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# “There Is a Higher Height in the Lord”: Music, Worship, and Communication with God

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**Abstract:** Music is so vital in the services of African American Baptist churches that there are few moments in the service when music—either congregational or choral singing, or instrumental music of some sort—is not being performed. Sustained as an auditory or imagined presence, music acts almost as a timbral membrane for the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the service. The Holy Spirit is physically manifested (inspiration by the Holy Spirit) in the church membership, predominantly (if not exclusively) in a musical context. In order to ground the general in the particular, I will give detailed consideration to two musical instances or events from the Sunday morning service at Clear Creek Missionary Baptist Church on 4 November 2012, contextualising those within a broader context.

**Keywords:** music; chant; fundamentalist; evangelical; African American; Baptist; Spirit inspiration/possession; text-and-context sermon; Gospel

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## 1. Introduction

Music is vital in the services of African American Baptist churches. There are few moments in the service when music—either congregational or choral singing, or instrumental music of some sort—is not being performed; in fact, especially in southern churches, the whole service may be underpinned by a coherent tonal system (often, but not exclusively, predicated on 3rd and 5th relations of closely related tonal centres). Much of the “impromptu” music within a service—chanted prayers, lined hymns, or “called up” hymns, for example—is spontaneously introduced by a member of the congregation, one of the deacons, or a minister. Yet even when such music follows a relatively extended period devoid of any

music, its tonal centre is not arbitrary, but is generally closely related to the preceding music. Thus one can argue, as I do here, when music is sustained in this way as an auditory or imagined presence, it functions as almost a timbral membrane for the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the service. While this is not necessarily the case in all, or even most, African American churches, it is the case at Clear Creek Missionary Baptist Church (hereafter M.B.C.) in Mississippi, the community where I conducted my most intensive fieldwork in the 1980s and early 1990s, and to which I returned in the 2010s. It was also the case at services of the Tallahatchie-Oxford Missionary Baptist (hereafter T.O.M.B.) District Association in the 1980s and 1990s, when some twenty or so local churches came together on fifth Sundays. At the time, many of these small local churches had only part-time pastors (engaged for first and third Sundays, or alternately, second and fourth Sundays), and so lacked a pastor for the infrequent fifth Sundays in a month which occur about three or four times per year, depending on how the Sundays fall in a given calendar year. Thus the T.O.M.B. District Association churches would meet for services at the large Project Centre on the outskirts of Oxford, on the fifth Sundays.

## 2. Clear Creek M.B.C

Clear Creek M.B.C. is, in many ways, a typical, Southern, African American, fundamentalist and evangelical church. While not all members of Clear Creek M.B.C. would embrace the labels fundamentalist and evangelical, they stress that they believe in Biblical inerrancy, and that they are an evangelical church. It is worth stating, however, that as Southern historian Charles Reagan Wilson has remarked “Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism are two quite distinct categories, although believers frequently hold both concepts. [...] Evangelicals and Fundamentalists in the South share the belief that right behavior is essential to ‘being religious’” ([1], p. 9). If fundamentalism is, therefore, frequently defined as militantly anti-modernist Protestantism, this is not how these congregations define it, and it is within the context of their definitions that I situate explication here.

Embedded in the seemingly simple identification of Clear Creek outlined in the previous paragraph (as typical, Southern, African American, fundamentalist and evangelical), is a plethora of historically documented facts, statistics, and assumptions, ranging from definitions of the nature of Southern religion—meaning “of the American South”—to the statistical and numerical supremacy of the (several) Baptist denominations, to assumptions about what constitutes a “typical” African American church. Each of these labels must be examined as they simultaneously delineate identities and resonate with the social and cultural spaces that surround them.

## 3. African American Christianity

While it is true that African American Christianity has its origins in the Christianity of the colonists, this is not to say that African American Christianity or religious expression is but an imitation of what might be termed Anglo American antecedents or counterparts. As explored by Black theologians in the 1960s and 1970s in particular [2–5],<sup>1</sup> African American Christianity is itself a unique expression, developed by the slaves and carried by their descendants into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not, of course, to imply that Black theological production has attenuated since that time but, simply, that in terms of academic scholarship, this was a new departure that had particular impact in the 1960s and 1970s.

The musical expressions that African Americans used to encode and express that interpretation of the Christian message were similarly reinterpreted to encapsulate a comprehension and elucidation of life that is uniquely African American.

I have chosen Christianity as the religion of study for the reasons stated above, but also because, as a consequence of distinct cultural and historical configurations, it is the religion where the exegesis of cultural transfer and reinterpretation is most concretely documented [6,7], and because the majority of contemporary African Americans who profess affiliation with an organised religion nominate Christianity. Similarly, I have chosen the Baptist church as the specific locus of study because it was one of the foremost denominations in the evangelisation of the slaves and their descendants, and because it holds today the largest African American membership of any Christian denomination [8–11]. In order to ground the discussion in the particular, rather than confine it to generalities, I will refer to my field recordings of services from fieldwork that I conducted in such churches in Mississippi in the 1980s and 1990s ([12], pp. 169–205), and re-contextualise these with field recordings from my fieldwork in 2012. Comparison over time is, of course, an intriguing possibility in this instance but, as I have explored the earlier services quite extensively in my 2004 monograph [12], the reader is referred there (and to the accompanying CD) for detail about those. For this article, therefore, I will ground discussion in 2012.

