Thus, the slave creator appeals directly to the Lord when the need is great. The rescues of Daniel, Jonah, and the trio Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not ordinary acts of deliverance. But the Lord had proved He was equal to the occasion; and the slave had proved he was deserving. Thus the miraculous deliverance was inevitable.[303]

Musical Arrangement

Moses Hogan is mentioned in Andre Thomas' *Way Over Beulah Lan*.' Thomas recognizes that Hogan "more than any other of the modern arrangers, is heralded as the composer/arranger who revitalized the performance of spirituals, publishing over seventy arrangements in his short life."[304] Until his untimely death, he was one of the most celebrated arrangers of spirituals, known particularly for his contemporary settings of spirituals. Hogan's musical talent was manifested at an early age and influenced by the musical traditions of the African American Baptist Church. His works have been admired by many worldwide and continue to be used as a learning curriculum in choral music education classrooms.

"Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" is written for SATB (8 part divisi) and a group of three vocal soloists (https://youtu.be/wbMubhKhS7U).[305] In the score, there is no indication of who sings the solo parts, whether male or female. Thus, the group of soloists could be sung by male

[302] Ibid. John 16:13.
[303] Lovell. *Black Song*. 234..
[304] André J. Thomas and Anton Armstrong. *Way over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*. Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2007, 72.
[305] Concert performance. Demetrius Farley. "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel - arr. Moses Hogan." November 8, 2013. YouTube video. 3:18.

or female voices. We know that there is much freedom in traditional African performance practice, which allows performers to, as Agawu explains, "weave webs of meaning around the musical object, constituting it freshly with each new performance."[306] The key of this arrangement is in G minor with the meter in 4/8. Although the tempo marking indicates very fast with a sixteenth note at 150 bpm, it really should depend on the ability of the chorus to deliver given the technical challenges of Hogan's arrangement. The voices are set in a homophonic texture for much of the song, but the rhythmic figures are highly syncopated and difficult to sing as is common in traditional African music.[307] The song is based around repetition and has a wide range for some voices. The group of soloists take the lead most of the time with the choir joining them for the verses.

In Hogan's arrangement, he uses repeated rhythmic figures to project a sense of confidence and reassurance on the phrase, "Why are you worrying? Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?"[308] While the text in the verses present the stories of various heroic figures of the Bible the singers maintain Daniel's deliverance experience. Near the end, Hogan brings together different stories of deliverance using a rapid rhythmic sequence (m.67-80). African traditional music is known for using rhythm as a form of worship. For example, the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria uses "fast percussive rhythm to accompany high or low vocal lines when worshiping."[309] The climatic point in this arrangement happens in the last line, "Tell me why not every man?" and is where the voices sing together in unison.

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[306] Agawu. "African Music as Text." 9.
[307] Ekwueme explains that, "the rhythm of African music is built on three distinguishable structural levels." Laz E. N. Ekwueme. "Structural Levels of Rhythm and Form in African Music: With Particular Reference to the West Coast." *African Music* 5, no. 4 (1975): 34-35.
[308] Moses Hogan. *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1999.
[309] Adegbite. "The Concept of Sound." 49.

III. Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit

Ev'ry time I feel the Spirit, moving in my heart, I will pray;
Yes, ev'ry time I feel the Spirit, moving in my heart, I will pray.
Upon the mountain my Lord spoke, out of His mouth came fire and smoke.
Looked all around me, it looked so fine, till I asked my Lord if all was mine.
Jordan river is chilly an' cold, it chills the body, but not the soul;
There ain't but one train upon this track, it runs to heaven an' right back.

Historical Background

"Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" describes what it means to live life in alignment with the Spirit of God. The enslaved Africans in America had to endure a long period of immense pain and suffering brought on by slavery. Yet, it was the knowledge of God through his Word that provided the enslaved community with answers to their questions concerning their circumstances. Thomas writes, "Spirituals told biblical stories. My people loved the majesty of the Bible, the great wonders, miracles, and signs. Why serve a God who could do just ordinary things? They wanted one who showed His power and His command. So they proclaimed in song, 'Upon the mountains where my God spoke, out of his mouth came fire and smoke' and marveled at his creation."[310] Du Bois describes the frenzy in African traditional religion as the Spirit in action and the most important aspect of the African Christian faith. Du Bois explains the Frenzy as:

> When the Spirit of the Lord passed by, and, seizing the devotee, made him mad with supernatural joy, was the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest. It carried in expression from the silent rapt countenance or the low murmur and moan to the mad abandon of physical fervor,—the stamping, shrieking, and shouting, the rushing to and fro and wild waving of arms, the weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance. All this is nothing new in the world, but old as religion, as Delphi and Endor. And so firm a hold did it have on the Negro, that many generations firmly believed that without

[310] Velma M. Thomas. *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song*. New York: Crown, 2001, 14.

> this visible manifestation of the God there could be no true communion with the Invisible.[311]

Guy Benton Johnson believes that African rhythm is the only contribution that was made to the spirituals by enslaved Africans and that all other musical characteristics, like the religious text, were borrowed from White songs. Johnson claims:

> The Negro's contribution seems to have been the introduction of his own rhythmic devices, the elaboration, sometimes the simplification, of the melodic patterns of white songs, and the preservation of a large body of folk song which might otherwise have been extinct now.[312]

The fact that the enslaved Africans' "own rhythmic devices" directly from Africa can be found in the spirituals calls for a rereading of the whole body of repertoire through a postcolonial lens with closer attention paid to the African Christian tradition within spirituals. In James Johnson's view, the African Christian heritage was the driving force behind the transforming of traditional African music into spirituals. James Johnson maintains,

> It was by sheer spiritual forces that the African chants were [changed] into Spirituals, that upon the fundamental throb of the African rhythms were reared those reaches of melody—and that this is the minute of the creation of the Spirituals.[313]

The enslaved Africans were called to continue the Lord's mission to make things right in the world. Part of the text states, "out of the Lord's mouth came fire and smoke," and is a reference to the train smoke that chugs from the chimney as it moves through the Underground Railroad. The final statement further illustrates the hidden message of escape to freedom: "There ain't but one train upon this track, it runs to heaven an' right back."

Coded Text

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[311] DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 141-42.
[312] Johnson. *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island*. 129.
[313] James W. Johnson. *The First Book of Negro Spirituals*. New York: The Viking Press, 1951, 19.