A number of critically important factors confound fruitful comparison in this article across the decades. Most critically, perhaps, Clear Creek M.B.C. has a new, full-time, and very different pastor (see heading 7 for more detail on this). Similarly, while some key officers of the church have remained, others (Deacon Lee Earl Robinson, and Deacon Sam Jones, for example) have moved on. Both the church membership and the church building have increased roughly fourfold in size, so that this is no longer the small, primarily familial church it once was, but a large evangelical church. It is still true, however, that when I attended service in 2012, I and the couple with whom I was staying (who graciously offered to drive me out to service, as I no longer have a valid American driver's licence) were the only white people in attendance. The “parent” Clear Creek Southern Baptist Church (organised 12 August 1834 by settlers from Virginia and the Carolinas) from which the African American population split in 1877, is but a few hundred yards up the road from Clear Creek M.B.C., and maintains a white congregation (see heading 7, below, for further detail).

#### **4. The American South**

The American South (and most particularly the states of the Deep South) is a deeply religious, and more specifically Protestant, domain. Nine out of ten Southerners identify themselves as Christian, Protestant specifically, (only six out of ten non-Southerners, by contrast, thus identify themselves) and more than half of those as Baptist ([1], p.13). But if Southerners identify themselves as primarily Christian, that Christianity is fractured more along racial than along denominational lines. As Charles Reagan Wilson has remarked:

Sunday morning [...] still is the most segregated time in the South. Blacks attend separate churches from whites—the National Baptist convention, not the Southern Baptist Convention; the African Methodist Episcopal Church, not the United Methodist Church; the Church of

God in Christ, not the Church of God. Black churches are historic, deeply rooted in a separate black religious tradition ([1], p. 11).

Or, as David Wills has remarked: “The gap between the races [...] remains one of the foundational realities of our national religious life [...] one of the crucial, central themes in the religious history of the United States” ([13], p. 20). Thus, as soon as we approach the religious arena, we are confronted with contested space, for there is not simply the separation between secular and sacred space but, particularly amongst Baptist congregations, racially designated space.

## 5. African American Church Congregations

I have stated that Clear Creek M.B.C. is, in many ways, a typical, Southern, African American church, but what constitutes a typical, African American church of this nature is, of course, an even more complex issue (for more detailed discussion of this topic see [12], pp. 29–31). The depiction of the Black church as a monolith that emerged from the literature of Black theology of the 1960s and 1970s, (for a variety of core readings on this topic, see [14]) was challenged in the 1990s especially, by scholars of African American religion such as Milton J. Sernett [4], Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer [5,6], scholars who sought to stress the variety of the African American religious experience. There persists, nonetheless, amongst both academics and local congregations, an acute awareness of momentous differences between black and white worship styles [7–10]. Moreover, Baptist congregations (which comprise the largest numbers of African American Christians in the United States) tend, probably more than any other non-racially designated denomination, to constitute themselves almost exclusively along racial lines.<sup>2</sup>

It remains to be emphasised, moreover, that Baptist associations or conventions are themselves constituted along racial lines: thus, the Southern Baptist Convention consists almost exclusively of white congregations, whereas the two National Baptist Conventions (Incorporated and Unincorporated) consist almost exclusively of black congregations.<sup>3</sup> As the first formal organizations where black people could congregate freely and exert some control over their lives, black churches have historically

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<sup>2</sup> The Baptists were the most successful denomination in converting slaves to Christianity for a variety of reasons, but not least their early evangelical efforts, and the Baptist emphasis on congregational autonomy, which had tremendous appeal for oppressed African Americans. From about 1700, it is clear that many slaveholders in the South were organising (or at least tolerating) religious instruction and places of worship for the slaves. The first specifically Black Baptist church in America was organized at Silver Bluff, across the Savannah River from Augusta, Georgia, in 1773, and other churches soon followed, most of them Baptist or Methodist. The Providence Baptist Association of Ohio, the first black Baptist group, was formed in 1836, followed by the first attempt at national organization in 1880 with the creation of the Foreign Mission Baptist Convention at Montgomery, Alabama. The American National Baptist Convention was organized in St. Louis, Missouri in 1886, the Baptist National Educational Convention was founded in the District of Columbia in 1893. All three conventions were merged into the National Baptist Convention of America in Atlanta in 1895 ([10], pp. 43–44).

<sup>3</sup> In 1915 the National Baptist Convention of America split into two (still separate) conventions: the National Baptist Convention of America “unincorporated” *i.e.*, not under the laws of the District of Columbia), and the National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A., Inc., “incorporated” ([10], pp. 43–44). Of the more than twenty pages devoted to a (very brief) history of the Baptists, and description of the various Baptist associations and conventions in this text, a single two-page section is headed “Black Baptists”.

maintained their separateness from white churches. In the tradition of Richard Allen (1760–1831), who famously walked out of the St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, PA in 1792, and established the first Black independent church—the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church—so the members of Clear Creek M.B.C. split with their parent Clear Creek Southern Baptist church in 1877.

## 6. The Religious Context: The African American Baptist Service

Because I have given detailed consideration to the typical structure of African American Baptist church services as manifest at Clear Creek M.B.C. elsewhere ([12], pp. 61–84), a brief summary will suffice here. Typically a Sunday morning service at an African American Baptist church, the main service of the week (some churches also hold Sunday evening services but, in my experience, these are not generally as well attended), begins at about 11 a.m., and has an expected duration of between ninety minutes and two to three hours.<sup>4</sup> Churches generally print up (or buy in) bulletins that give some information on the church, details of the pastor, church officers, weekly schedule of services, the Church Covenant (perhaps) and an anticipated order of the particular service. The service may include, or be preceded by, the Devotion, which is usually led by the deacons and consists of alternating spontaneous prayers and songs. A “Call to Worship” and “Benediction” generally frame the service, and formal structures such as “Announcements”, “Recognition of Visitors”, and the “Sick and Prayer list”, designated choral numbers (as opposed to congregational singing), the sermon, and the “Invitation to Christian Discipleship” are rarely moved (as to sequence or order), but what transpires in between those structures is largely responsible for the elasticity of the service. There is, as might be expected, considerable variation in the duration of the sermon from one service to the next, even at the same church. This sense of flexibility is to be desired and cherished, as it reflects receptivity to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and a permeability that allows for the physical manifestation of the Spirit in the service. Traditional African American Baptists have explained to me that the time allotted to service is thus elastic, because what is important is that one be open to the working of the Holy Spirit, whereas trying to control the duration of the service would be contrary to this.

## 7. A Brief Recent Overview of Clear Creek M.B.C

When I conducted fieldwork in Mississippi in the 1980s and early 1990s, Clear Creek M.B.C. in northern Mississippi, had a part-time pastor—the Rev. Grady McKinney (1971–1991)—which would have been quite usual in this area of Mississippi, and the church had a small, largely familial membership of about 180. In the last decade or so, however, Oxford, and as a consequence the surrounding satellite communities (of which Clear Creek is one) have experienced significant economic growth and prosperity. Four-lane highways have been constructed for the first time in this part of

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<sup>4</sup> Whilst broad generalisations like this are always problematic, I base these observations on 10 years of living and conducting fieldwork in the United States (1981–1991), generally attending church services weekly, and on sporadic visits since then, most recently to Atlanta, GA (April 2012) and Clear Creek/Oxford, MS (November 2012). Most of my research was conducted in Kentucky, Mississippi, and Rhode Island, but I also attended at least occasional services at African American Baptist churches in California, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine (rather rare here), New York, and Pennsylvania.

northern Mississippi, and this has, naturally, greatly influenced both mobility and trade. Where the population in 1990 was about 10,000, today it is closer to 40,000, roughly 17,000 of those associated with the University of Mississippi. The demography of the area has similarly changed. Whereas in 1990 I recall there being one Mexican restaurant (but little else in terms of “international” cuisine), when I visited in November 2012 there were three Japanese restaurants, one Indian restaurant, one Middle-Eastern restaurant, two Thai restaurants, a Portuguese bakery, countless numbers of other Asian restaurants, both Chinese and Malaysian, and of course, many Mexican restaurants. Both to accommodate and as a result of these developments, many new housing subdivisions have been built in outlying areas, some modest, others very extravagant (with some of these latter inevitably suffering as a result of the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the United States).

Thus, not only the pastor, but the congregation at Clear Creek M.B.C. has changed considerably, drawing in a more diverse (but still African American) population. Yet even prior to the economic prosperity and gentrification that came to the South in the late 1990s and early 2000s (perhaps latterly to Mississippi), a South that has also suffered from the sub-prime mortgage crisis that threatened to derail the American economy, many of the key musicians from my earlier fieldwork had already moved away from Mississippi in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Mississippi is, of course, historically the most economically deprived state in the Union, and these musicians migrated in search of (better) jobs, typically to the expanding urban metropolis that is Atlanta, Georgia.

Clear Creek M.B.C. has also been transformed. The church now has a full-time pastor—Eddie D. Goliday, Sr., (May 1998–present)—which has resulted in many more weekly church activities. The membership has grown to about 800, and a new sanctuary (roughly four times the size of the previous one) was built in 2002 (see Figure 1a, b). Note the phenomenal difference in terms of size between the two church buildings, not just in terms of mass, but in height and physical presence upon the landscape. In contrast to the relatively low profile of the older building, the new building soars skywards, with an imposing entrance enclosed in a brick tower, which is itself topped by a multi-tiered white spire.



(a)

Clear Creek's Sanctuary today: note Baptismal pond (centre) and video screens (right and left)



(b)

**Figure 1.** (a) The Clear Creek M.B.C. Building, November 2012 (previous building to the left, portion of newer building on the right); (b) The Clear Creek M.B.C. Sanctuary, November 2012.

The new sanctuary contains a Baptismal pool with a glass front set relatively high into the wall of the church behind the podium (much like the one that I described for Main Street Baptist church in Kentucky ([12], p. 53), so that the membership no longer has to travel to a local outdoor pond during the summer months to conduct Baptism, but can do so any time. Along with an increase in the size of the Clear Creek M.B.C. church sanctuary in 2002, has come a need for increased technology: a new PA system, and two large video screens installed on the wall behind the choir stalls (so that members far removed from the performers at the front of the church, can see those individuals, and read key texts that are projected onto the screens).

A bus was purchased to transport members in need of it to church events (see Figure 2).

### Clear Creek's M.B. C.'s new bus



**Figure 2.** The Clear Creek M.B.C. bus, November 2012.

The church has a website, email contact, and a radio ministry (WOXD FM 95.5 each Sunday 4:00–5:00 p.m.), and recordings (both CD and DVD) are made of each service and may be purchased from a designated deacon. Because the physical distance within the church sanctuary is now so much greater, close ups of individual “actors”—prayer leaders, soloists, preachers, deacons—are projected onto two large video screens, as are such things as relevant quotations from the Bible. While the word

“actors” and by correlation “audience” sits uneasily in this context, I use it advisedly in the sense of an individual committing an action, as opposed to implying any sort of make believe. In this regard, see ([15], pp. 2–3).