The spiritual "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" can be found in *Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books* by Natalie Curtis-Burlin.[314] The text reads:

> O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray,
> Upon de mountun ma Lord spoke, out of his mouth came fier an' smoke.
> O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray.
> Jordan Ribber chilly an' col', chill de body, but not de soul.
> O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray.
> All aroun' me looks so shine. Ask ma Lord if all was mine.
> O ev'ry time I feel de Spirit movin' in ma heart—I pray.[315]

In *Soul Praise: Amazing Stories and Insights behind the Great African American Hymns and Negro Spirituals*, the text contains a variation of words and additional lines in italics:

> *Down in the valley on my knees, I asked the Lord have mercy please.*
> Jordan river chilly and cold, took my body but not my soul.
> All around me looking so fine, I ask the Lord and know it is mine.
> St. Peter waiting at the gate, saying come on sinner, don't be late.[316]

The text of "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" contains coded messages that enslaved Africans used to communicate with one another how and when to run for freedom safely. The last two lines of text contain a hidden message referencing freedom via the Underground Railroad. Agawu tells us that our understanding of African traditional music might be deepened "by our construal of them as texts, texts that demand (and deserve) to be contemplated."[317]

> Jordan river is chilly an' cold, it chills the body, but not the soul.
> There ain't but one train upon this track, it runs to heaven an' right back.

The Jordan River is a profoundly important symbol in spirituals. To the slave master, the Jordan River refers to death, as in freedom from the struggles of this world. Thus, crossing the Jordan River meant going to heaven to a better world. To the enslaved community, the Jordan River was

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[314] Natalie Curtis-Burlin. *Negro Folk-Songs: The Hampton Series Books I-IV, Complete*. Mineola, NY: Dover 2001, 64-65.
[315] Ibid, 64-66.
[316] Jordan. *Soul Praise*. 41.
[317] Agawu. "African Music as Text." 10.

the border between slavery and freedom and could be referring to any of the rivers that would have been necessary to cross to reach freedom, like the Mississippi River, Ohio River, or even the Atlantic Ocean. Thomas explains, "When slaves sang of the Jordan River, they were speaking of the Ohio River or the Atlantic Ocean. If one crossed either, he or she would know freedom."[318]

The word "train" is another clue that can be seen as a symbol of transportation to travel through the Underground Railroad. In *Black Song*, Lovell explains the significance of the train as an important symbol in songs of slavery:

> Songs about trains are a minor miracle. The railroad train did not come into America until the late 1820s; it did not reach the slave country to any great extent until the 1830s and 1840s. Even then, the opportunities of the slave to examine trains closely were limited. Yet, before 1860, many spiritual poems exploited the train, its seductive sounds, speed and power, its recurring schedules, its ability to carry large numbers of passengers at cheap rates, its implicit democracy.[319]

"Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" sends the message that freedom is possible by way of Spirit in the form of escape (or transportation via the Underground Railroad). The message also warns of a possible barrier in the form of bodies of water along the way to freedom. Slave masters were completely unaware of the secret messages being shared between the enslaved Africans through "worship music." From their understanding, these songs of worship reflected the enslaved African's desire to express their Christian faith. Little did they know, the enslaved had freedom in mind and would stop at nothing until they, as Jesus taught, "brought heaven to earth" by escape.

Musical Arrangement

[318] Thomas. *No Man Can Hinder Me*. 26.
[319] Lovell. *Black Song*. 249.

"Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" is arranged by William L. Dawson (1899-1990).[320] Dawson was the choral director at Lincoln High School in Kansas City, MO. His choir consisted of 150 vocalists that performed primarily traditional spirituals arranged by Dawson himself. As a result, Dawson became famous for his arrangements of folk songs and was appointed director of the School of Music at Tuskegee Institute. Ironically, he attended Tuskegee Institute at the age of 13 and graduated with first honors. After being appointed, Dawson went on to direct Tuskegee's 100-voice a capella choir at several prestigious engagements, including concerts at Carnegie Hall in New York City and the White House. Under his direction, Tuskegee's choir toured internationally. In 1956, Dawson was awarded the honorary degree of doctor of music by Tuskegee Institute and sent by the U.S. State Department to Spain to direct various choirs.

In the book, "In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals," Guenther describes three main stylistic categories of spirituals. She classifies "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" under the third category, in which holds spirituals containing "syncopated, segmented, short punchy phrases. Their tempo is quick, their rhythm invites motion, and they are driven more by rhythm than melody."[321] West African music is built on rhythmic figurations and patterns. As Ekwueme states, musical form "is rhythm in the long span."[322]

"Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" is in the key of Eb major and arranged for SATB with a male soloist sung by a baritone (https://youtu.be/1QAj-7Y-nM0).[323] The soloist sings the verses while the choir accompanies in a homophonic texture. For almost the entire music the texture

[320] William L. Dawson. *Ev'ry Time I feel the Spirit*. Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Institute, 1946.
[321] Eileen Guenther. *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals*. Saint Louis: MorningStar, 2016, 32.
[322] Ekwueme. "Structural Levels of Rhythm." 28.
[323] Concert performance. Leanback04. "Every Time I Feel the Spirit - 2014 William L Dawson Concert." April 8, 2014. YouTube video. 1:32.

remains homophonic. Syncopated rhythms are used for short statements to paint the image of confidence and boldness. It is important to remember that the musical forms used in spirituals have African roots. This song uses the pentatonic scale by eliminating the 4th and 7th scale degrees in the refrain and verse sections. The pentatonic scale is a west African musical mode.

To paint the "short punchy" statements, including the humming sounds, accents and staccato markings are indicated within the music.The humming sounds are marked as *Fz* and produced by the basses and baritones. To the traditional African performer, humming is "singing in the throat." Agawu explains it in this way:

> For what was hummed was previously sung, so that, while singing in the throat with a kind of percussive articulation (that is, a kind of articulation native to speech), singers have the opportunity to reflect upon the very words that they have abandoned or tried (usually unsuccessfully) to abandon, and to construct appropriate (new) meanings.[324]

The characteristic melodies and rhythmic movement of "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit" demonstrates freedom in the face of slavery.

[324] Agawu. "African Music as Text." 13.