Despite all of these material changes, Sunday services at Clear Creek M.B.C. continue to be traditional and Spirit-filled. Rev. Goliday, Sr., is a powerful preacher, and the music ministry continues to be strong. One significant musical change is that a drum set has now been officially installed close to the other instruments (generally electric keyboard and acoustic piano): previously, partly because of the drum’s close association with blues and “Devil’s music”, drums made only occasional appearances at Clear Creek M.B.C. (generally when other visiting churches brought them to accompany their music), and several members then expressed reservations about them to me.

## 8. Music in Clear Creek M.B.C Services

As stated in the introduction, music is so vital in the services of African American Baptist churches that there are few moments in the service when some sort of music is not being performed and, especially in southern churches, the whole service may be underpinned by a coherent tonal system. At Clear Creek M.B.C., this is particularly true. Sustained as an auditory or imagined presence, music acts almost as a timbral membrane for the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the service (for more discrete explication of how church members view inspiration by the Holy Spirit, see ([12], pp. 111–40). The Holy Spirit is physically manifested (inspiration by the Holy Spirit) in the church membership predominantly (if not exclusively) in my experience, in a musical context. Thus music, in all of its various manifestations in a typical service—lined hymns, chanted prayers, congregational song, choral numbers, spirituals, Gospel pieces—facilitates the inter-penetration of the sacred into the secular, the divine into the profane. In some cases, this inspiration by the Holy Spirit may result in holy dance, or trance (this is more common among congregants, as opposed to individuals with designated roles—although I have seen deacons become inspired—and may appear to the uninitiated to be out of control). As Rev. McKinney explained it to me: “It’s just something explode on the inside, and if a person haven’t been born again, they wonder what is wrong with you” [16]. In the case of the preacher (or indeed musicians), control is more likely to remain with the individual: the preacher lends his voice to the Holy Spirit, who preaches through him, often in remarkably beautiful poetic and musical chant (for some examples, see [12], pp. 132–40, 194–204; [17], tracks 5, 7, 8, 9).

For the remainder of this article I would like to consider two musical instances or events from the Sunday morning service at Clear Creek M.B.C. on 4 November 2012.

## 9. Clear Creek M.B.C Morning Worship Service, 4 November 2012 [18]

With the slight exception of an earlier start—10:45 a.m., as opposed to 11 a.m., as it used to be—this service proceeded as previous ones that I had experienced. As this was a first Sunday, the service was also a Holy Communion day. The service began with a song and prayer sequence, listed in the bulletin as “Call to Order and Invocation, Pulpit Ministry”. Intended to prepare the congregation for a Spirit-filled service, this sequence opened, as might be expected, with congregational singing of a favourite Baptist hymn, “Oh, How I Love Jesus”. Led by Pastor Goliday, and performed in a swinging compound duple meter, 6/8 (with most people also swaying to the beat as is expected in holistic worship), all present—choir



members, deacons, mothers of the church, the mission ministry and the pulpit ministry, as well as the entire congregation—joined in the singing, thus uniting everyone in a single “voice” as it were, reinforcing community and generating prayerful participation and integration from the outset. The lyrics of the song (see below), as well as the rather simple, limited-range melody, in combination with the primary colour, diatonic harmonies, and joyful and inclusive manner of performance, created a feeling of wellbeing and transported those present to the liminal, sacred space of worship. The alliance of text, music (the song was accompanied by drum set, tambourine, and piano), and central tenets of belief—the power of “the Word”, the invocation of Jesus’ name, and the assertion of His love—prepared those present to experience the encounter with the divine in a way that the absence of this type of musical performance could not, I would argue, achieve. Vocal music is recognised by the church membership and musicians alike as being uniquely powerful.

#### Lyrics to song “Oh, How I Love Jesus”

##### *Verse*

There is a name I love to hear  
I love to sing its worth  
It sounds like music in my ear  
The sweetest name on earth

##### *Chorus*

Oh, how I love Jesus  
Oh, how I love Jesus  
Oh, how I love Jesus  
Because He first loved me.

This song was followed by an improvised prayer from Pastor Goliday. Key phrases in his prayer continued the theme of implied thanks articulated in the preceding song (“Because He first loved me”)—“Father, we thank You Lord, for all the blessings you have bestowed upon us”—and preparation for prayerful worship—“Now Lord, as we go into this service, I pray that you cleanse our hearts and our minds, that everything we say, do, sing, pray or think, be directed toward You”. Reverting to communal participation, everybody then recited the Lord’s Prayer in unison, at the conclusion of which Rev. Goliday remarked, “Let us all open our minds and our mouth and let us praise the Lord. Bless us choir!” This latter comment highlights the role of music for this congregation. Now moving from full congregational participation to more formal performance (that also limited participation), Rev. Goliday instructed the choir not simply to sing, but to “bless us”. (It must be noted, however, that congregational participation in the form of hand clapping, exclamations, and other indications of approval, is very much expected in this context). The Clear Creek Choir Ministry responded with an upbeat Gospel piece—“Way Maker”—and thus this opening sequence, framed by music, and alternating individual or limited performance with communal performance, led into the Announcements, Devotion, and the heart of the service. Although seemingly simple, this carefully crafted sequence allowed for prayer, song, and music; improvised individual performance; congregational performances; and also more formal choral ones. In this opening sequence, then, music both frames the experience of worship, and facilitates the transition from the profane to the sacred.

The second event that I would like to consider from this service is the sermon, or “The Spoken Word” as it was listed in the church bulletin. I have chosen this second “event” not only because it is the central event in the service and thus provides a counterbalance to the initiatory nature of the sequence just examined, but also because the sermon is central to the African American Baptist service. It is in the sermon, the fulcrum of the service, that unification with the divine is most to be expected.