CHAPTER FIVE: ESCAPE SONGS

American songs of slavery developed into music of worship as they outline the enslaved Africans' priorities, ancestral Christian values, and important worldview through coded language. Coded message spirituals did not attract the attention of slave masters or those who owned the American plantations because they interpreted the messages literally. Enslaved Africans could not openly pray for deliverance, which made coded message spirituals even more effective. Simple Bible stories were enough to mask the real message that was being conveyed through song.

Augustine states that, "Mankind is divided into two sorts: such as live according to man, and such as live according to God. These we mystically call the 'two cities'…"[325] Augustine taught that to "live according to God," comes in two distinct forms: The first form is the inborn knowledge of God and his law, that is, the Spirit that lives within or consciousness of the moral goodness. The second form is the first form in written Word, that is, the Bible. The knowledge of God, which he has caused to be written, is explained in the book of Isaiah: "Seek and read from the book of the LORD: Not one of these shall be missing; none shall be without her mate. For the mouth of the Lord has commanded, and his Spirit has gathered them."[326]

Augustine taught that God cannot be glorified if one seeks pleasure and fulfillment in anything other than Him. For the enslaved African, this concept applied to the search for freedom and translated as "freedom cannot be obtained outside of God." The Bible in song would reconnect the enslaved Africans to their African Christian heritage ultimately leading them to freedom.

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[325] Aug. *The City of God*. 14.1.
[326] *The Holy Bible*. Isaiah 34:16.

I. Steal Away

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus.
Steal away, steal away home. I want to cross over into campground.
My Lord, He calls me, He calls me by the thunder.
The trumpet sounds within a my soul. I ain't got long to stay here.
Green trees are bending, poor sinner stands a trembling.
The trumpet sounds within a my soul. I aint got long to stay here.

Historical Background

"Steal Away" is a recognized "escape song." This spiritual references Jesus from the New Testament in whom enslaved Africans held their identity and who they knew would deliver them from slavery. The text of "Steal Away" could also be interpreted as a signal to the enslaved people that one of their own was currently in the process of escape. Many songs of slavery use this theme of freedom masked as a desire to leave this world for the next. Du Bois describes it as "The Negro, losing the joy of this world, eagerly seized upon the offered conceptions of the next; the avenging Spirit of the Lord enjoining patience in this world, under sorrow and tribulation until the Great Day when He should lead His dark children home—this became his comforting dream."[327]

Enslaved Africans in America understood that God was the author of their mission to be free from the bonds of slavery and they were the instrument by which the mission would be accomplished. God was their only hope, and he was connecting with them through his Word. In the Akan community, they live by the African proverb, onyiaa ne nsa kor, *Onyame na osiw ne fufu ma no*, it is God who ponds and prepares "fufu" (A Ghanaian dish) for the one-armed person.[328] This tells us that, as Pobee explains, "God is actively concerned with men, particularly

[327] DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 141.
[328] Pobee. "Aspects of African Traditional Religion." 6.

the helpless."[329] An enslaved African on American plantation singing, "Steal Away," could have been referring to a desire to meet Jesus in death as in heaven while also speaking of an escape plan to reach freedom. Because the meanings were flexible, plantation owners and slave masters were unbothered by the message, hearing it as a simple religious tune.

Coded Text

"Steal Away" can be found in *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs*, the work *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular*, and *The Story of the Spirituals*, all important historical collections of spirituals.[330] The work, *The Jubilee Singers*, is a primary source also discussed in André Thomas' *Way Over in Beulah Lan': Understanding and Performing the Negro Spiritual*. Guenther writes, "This song is exceptional: it is one spiritual connected with a composer and a specific situation. Numerous sources cite Nat Turner (1800-31) as the composer."[331]

"Steal Away" is also widely known as a signal song. The words "steal away" can be interpreted multiple ways. There is the masked interpretation only understood by the enslaved community, which was a call for secret worship. There are things one can only learn, see, and understand in a private, secret life of worship. This biblical principle can be found in Psalm 91:1: *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*, and Matthew 6:6 states, *But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will*

[329] Ibid.
[330] Marsh. *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs*. 181; Thomas. *Way Over Beulah Lan'*, 13-19; John Work. *American Negro Songs. 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998,123; Boatner. *The Story of the Spirituals*. 115.
[331] Guenther. *In Their Own Words*. 124.

reward you. The obvious interpretation is the literal meaning heard by those in power. The text sends the message that Jesus identifies with the "least of these,"[332] that is, society's poor, weak, and oppressed, and to be free from earthly bondage is to be with Christ in heaven. Slave masters and plantation owners approved of this sort of language because it aligned with their religious beliefs. Thurman explains that White preachers were instructed to steer away from teaching the importance of the birth of Jesus (Christmas) to the enslaved people because "it was dangerous to let [the enslaved] understand that the life and teachings of Jesus meant freedom for the captive and release for those held in economic, social, and political bondage."[333]

A path to freedom was embedded in the lyrics of "Steal Away." The words "crossing over into campground" emphasize the idea of making it to freedom in the North, Canada, or back home in Africa. It could also refer to storytelling of the heavenly journey to not attract the attention of slave masters. The words "Green trees are bending" appear straight-forward, exactly how the slave masters received it. Little did they know, these words were a call to action. Upon hearing Reverend Pearlie Brown sing "Steal Away," Boatner says he felt the meaning of the story. Brown told Boatner that:

> He had learned Steal Away from his grandmother, who told him that it was sung whenever there was to be a meeting among the slaves. He also said that the verse of the song that had the words, "green trees a bending" referred to bush arbors the slaves created in the woods to have their praise meetings. By bending and tying bushes, they could stimulate the bushes to grow into a kind of a cove that would be a gathering place for people to come and sing and pray and do other things that were not to be shared with the plantation owners.[334]

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[332] Ibid. Matthew 25:40.
[333] Howard Thurman. *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*. Friends United Press: First Edition, 1975.
[334] Bernice Johnson Reagon. *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, 76-77.