###### 10. The Text-and-Context Sermon

The text-and-context sermon remains today at the heart of traditional worship in the African American Baptist Church.<sup>5</sup> This genre, particularly when it moves into chant or song, is associated with a style of worship that is most often referred to as “traditional”, if the speaker is from a Southern or a Southern-oriented church (*i.e.*, a church that has drawn its membership from the South, and that maintains many of the traditions of the South—the late Rev. C. L. Franklin’s church in Detroit, Michigan, would be a very good example of this), or as “down-home” if the speaker is Northern. This is not, of course, to imply that all churches in the South maintain this tradition (or indeed other “down-home” traditions), yet the chanted text-and-context sermon is most common in the Deep South. Particularly when the sermon moves to chant, it is most often associated with churches that are generally also at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, *i.e.*, those churches that have been least influenced by the dominant culture. As Roger Abrahams has remarked (although his terminology is by now somewhat dated):

The more middle-class a black community becomes, the more its observances tend to conform to white norms (because it is whites who dictate the middle-class forms of behaviour). However, when dealing with features of lower-class or peasant behaviour [...] the manner of performance, especially of interactional expectations, is more characteristic of African performance practices. ([19], p. 33).

All evidence points to the fact that the text-and-context sermon structure, which is so favoured by African American Baptist preachers,<sup>6</sup> was brought by the colonists to the New World, where slaves were exposed to it. Here slaves adapted and reinterpreted the style, creating a uniquely African American version of what had been a primarily English cultural form. As Jeff Titon has remarked, “It may be that the sung sermon is the result of black Americans’ African-based transformation of the chanted Baptist prayers and exhortations. This would clearly seem to be the case as regards the black Baptist tradition of sung and chanted prayers and sermons” ([19], p. 309). This style of sermon has received considerable scholarly attention, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and from early

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<sup>5</sup> It is misleading, perhaps, to imagine a homogeneous African American Baptist church (as previously explored), as Baptist churches are singularly independent and many choose not even to affiliate formally with a national organisation. Nonetheless, most African American Baptist churches share basic aspects of belief and practice.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of such sermons by a variety of preachers see, for example, [20–25], or for earlier recorded examples from Clear Creek M.B.C., see the CD accompanying [12]. It is also, of course, true that a large number of such sermons (some chanted, some not, but totalling some seven hundred) were released on “race records” between 1925 and 1941, there are also the famous recordings of the Rev. C.L. Franklin. In addition, some labels continue to release recordings of sermons by more contemporary preachers. These find a ready audience in many African American communities, and specifically dedicated African American Gospel programs continue to broadcast them.

accounts (Brown 1880, quoted in [20], p. 190) to later and more comprehensive studies [19,21,22]. My monograph [12] concentrated analysis on field recordings I made primarily in Mississippi and Kentucky in the 1980s and 1990s, and the reader is referred to this for more general context, as well as a more detailed consideration of the structure and development of this type of sermon. In the confines of this article, however, I would like to return to the central church community explored in that monograph—Clear Creek M. B. C.—and examine my most recent recording of a sermon there in the service under discussion, on Sunday, 4 November 2012.

While the entirety of the worship service can be interpreted as a liminal period (as defined by Van Gennep [26]), *i.e.*, a time of suspension from the profane time of everyday life into the sacred time of worship, the sermon is undeniably at the heart of this sacred time. Everything that precedes the sermon (routine announcements aside) is designed to prepare the congregation for the sermon.

Rev Goliday's sermon on Sunday, 4 November 2014, was, as is customary, preceded by a song of praise (although choral as opposed to congregational, as it had always been in my previous experience) and followed by the "Invitation to Christian Discipleship". Pastor Goliday took his place at the podium and requested that the congregation read with him "from the screen"—this admonition was repeated twice as many members (and indeed deacons) instinctively turned to their Bibles—his text, which was from Psalms 22, verses 12 through 16.<sup>7</sup> It is worth emphasising, perhaps, that almost all church members have a personal copy of the Bible which they bring to church every week. Given this (and other) congregation's emphasis upon the inerrancy of the Bible, the unchallengeable veracity of "the Word", as well as the fact that Bibles may be handed down through the generations, inscribed with details of family births, marriages, and deaths, the sheer physicality of the Bible, holding God's Word in one's hand rather than seeing it projected onto a screen, is a religious experience of an entirely different nature. In this particular instance, technology, while reducing physical distance (by bringing the large text on the screen into visibility at the back of the sanctuary), also creates distance (by removing the text from the close proximity of hand-held Bibles, to a distant projection on a large screen).

Many bulls have surrounded me,  
 Strong bulls like Bashan have encircled me,  
 They gape at me with their mouth, like a raging and roaring lion.  
 I am poured out like water  
 And my bones are out of joint.  
 My heart is like wax, it has melted within me.  
 My strength is dried up, like a pot shard  
 And my tongue cleaves to my jaws.  
 You have brought me to the dust of death.  
 For dogs have surrounded me.  
 The congregation of the wicked has encircled me

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<sup>7</sup> Two large video screens were added on either side of the Baptismal Pool when the new church sanctuary was constructed in 2002. Because of the vastly increased size of the new sanctuary, the distance between the actors and the congregation had increased to such an extent that the screens were deemed necessary in order to integrate the congregation with the actors.