The dual meaning of this phrase was further emphasized by other enslaved Africans who made it to freedom. Chenu tells us that a freed slave named Peter Randolph gave an account of the way this worked in Virginia:

> Not being allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. This is often done by the first one arriving breaking boughs from the trees, and bending them in the direction of the selected spot.[335]

Musical Arrangement

This arrangement of "Steal Away" is by Dr. Clayton White (b.1942), a well-known scholar on the topic of spirituals who has over one hundred arrangements of spirituals. Dr. White is also the choral director of the "Clayton White Singers," a band of professional singers who perform arrangements of spirituals from his collection, "Tryin' to Get Ready." His collection includes this arrangement of *Steal Away*, written for SATB chorus[336] (https://youtu.be/rPHiN27IivM).[337]

The original scale is pentatonic, but White is able to adapt it to the diatonic scale of F. As Guenther points out, "Certain patterns characterize the melodies of spirituals. The scales tend to avoid the fourth and seventh degrees, resulting in an effective pentatonic scale. *Steal Away* beautifully illustrates this type of scale."[338] This arrangement uses 4/4 time and free and expressive rhythm, which calls for rhythmic freedom in tempo and at the discretion of the performer. White also uses dynamic markings to indicate freedom of expression. It seems that his interpretive choices are meant to be sensitive to the original intent of the performance, as they

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[335] Bruno Chenu. *The Trouble I've Seen: the Big Book of Negro Spirituals*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003, 67.
[336] Clayton White. "Steal Away" in *Tryin' to Get Ready*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2006, 79.
[337] The audio recording is Moses Hogan's arrangement of "Steal Away." Sing to God! "The Moses Hogan Singers - Steal Away to Jesus." June 7, 2016. YouTube video. 5:51.
[338] Guenther. *In Their Own Words*. 32.

reveal the meaning of the coded message. This structured approach gives performers an opportunity to hold as much of the "feel" from the original music as is possible.

The refrain in "Steal Away" is the repeated line, "Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus." White uses this simple line to help establish the mood of the music as well as emphasize the goal. The performance practice of the original spiritual where a leader is to start singing and pass on the words to someone else and so on is said by Boatner and Jordan to have been a way of notifying the enslaved community of a pending meeting. Ekwueme describes this practice as a traditional west African rhythmic "form" of the music that is "reducible to an A-B form, or simply a "Call and Response" or "Call and Refrain" form, in which a soloist (or a group) makes a statement, and a chorus (or another group) makes a response."[339] One would assume this pattern of singing would be presented in an imitative fashion. White instead chose to focus on the concept of unity displayed within the African slave community by keeping the refrain homophonic in texture. Majority of the musical arrangements of this spiritual are written as homophonic singing. William L. Dawson is the only known arranger to have approached the music using imitative texture.

White contributes dynamically to the singing pattern of the text by raising the dynamics for each phrase of the refrain. The sound increases by one level until the phrase, "steal away home." The tension is released by a decrease in the dynamic sound of the last phrase, "I ain't got long to stay here." For the verse, he includes the whole SATB chorus to project the meaning of the text. The sopranos sing, "My Lord, he calls me, he calls me by the thunder," while the remaining voices communicate the words in a hum-like manner on the vowel "oo." Afterwards,

[339] Ekwueme. "Structural Levels of Rhythm." 28.

all the voices join together singing in full tone, "The trumpet sounds with-in-a mah soul." Participation of an audience is an integral part of musical performance in traditional African communities. Kwabena says that, "the presence and participation of an audience influence the animation of a performance, the spontaneous selection of music, the range and textual improvisation, and other details; and this stimulus to creative activity is welcomed, and even sought, by the performers."[340] The final phrase, "I ain't got long to stay here" shares the same text as the final phrase of the refrain. Thus, White treats it the same way by resolving the tension through a decrease in the dynamic sound.

II. Deep River

> Oh, deep river, my home is over Jordan,
> Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
> Oh, don't you want to go to that gospel feast,
> That promised land where all is peace?
> Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.

Historical Background

"Deep River" is one of the most beloved spirituals. The message refers to the biblical passage in Joshua 3:17: "And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." The Jordan River is a common theme in many spirituals not only as a geographical area, but also as a border beyond which freedom was possible. Thurman describes Deep River as:

> Perhaps the most universal in insight, and certainly the most intellectual of all the spirituals. In a bold stroke it thinks of life in terms of a river. Of course, it must be added that to these early singers - slaves as they were - practically the river may have been for

[340] J. H. Kwabena Nketia. *The Music of Africa*. London: Gollancz, 1975, 33.

> many the last and most formidable barrier to freedom. To slip over the river from one of the border states would mean a chance for freedom in the North - or, to cross the river into Canada would mean freedom in a new country, a foreign land. But let us reflect in a deeper meaning here. To think of life as being like a river is a full and creative analogy.[341]

There were many counterfeit paths to freedom that were meant to lead escaped slaves to danger. The line, "I want to cross over into campground" describes the right path to freedom. "Deep River" also speaks about the promise of restoration. The enslaved Africans saw themselves as God's plan to restore their broken world to the vision God had for it from the beginning. Dixon recognizes that, "This spiritual reflects a quite different philosophy of life. The stream (river) as such is of no interest except as a marker of the border. The deep river is a constant, difficult barrier between our desert pilgrimage here and the fulfillment of all desires in the "promised land."[342] The physical "river" was a body of water an escaped slave would have to cross to reach freedom. The river, often wide, presented many challenges for the enslaved African. To travel through the river required great physical strength.

Oftentimes, enslaved Africans were physically abused by slave masters and suffered from extreme exhaustion brought on by the harsh working conditions on the plantations. Despite their unfortunate circumstances, the idea of a "gospel feast" offered hope because it was the promise of a new reality.

Coded Text

"Deep River" can be found in "The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs," with additional text in italics:

> Deep river, Lord, my home is over Jordan.
> Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.

[341] Thurman. *Deep River*. 70.
[342] Christa K. Dixon. *Negro Spirituals, From Bible to Folk Song*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976, 90.