They pierced my hands and my feet. [18].<sup>8</sup>

From this reading, Rev. Goliday then announced his theme: “for a very short time today I would like to talk about ‘Surrounded by bulls and dogs’,” and the congregation responded appropriately with verbal statements of encouragement and agreement. Then, before proceeding with his sermon, he announced that he had been asked by a member who was hospitalised to sing “I’m So Tired Lord, My Soul Need Resting”. This performance revealed him to be a fine singer: his rendition was largely unmetered and melismatic for the verse, and more metered and less embellished for the chorus, and provoked considerable positive response from the congregation. After applause and several congregational “Amen’s” and good wishes to his hospitalised parishioner, Rev. Goliday returned to his sermon.

As is typical of the text-and-context sermon, Rev. Goliday, reiterated his theme—“Surrounded by bulls and dogs”—contextualised it within the Bible and Psalms—“this is David prophesying about the crucifixion in a psalm that begins ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”—and proceeded to contextualise it in the lives of the church members. This correlates to the “weighted-secular” factor which Davis describes ([19], pp. 61–64) and which I have also described ([12], pp. 187–90), *i.e.*, an emphasis on the worldly as opposed to the otherworldly. Moving into the body of his sermon, he stated in unmetered prose [18]:

All of us have folk in our families and in our circles, that doesn’t [sic] mean us any good. An’ I don’t care what church you belong to, an’ I don’t care what denomination you belong to, there are goin’ to be some folk in the congregation and in the denomination that doesn’t mean you any good. So if you jump up and run trying to leave trouble, when you get where you goin’, you goin’ to find trouble there. That’s why Paul said “every time I desire to do good, evil is always present with me”. Sometime evil just follow you around. And if you’re not careful, sometime evil may even be in your own heart.

In the tradition of Rev. Grady McKinney, Rev. Goliday continues to “tell it like it is”. Gradually, his prose became more metered and measured and he began to spin anaphoric sequences such as the following [18]:

You have to be careful how you judge other folk  
 You have to be careful how you look at other folk  
 You have to be careful what you say about other folk  
 You do know that as you sow, so shall you reap, don’t you?  
 You gotta give some of this back  
 Oh Lord, have mercy, I’m gettin’ excited [response, “Come on pastor!”], but I’m  
 just goin’ to talk a little bit.

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<sup>8</sup> While the psalm verses appeared as I have printed them on the video screens, below is how they appear in the King James Bible, which is the version that the Clear Creek membership has used since I have known them. Psalms 22, verses 12–16: 12 Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bāshan have beset me round; 13 They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion; 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels; 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death; 16 For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet.

These anaphoric sequences serve both a rhetorical poetic and an aesthetic function, particularly as articulated in relatively metered prose, but they also, of course, serve a practical purpose. In a tradition where the preacher has no printed text, where the sermon is spontaneous, the repetition (identical or varied) of the beginning of the phrase allows the preacher time to formulate the phrase's ending. A few moments later Rev. Goliday began another such sequence, but this time adding at its end the common admonition "You don't hear me!" designed to elicit greater response from the congregation, for this is an antiphonal tradition where the verbal interaction between preacher and congregants is critical.

David was surrounded by folk,  
David was surrounded by folk,  
And I talkin' about church folk,  
That didn't mean him any good.  
You don't hear me! [18].

And for much of the sermon he continued this alternation between metered and unmetered, poetry and prose, returning regularly to a reiteration of his theme. The following is typical from about mid-way through his sermon [18]:

What makes you think that because you in church nothing bad's gonna happen there?  
But it has always happened in God's congregation.  
You all don't hear what I'm sayin'!  
And so what make you think in this wicked society that we live in, we are not goin' to have  
some bulls and some dogs gathered around us?  
You don't hear what I'm sayin'!  
See, see you got to understand the mentality of a bull.  
A bull is a strong animal.  
An' a bull can just about bully his way  
You know what a bully is, don't you?  
A bull can just bully you around.  
An' I grew up on a farm, and there was a big, black Bremer bull, that if you got out there  
too far, he was gonna come after you because it was his territory. And sometime church  
folk feel like this is their territory, and they don't just necessarily want you in their  
territory. They will get after you.  
Lord, let me hush.  
Oooh!  
I'm just gonna stand here awhile.

Intermittently, as is also typical, Rev. Goliday added in personal comments to individual members of the congregation, thereby both giving individuals a sense of personal investment in the sermon, and also keeping his congregants "on their toes", as it were.

Hush now, Brunel, I'm talkin'.  
You and Eulastine now here carrying on a conversation.  
We just havin' fun: I love 'em both and I think they love me [18].

Rev. Goliday was by now (he had been preaching for about fifteen minutes) heading towards the climax of his sermon [18].

We are caught up in a society where folk will go to church and they will lift up holy hand, and they will sing and they'll shout, an' they'll pray, an' they'll preach and they'll holler "Halleluia!", and before they out the door they lyin' on somebody.

Oh, y'all don't hear what I'm sayin'.

An' talkin' about somebody, and you think, you wonder when they supposed to be church folk, well if you go talkin' about what they did to you, you doin' the same thing they did.

So some way, if God start disciplining folk, He gonna have to discipline you too! Just because you are tellin' the truth, don't mean it's right for you to spread it. Because you could cause somebody else to stumble.

Because somebody gonna look at you and say "well if you not goin' back, I'm not goin' back either."

And the Lord said, "Woe be unto you that cause the least of these, my little ones, to stumble."

Surrounded by bulls and dogs.

See, see, see you have to be ready, Barbara.

Just because you want to treat folk nice, don't mean folk gonna treat you nice.

Just because you showing respect don't mean that everybody goin' respect you!

But how you act isn't predicated on how somebody treated you

Your salvation is your salvation alone.

Your personality is your personality.

You've one soul to take care of.

And that's yours.

The congregation was by now responding to every line the preacher delivered, and while Rev. Goliday was speaking in heightened speech, he was not establishing an intoning note, nor was he showing indications of moving towards chant. Significantly also, none of the musicians or congregants was adding musical interjections, which I would have expected at this juncture of a sermon that would move into chant. Instead, Rev. Goliday moved to the latter portion of his theme—"Surrounded by bulls and dogs" [18].

And then you got dogs.

Ooh!

The wrong dogs is [sic] just nasty.

Dogs is just flat out nasty.

They'll vomit,

You know what the Scripture says.

An' they'll return to their vomit.

Now what that means is, they'll throw up, and they'll turn right back around and eat it up.

That's just flat out nasty.

You don't hear what I'm saying.

But not only are dogs nasty, dogs are greedy.

A dog will sit there, lay there with a belly-full

And can't eat any more  
 An' if you start up there, they'll growl at that stuff.  
 They don't want you to have any.  
 Well you got church folk who are greedy.  
 You don't hear what I'm sayin'.  
 You got church folk who are just downright nasty!  
 An' they're not nice to anybody.  
 Folk barkin' at you, "what you want?"  
 Lookin' all cross-eyed at you [makes a growling sound]  
 And then, I wondered, now David, how can you say that you are surrounded by bulls  
 and dogs?  
 He said "I am surrounded, not just by bulls, but by *strong* bulls".  
 And then, Deacon Thompson, I looked at that Word, and I broke it open, and I found out  
 that when David was talkin' about bein' surrounded by bulls, he's prophesying Jesus's  
 [sic] crucifixion.  
 And think about who it were that Jesus was surrounded by.  
 He was surrounded by the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem.  
 It was not the Romans who were out there hollerin' "Crucify him!"  
 It was the church folk!  
 It's not the folk in the street that makes us act like we act up.  
 It's us folk up in here that makes us act like that.  
 See here we are trustees over God's property, and somehow it gets to be our church so  
 much so until we run other folk away.  
 Come on here somebody, I'm almost through.

This latter intimation ("I'm almost through") that many preachers use, is a common rhetorical device that functions to draw closer attention from the congregation because, to put it too simply perhaps, "the end is in sight".

This is not your church.  
 Jesus said "Upon this rock I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."  
 An' even though you gonna catch some hell, he, the devil can't win.  
 Ain't no point in you runnin', hell gonna follow you.  
 But the devil can't win, all he can do is scare you.  
 Jesus was surrounded by bulls.  
 You're gonna be surrounded by bulls.  
 Pere you gonna be surrounded by,  
 An' if you ain't careful, there may even be some bulls in your family.  
 An' if you're not even more careful, you might even be the bull.  
 Y'all don't hear what I'm sayin'.  
 Whoo! [18].

By now (about twenty minutes into the sermon), the congregation was interjecting chanted responses, and Rev. Goliday's high-pitched "Whoo!", was at least implying a tonal centre and intoning

note. Yet he did not yet move towards either tonal recitation, or full-fledged chant. The central piece of the sermon, as so often, was Jesus' crucifixion [18].

You know they were taunting Jesus.

They were sayin' "if you are really are who you say you are, come down from the cross!"

Now see that's why the Lord didn't let either one of us die for other folk's salvation

Or we would have came [sic.] down, slapped them up pretty good, went back up there and just died.

But no, He had to show humility more than I can stand.

Because I'm one, I'm a brother who would want to show you.

"What you mean?

Do you really think I can't come down, I'll show you.

I can come down!"

Y'all don't hear what I'm sayin'.

You know we all like to show folk what we can do.

We might not be supposed to do it like that, but we will do it.

It's human nature!

You just want folk to know, "no, I'm not scared.

What do you mean? I'll come down here and slap fire from you!"

But Jesus stayed right there on that cross like He was supposed to.

An' then they started sayin' stuff like "Aw, he saved others,

But himself,

Whoo!

He can't save."

Wow, I'm just as happy as I can be!

Rather than choosing to dwell on Jesus' suffering, endurance and humility in this passage, Rev. Goliday by reiterating that he himself could not show such restraint ("I'll come down here and slap fire from you!"), both creates a series of vivid vignettes for his congregation, and identifies himself with the vagaries of human nature ("You know we all like to show folk what we can do"), thereby also reinforcing that he is a strong individual, and someone not to be "messed with", essential qualities for a successful leader.

Following on this passage, Rev. Goliday returned to the theme of dogs, more unmetered prose, and articulated some of the key vices that Christianity and this church community, in particular, abhor: having already touched on gluttony, he now warned the members against idleness, jealousy, and such obvious evils as gambling, before admonishing them that they should be grateful and thank God for what they already have. He then continued [18]:

By now they were taunting Jesus.

Gambling.

You know you got folk lookin' at what you got.

Gamblin' at the casino

Folk who won't properly apply what they have.

[...]



If you know God have been good to you  
 Your family and your friends that are not saved  
 Instead of telling them the bad things about Clear Creek, you should be telling them about  
 the good things  
 An' when you get there [Clear Creek], instead of waiting for somebody to fire you up, you  
 ought to be fired up for Jesus  
 Not worrying about who's looking at you  
 But you oughta be ready to lift up holy hand  
 Maybe you didn't have everything you thought you should have had  
 But God blessed you with something  
 And you ought to tell Him "Thank you"  
 Whoo!