> Oh, don't you want to go to that gospel feast, that promised land where all is peace?
> Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
> I'll go into heaven, and take my seat, cast my crown at Jesus's feet.
> Oh, when I get to heav'n, I'll walk all about, there's nobody there for to turn me out.
> Lord, I want to cross over into campground.[343]

The concept of heaven meant to do justice, to make things right for a better world for the enslaved African. The spiritual instruction was to "bring heaven to earth" by applying to life what Jesus taught—to ensure justice for those being crushed and to see people and their communities transformed.[344] Courlander believes that most Africans "had their own concepts of a supreme deity" and more often than not this God "tended to be somewhat remote, and their dealings—supplicative, invocational, and placative—were with lesser supernatural beings, including members of the holy pantheon."[345] Many of these concepts like the Supreme Being and Trinity can be found in African Christianity as it was early African Christian leaders who were the firsts to "figure out how best to read the law and prophets meaningfully, to think philosophically, and to teach the ecumenical rule of triune faith cohesively."[346]

The meaning of God in African traditional religion starts with, as Knighton states, the ultimate source who is "not like a man that He should behave like one."[347] Enslaved Africans knew they had the right to live and exist freely. They understood that in the eyes of God all are equal, and so they stood up for what was right by "casting their crowns at Jesus's feet." Dixon explains that:

> Once the obstacle of the deep river is overcome there will be no more hindrances. For believers who were used to being excluded from the festivities, who normally led others into beautiful homes and seated them at banquets they had themselves

[343] Marsh. *The Jubilee Singers*. 230.
[344] *The Holy Bible*. John 20:21; Proverbs 31:8.
[345] Courlander. *Negro Folk Music*. 38.
[346] Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. 29-30.
[347] Knighton. "The Meaning of God." 121.

> prepared, it is a glorious promise and prospect to be invited in and to be given a seat at the heavenly banquet where everything has been prepared…[348]

The message in "Deep River" emphasizes faith in the good Lord and the great reward for God's faithful, that is, heaven here on earth (freedom). There are other hidden meanings behind the text, as in escape plans and secret meetings. In his book, *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit*, Warren tells us that:

> *Deep River*, like most other spirituals, contains multiple levels of meaning. In this case, besides its sacred aspect, its text give it political significance as well… Specifically, *Deep River* is a dual-coded song of the URR (Underground Railroad). It was often sung to help may out a route to freedom, possibly indicating that escape would involve crossing a river in order to avoid the tracking of patrols and dogs.[349]

Lovell comments that, "The same pattern of interpretation will fit *Deep River*, and hundreds of other so-called death spirituals. Deliverance is often expressed in the spiritual in impersonal ways and things."[350] To the outsider, "Deep River" expresses a longing to literally die and go to heaven above to see Jesus. However, it served as a reminder to the enslaved African population that God was ready to break the chains of bondage to set them free.

Musical Arrangement

This arrangement is by René Clausen, a composer and arranger of spirituals who received his musical training from St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.[351] Dr. Clausen was the choir director of the Concordia Choir at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN and held a significant position as a faculty within the music department at Concordia College.

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[348] Dixon. *Negro Spirituals*. 91.
[349] Warren. *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit*. 31.
[350] Lovell. *Black Song*. 239.
[351] René Clausen. *Deep River*. Delaware Water Gap, PA: Fostco Music Press, 1990.

"Deep River" is written for SATB chorus (https://youtu.be/CQ2Wgc7u3VM).[352] Where the chorus is singing the word "oh" (mm.18-21), the solo part above could be sung by either a soprano or tenor. Although the key is in F major, a note in the piece states that the key of the song could be raised by ½, if preferred. The song is based around the African-derived pentatonic scale and the meter is in 4/4. It consists of mostly homophonic writing with the use of harmonic texture to paint aspects relating to the "deep river," like the river in motion. In the African context, river is a mode of sound production. According to Saakana, "These sounds—from the lion, the elephant, the bird, the wind, the river, thunder, etc.—became the principle for artistic formulation and expression."[353] Divisi writing happens when the text speaks about the boundary between slavery and freedom in order to express the great challenge of perseverance. In the line, "my home is over Jordan" divisi appears on the word "over" and the great reward, the "promised land."

Furthermore, to demonstrate how deep and wide the river goes divisi is written in the male vocal parts. The use of similar voicing to paint the many challenges enslaved Africans had to face to get to freedom and the great reward for overcoming these challenges further reiterates the main point of deliverance. As for the musical style of "Deep River," Guenther suggests that, "long, slow phrases characterize the second musical style in which a longer arc of thought flows in the texts of these more expansive songs. They express contemplative or sorrowful emotion, digging deep into the well of suffering and pain enslaved Africans experienced."[354] According to

[352] Audio recording. Willie Ellebie. "René Clausen: Deep River - Houghton College Choir." September 22, 2021. YouTube video. 3:07.
[353] Saakana. "Culture, Concept, Aesthetics." 330.
[354] Guenther. *In Their Own Words*. 32.

Adegbite, “long projected sounds in free rhythms may be used for certain types of chants…” These songs were a reminder to an oppressed people that deliverance was possible.

III. The Old Ship Of Zion

> ‘Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah!
> I’m no ways weary! I’m no ways tired! O glory hallelujah!
> Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch a fire!
> ‘Tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah! She has landed many thousands, hallelujah!
> She is rollin’, jes rollin’
> She is coming in the harbor, hallelujah! She will land you safe in heaven, hallelujah!
> O get your ticket ready, the ship will soon be leavin’. O get your ticket ready to go.
> King Jesus is her captain, hallelujah! She will never rock nor totter, hallelujah!
> Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch a fire. O glory hallelujah!
> Sing hallelujah!

Historical Background

“The Old Ship of Zion” was sung by enslaved Africans during camp meetings that were monitored by traveling preachers. Beneath the surface of this spiritual is a message of hope for freedom from slavery. The words carry more than one meaning, and the general message has its basis in scriptural prophecy. The story embedded in “The Old Ship of Zion” tells of an old ship that carries people safely across troubled waters to the shores of the kingdom of heaven. The message is that this old ship has safely carried thousands, even millions of people to Zion (the promised land) and will carry as many more safely home. One might think that an enslaved person boarding a ship to travel across dangerous waters to a foreign place would be the last thing they would think to sing about. Yet, this spiritual brings to light the reality of coded language within songs of slavery.

Coded Text

Spirituals were songs passed down from generation to generation by oral communication or spoken word, thus many of them contain a combination of texts from other songs and spirituals. Spoken word is rooted in African tradition. It is one of 3 main types of sounds. Adegbite describes these sounds as defined by the Yoruba people of Nigeria, "These are the sound of the spoken word (*iro oro*), musical sound (*iro orin*), and noise (*iro ariwo*), which may be produced by man, animal, nature, and so forth."[355] Adegbite adds, "the sounds that correspond with the inflections of the spoken words are as important as the aesthetics of a melody..."[356] "The Old Ship of Zion" is an example of songs that were passed down by oral tradition with some of its text appearing in other well-known songs like, "Old Ship of Zion," "The Gospel Train," "I Don't Feel Weary," "The Old Ship of Zion," "Hallelu, Hallelu." Parts of the text also appear in some primary collections of spirituals, like *The Jubilee Singers and Their Songs (1892)* and *Slave Songs of the United States (1867)*.

Below are the five songs mentioned above, which contain texts from "The Old Ship of Zion:"

Old Ship of Zion

What ship is that a sailing, hallelujah,
do you think that she is able for to carry us all home.
'tis the old ship of Zion, hallelujah.
She has landed many a thousand, and will land as many a more.
She is loaded down with angels,
King Jesus is the Captain, and he'll carry us all home.

The Gospel Train

She's nearing now the station, ah sinner, don't be vain;
but come and get your ticket, be ready for the train.
This train has never run off the track, she's passed through every land;
millions and millions are on board; oh, come and join the band.

[355] Adegbite. "The Concept of Sound." 47-48.
[356] Ibid. 48.

I Don't Feel Weary

I don't feel weary and noways tired, glory hallelujah.
Jest let me in the kingdom while the world is all on fire.
Gwine to live with God forever. And keep the ark movin'.

The Old Ship of Zion

Don't you see that ship a sailin' gwine over to the promised land!
She sails like she is heavy loaded.
King Jesus is her Captain.
The Holy Ghost is her pilot.

Hallelu, Hallelu

Oh, one day as anoder, hallelu. When de ship is out a'sailin', hallelu.
Member walk and never tire. Member walk Jordan long road.

Since enslaved Africans were primarily vocal people who were forbidden by their masters to hold any kind of written records, they relied on singing to tell their story. Singing is a sacred and important aspect of African life. Songs are a source of knowledge.[357] The ability to decode the coded messages in escape songs was of utmost importance, because at any given moment an enslaved could lose their life. The "Old Ship of Zion" is said to have been referring to Harriet Tubman who was a famous conductor of the Underground Railroad and known by many as "Moses." We know that Moses from the Old Testament was a chief ordained by God to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt to freedom. Harriet Tubman, the "Moses of her people," led hundreds of escaped slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

"The Old Ship of Zion" is prophetic in nature, as is with most spirituals. Prophecy is a way God communicates to his people, and the enslaved Africans knew that God was

[357] Pobee. "Aspects of African Traditional Religion." 3-4.

communicating to them through the Bible in song. The word "Zion" is mentioned throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament it is used to signify forward movement; God's calling for his people. In the New Testament, Zion reveals the place and purpose—the kingdom. Heaven meant the promised land or freedom to the enslaved African. In the line, "Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch a fire," the word "kingdom" refers to God's promises, and the message of the kingdom is that God promises to bring life and light from heaven to earth by setting things right. In Courlander's view, the enslaved African "felt impelled to translate and recast biblical events into a dramatic form that satisfied his sense of what was fitting." A small number of spirituals, Courlander states, "project mystical or abstract philosophical concepts." He further states that, "They tend to concentrate on particular events, episodes, stories, and revelations."[358] In other words, the African Christian heritage of the enslaved African was translated into song and passed down through oral tradition.

The meaning of "the world ketch a fire" is suffering or bondage of slavery. The line, "She is rollin', jes rollin" calls for the enslaved African to keep moving toward Zion, the promised land. The line "She is coming in the harbor" is a call to be alert that transportation via the Underground Railroad is on its way. "O get your ticket ready, the ship will soon be leavin'. O get your ticket ready to go" is a continuation of the previous line and provides details about how to escape. "King Jesus is her captain, hallelujah! She will never rock nor totter, hallelujah" and the final line reference the message of the kingdom. To know what Jesus taught regarding the kingdom is to experience the promises of God—freedom from slavery.

Musical Arrangement

[358] Courlander. *Negro Folk Music*. 38-39.

This arrangement of "The Old Ship of Zion" is by Dr. Richard H. Smith (1937-2011).[359] Dr. Smith is a noted choral director, composer, and arranger of spirituals. He has composed numerous choral works in various styles, many of which have been published.[360] His arrangement of spirituals is especially significant given his musical background. Dr. Smith was raised in the African American church where spirituals were the songs of worship. He attended Concordia College in Moorhead, MN where he received his BA in music. He also holds a Masters degree in biochemistry and a PhD in music. For almost 30 years, Dr. Smith was the choral director of the Jamestown College Concert Choir, a highly regarded choir in its day. His choir was the first American choir to perform at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (1972). Dr. Smith's works and performances were so well received that in 1984 he was appointed Dean at Jamestown College, a title he held for more than 10 years.

The text of this arrangement by Richard Smith takes aspects of all five songs presented above to reveal a different experience and tell another story. By the note in the song's score that reads "traditional spiritual," it appears that the text used in Smith's arrangement is not by himself. That said, "The Old Ship of Zion" was a powerful force of language on the Underground Railroad that led many enslaved Africans to freedom.

"The Old Ship of Zion" is arranged for SATB (https://youtu.be/aqKRlZUd4XQ).[361] Although the song employs the distinctive African pentatonic scale, a non-chord passing tone occurs on the flatted 7th scale degree during the line, "the world ketch a fire." The tempo is in

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[359] Richard Harrison Smith. *The Old Ship of Zion*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979, 1-7.
[360] Some of Smith's published works are, *Heav'ns Bells a Ringin'*. Augsburg Publishing House; *The Old Ship of Zion*. Augsburg Publishing House; *Wear a Starry Crown*. Lorenz; *Did Mary Know?* Lorenz; *Lawd, I Wanna go Home*. Lorenz; *Wear a Starry Crown*. Lorenz.
[361] Concert performance. FUMC Pittsfield. "The Old Ship of Zion, by Richard H Smith." June 6, 2017. YouTube video. 3:09.

2/2 meter, and homophonic texture is mostly used with some rhythmic flexibility in the men's sections. Interestingly, the key starts in C major but doesn't stay there. A modulation to F major happens at the final phrase to boldly declare the message. It is clear the musical devices employed in this arrangement are meant to enhance the text and project the intended message. According to Ekwueme, "It is important to ascertain in the (African traditional) music...those things which are variable (subject to several changes during the course of a performance, or at different performances)."[362] Ekwueme further explains:

> A tune that alters its melodic line sometimes, or whenever it reappears, is a *variable*. An accompaniment that is either irregular in pattern or inconsistent in timing or mode of occurrence is a variable. An occasional interjection of spoken words or other emotional expression (such as the pulsation of lips) by singers or dancers in the course of a performance, which is not a regular feature of the song, is a variable.[363]

As for text painting, the song begins with a strong statement declaring that The Old Ship of Zion has arrived to pick up its passengers—those who believe. In m.6, the passengers meant to sail the ship powerfully declare the refrain, "I'm no ways weary! I'm no ways tired!" It seems the passengers have been waiting a long time, and yet they are still ready and hopeful for the journey ahead. The refrain is boldly stated throughout the song to not only paint the picture of endurance and perseverance, but also to paint great faith in the goodwill of God. Steady quarter notes and rhythmic variations, as is common in traditional African music, are used in m.22 to imitate the sound of the majestic ship of Zion in motion. A traditional African performer would create "improvised variations on rhythm patterns" in order to decorate or add embellishments to a song.[364]

[362] Ekwueme. "Structural Levels of Rhythm." 29.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid. 32.

For the phrase, “She is rollin’, jes rollin,” motifs are written for the men to demonstrate the process of traveling to a distant place never to return again. The music starts out slowly and then picks up the pace to show motion. The melody is sung by the women who join the men two measures after they begin. Smith allows the melody to flourish and change moods to paint the exciting and anxious journey to freedom as with, “She is comin’ in the harbor, hallelujah. She will land you safe in Heaven, hallelujah!” and when the sopranos sing “hum” over the other voices to signify achieving kingdom.

The statement, “I’m no ways weary. I’m no ways tired” is repeated over and over again as a way of reminding the enslaved population that the kingdom of heaven was near and to not lose hope. We remember that enslaved Africans risked their lives by escaping to freedom, and songs of hope as this one kept many of them committed and determined to make it out alive. To paint the text in m.77, “O glory hallelujah! Just let me in the kingdom when the world ketch a fire,” it is indicated for the choir to sing “gradually faster and louder.” This provides the listener with a sense of forward movement and an increase in speed as the sight of heaven draws near. For the section leading up to the final statement, Smith creates a whistle-like sound as an announcement call to all passengers waiting to board the ship. The whistle is sung by sopranos and altos for most of the time while tenors and basses sing in the upper range to meet the women.

Smith also has the choir sing in SSATB. The change in voicing produces a fuller, more powerful sound that projects great faith in the unknown. A dominant seventh chord happens on “get your ticket ready to go” to serve as a pivot chord. Surprisingly, the dominant seventh chord doesn’t resolve as expected. It is held for a longer period of time to prepare for the final

statement. The last statement starts with a pivot note that is used to modulate to F major. Arrival in the new key of F major represents achievement and success having reached heaven (freedom).

IV. Let Me Fly

Way down yonder in the middle of the fiel', angel a-workin' at the chariot wheel.
Not so partic'lar 'bout workin' at the wheel, I jus' wan' to see how the chariot feel.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
Meet that hypocrite on the street, first thing he do is show his teeth.
Next thing he do is tell a lie. Well, the best thing to do is pass him by.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
I got a mother in the Promised Land. Well, I ain't gonna stop 'til I shake her hand.
Not so partic'lar 'bout shakin' her hand, but I just wan' to get to the Promised Land.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
I heard such a rumbalin' in the sky, I thought my Lord was passin' by.
Twas the good ol' chariot drawin' nigh, shook the earth, swept the sky.
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.
I want wings, I want to fly, oh Lord, I wan' to fly,
Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord.

Historical Background

Enslaved Africans in America dreamed of one day being delivered from slavery. Despite their struggles, they kept the faith knowing the good Lord would one day set them free. The angels, chariots, and wings are all symbols for freedom. "Let Me Fly" is a plea for survival. The text symbolically represents community support. Guenther tells us that, " 'I' equals 'we' in the African sensibility, where individuals are responsible for the whole community, not only for themselves. The bonds of community were palpable, as they sang songs of unshakable faith."[365] For the sake of survival, enslaved Africans maintained a sense of community even across plantations. Reaching freedom was a community project that consisted in communion with God through singing spirituals.

[365] Guenther. *In Their Own Words*. 355.

Coded Text

"Let Me Fly" also goes by the name of, "Now Let Me Fly." Although it is one of a few spirituals not listed in the primary collections of spirituals used in this study, parts of the text appear in other spirituals. "Let Me Fly" covers a wide range of emotions as it tells of a longing to be released. Thomas states, "Their spirituals told of the enslaved longing to be free. Their songs sent a message, filled with symbolism and metaphors, telling how and when and why they would flee."[366]

The first line states, "angel a-workin' at the chariot wheel." The words "angel" and "chariot" are coded words signifying escape. The "angel" represents an enslaved person who was now on board the "chariot" to freedom. The refrain, "Oh let me fly, to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord" is repeated throughout this song. The words "Mount Zion," "the Promised Land," and "Heaven" symbolize freedom. There is no denying that the ultimate goal for the enslaved African was to be released from the bondage of slavery. As Lovell makes clear, to read the spirituals for true meaning is to "accept the slave's desire for freedom as his prime cause." He adds that, "It should be reiterated that the slave could discuss this prime cause only through symbols. Thus Death and Canaan are most often symbols of release from slavery without meaning release from life."[367]

The following line, "Meet that hypocrite on the street, first thing he do is show his teeth" refers to the slave owners who would pick the parts of the Bible that were convenient to exercise power and control over the enslaved population. In the preface to his *The First Book of Negro Spirituals*, Johnson discusses the way in which White preachers delivered the message of Jesus to the enslaved population. He explains that White preachers were made to leave out certain

[366] Thomas. *No Man Can Hinder Me*. 26.
[367] Lovell. *Black Song*. 307.

passages from the Bible, especially ones like the Nativity story of Christ (how and when Jesus was born and the reason for his birth). Johnson explains that this was done in order that the enslaved community would not feel empowered, but instead remain in obedience to their masters.[368] Most slave owners were religious and believed in heaven and hell, however, the surface level meaning of many passages in the Bible was still interpreted differently by both the enslaved Africans and the slave owners. The concept of heaven and hell was not the same for the enslaved African and his master. Thurman tells us that:

> The slave had often heard his master's minister talk about heaven, the final abode of the righteous. Naturally the master regarded himself as fitting into that category. On the other hand the slave knew that he too was going to heaven. There must be two heavens, no, God cannot be divided in this way. I am having my hell now---when I die I shall have my heaven. The master is having his heaven now; when he dies he will have his hell.[369]

In "Let Me Fly" and many other spirituals, parts of the text reference relatives who had already made it to heaven or reached the Promised Land. Other spirituals that make reference to family include: "A City Called Heaven," "Death's Going to Lay His Hands on Me," "Listen to the Lambs," "Poor Wayfarin' Stranger, Swing Low, The Old Ark's a-Moverin'," "Wake up Jacob!," and "When the Train Comes Along." In traditional African culture, the family is the foundation of society. Not only does family provide love and support, family provides a sense of meaning and belonging. Therefore, the enslaved Africans made it a point to include stories about their relatives in many texts of spirituals. Lovell explains:

> Where death does mean release from life, the African concepts are likely to be present or pronounced. In dozens of songs which speak of reunion with mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and other beloved dead, these African beliefs are assuredly being perpetuated.[370]

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[368] Johnson. *The First Book of Negro Spirituals*. "Preface."
[369] Thurman. *Deep River.* 43.
[370] Lovell. *Black Song*. 307.

The literal meaning of the text appears to be telling of family members who had passed away, but the intended meaning is speaking of relatives who had already escaped to freedom. Since the enslaved Africans had no way of knowing if their family members who had escaped made it to freedom safely, singing spirituals also served as prayer to God for guidance and protection over them. The lines near the end of the text that tell of a "rumbalin'" sound of the "good ol' chariot drawin nigh" is symbolic for the train noises sounding as it rides through the Underground Railroad. The final statement, "I want wings, I want to fly, oh Lord, I wan' to fly, Oh won't you let me fly to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord" is a prayer for steadfast faith and a way to escape. We remember that planning an escape was not an easy task. It was in fact very dangerous. Enslaved Africans risked their lives to get to freedom and not every attempt to escape was successful. Many died along the way to freedom. To be an "angel a-workin" was to be in tune with the Spirit. As Chenu puts it, "Travel no longer would be a problem because a pair of wings would be given."[371] To the enslaved African, the only way to make it out alive on the journey was by the power of the Spirit working in and through them along the path to freedom.

Musical Arrangement

"Let Me Fly" is arranged by Robert DeCormier (1922-2017), a choral director who was known for his classical music works and arrangements of folk songs.[372] DeCormier graduated from the prestigious Juilliard School of Music and became a music teacher in New York City. He was also the music director of the New York Choral Society and co-founder of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra Chorus. DeCormier and his wife, Lousie, were avid collectors and recorders of folk songs. He directed the Belafonte Folk Singers for most of his life and led the DeCormier Singers.

[371] Chenu. *The Trouble I've Seen*. 213.
[372] Robert DeCormier. *Let Me Fly*. Miami, FL: Warner Brothers Publications, 1984.

"Let Me Fly" is DeCormier's most recognized arrangement of spirituals. A request was made for him to arrange the cantata, "They Call Her Moses," as a celebration of Harriet Tubman's good works during her lifetime.[373]

"Let Me Fly" is scored for SATB divisi with one soloist marked for baritone voice (https://youtu.be/R3AvMuZkv-s).[374] The key starts in G major but modulates to Ab major in m.57. Both the tonality and rhythmic quality create a sense of excitement and hope throughout the song. The music is built on the pentatonic scale. The tempo is in 2/2 meter with the marking indicating "swung" for the choir to sing the eighth notes unevenly throughout. The rhythm is syncopated most of the time, retaining a sense of excitement while simultaneously reflecting the standard rhythmic patterns of west African music. As Ekwueme demonstrates, "each rhythm pattern is a cyclic form, which may begin at any point in its sequence…We also know that each pattern may be internally varied."[375]

Imitative texture occurs during the majority of sections, but homophonic texture is used for parts of the verses and the end of the refrain. To paint text in an imitative manner, quick phrases are utilized as a type of call and response between the female and male voices. The syncopated rhythms during the statement, "I want wings, I wan' to fly" create a change in texture as the voices have a bit more freedom of expression. Ekwueme explains that "the background of the bulk of most African musical rhythm is a duple statement or pulsation, in the long span, in

[373] Live Culture. "Remembering Robert DeCormier: The Music and the Man." Seven Days: Vermont's Independent Voice, 2017. https://www.sevendaysvt.com/LiveCulture/archives/2017/11/09/remembering-robert-de-cormier-the-music-and-the-man.
[374] Audio recording. Various Artists - Topic. "Let Me Fly (Arr. R. DeCormier)." October 13, 2016. YouTube video. 2:35.
[375] Ekwueme. "Structural Levels of Rhythm." 30.

binary form."[376] Finally, all the voices join together in one accord by using the same rhythm into "O won't you let me fly to Mount Zion, Lord, Lord" to intensify the final statement.

[376] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Spirit within the African slave community in America has always been important. God is the foundation by which everything in traditional African society makes sense. The "Spirit" of God is the base upon which spirituals, created by the enslaved Africans in America, are accurately interpreted. Many scholars want to be the expert on the subject of the Bible in spirituals. However, interpretation without regard to the historical and cultural context of spirituals is meaningless. Christianity is an African traditional religion that was passed down from generation to generation by both oral and written traditions. The written records of African theologians in the early church, like Augustine, are vast and absolutely necessary for analyzing and interpreting spirituals.

Many scholars claim African Christian history as the history of Western Christianity. This myth should be laid to rest never to rise again, since there remains an abundance of evidence clarifying that Christianity did in fact move from Africa to Europe, not the other way around.[377] To say otherwise is to deny the African and descendants of Africans across the diaspora their own long-standing African Christian heritage and access to their spiritual ancestors of the faith.

It remains the responsibility of present and future scholars to adopt a postcolonial approach to reading African Christian history, that is, to hear the voice of the colonized, the oppressed, and the lowest members of society.[378] If we can apply this reading practice, then we will have a clearer view and better understanding of both the past and the present.

[377] See Oden's, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, for more information on the African origins of Western Christianity.
[378] See Wilhite's, *Augustine the African*, for a detailed discussion on the field of Postcolonialism.

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