At this juncture in his sermon, the Rev. Goliday began running around the platform on which the podium is elevated, thus signalling his excitement or almost ecstasy. The keyboard player joined in on the electric organ, and members of the congregation began to chant responses. By this point, the sermon had moved to that mysterious realm where believers hold that the Holy Spirit has taken command of the preacher's voice and is speaking through him.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, however, in contrast to his predecessor, Rev. Grady McKinney (see, in particular [12], pp. 197–204; [17], track 9), Rev. Goliday did not develop an elaborate sung structure. Certainly, his text became more personal and more metered, and he moved into heightened speech, but he did not develop any very elaborate melodic contours (and this I found somewhat surprising for such a confident singer). His interjected exclamation "Whoo!" was, from this point on, however always sung. He then continued [18]:

See I don't know about you, but sometime on Sunday morning I can't hardly stay in  
 the bed  
 I'm sittin' there at my counter in the kitchen, an' I'm readin' and I'm prayin'  
 Just waitin' until daylight comes, so I can start getting' ready to get here  
 'Cause I can praise God by myself,  
 But when I get where all of God's folk are,  
 An' I see lifted up hands,  
 An' I see tear-filled eyes,  
 An' I see hallelujas  
 Even though I'm goin' through what I'm goin' through  
 I know that everything is gonna be alright, because the God we serve is just good like that  
 He just good like that  
 And then when I look at my little ugly self, Caroline  
 An' I see how God still love me

---

<sup>9</sup> There exists a wide variety of valuable writing on this area of belief, *i.e.*, that the Holy Spirit can be physically manifest in the Service, but detailed discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this article. The reader is referred, however, to [23] for readings from a wide variety of perspectives and [24,25] and [27–29], referenced at the end of this article. For a variety of readings on African American church music and worship, the reader is additionally directed to [30], especially sections IV and VII.

I still make some mistakes, but He never cast me aside.  
 I'm gonna hush...  
 But He's been good to me  
 See I don't know what God have done for you Deborah, but He's been good to me.  
 Out of all of my mishaps  
 Whoo!  
 See if there's anyone here that thinks you're not good enough to be saved  
 Every now and then come talk to me  
 An' let me tell you my story,  
 Let me tell you where God brought me from  
 How God blessed me.  
 The door is open

This statement—"The door is open"—signalled that Rev. Goliday was effectively moving to the next "event" in the service, *i.e.*, the Invitation to Christian Discipleship" when all in attendance (but most especially sinners, or backsliders) are invited to come forward and embrace Jesus as their personal saviour, dedicating themselves to Him. It was, nonetheless, evident that Rev. Goliday was folding the sermon into the invitation to discipleship, eliding the separation between them and thus, as is not uncommon, building the climax of his sermon into the salvation of souls. Thus, he continued both preaching and exhorting [18]:

And if you can't think of anything else, you can say He died for me  
 He went in the grave for me  
 An' three days later, He rose for me  
 He rose for you,  
 By yourself,  
 Just like you are  
 The door is open  
 The door is open  
 If there is one here  
 I don't care what condition you are  
 See there is folk here  
 Who are tryin' to wait 'til they get their lives right  
 You don't need to try to wait  
 You come to Jesus just like you are  
 God will accept you when it seem like there is no way  
 You come to Jesus just like you are  
 The door is open  
 God will love you when it seem like there is no love.  
 Come to Jesus  
 You remember that hymn, "Just Like I Am"?

The standard title for this hymn is "Just As I Am" and it features regularly in African American Baptist worship, emphasizing as it does the virtues of humility, obedience, a sense of one's own

wretchedness, and the salvation that is possible in the Lord. As I have remarked elsewhere ([12], pp. 131–32), preachers who do not move into full-fledged chant (but very well may move into heightened speech at the climax of their sermons) will generally introduce a religious song, particularly an old favourite, into the sermon. The song title may simply be mentioned, as here, or as we will see later, it may actually be performed by the preacher (with the congregation joining in or not, depending on the occasion and spirit in the church) as part of the sermon. In either case, this introduction of music into the sermon almost inevitably draws further intensity from the congregation and may often result in some members of the congregation being inspired (possessed) by the Holy Spirit.

God will take you just like you are  
 Folk will make you think you not good enough  
 Folk will make you think you not ready yet  
 But God says, that's when God says "Come as you are"  
 He's not talkin' about your clothes  
 I know you a drunkard, but come on anyhow  
 I know you a smoke dope, but come on anyhow  
 I know you a big liar, but come on anyhow  
 "I know you a back biter", He said, "but come on in anyhow."  
 An' with the love of Jesus  
 Jesus get in your heart, all of those habits will start to dissipate [18].

As is clear from the preceding transcription, Rev. Goliday was still employing many of the structural characteristics of the chanted sermon: anaphoric sequences, repetition, personal mention, *etc.*, but he was also using "signal mode" for the "Invitation to Discipleship" by regular insertion of the phrase "the door is open". At this juncture also, he began to move, significantly, out of the sacred space that is the preaching locus of the podium, coming down from the elevated platform on which it is set, and gradually moving out into the sanctuary, exhorting and also physically embracing members of the congregation. While thus expanding, and yet democratizing the physical space that he inhabits, from elevated leadership role at the pulpit, lending his speech organs to the Holy Spirit who speaks through him; to the lowered, democratic space of the sanctuary, Rev. Goliday signalled his return, if not to the secular, certainly to the human realm, thereby transforming the space that he inhabits and aligning it with that of his church membership. His speech also began to wind down, becoming slower, with longer gaps between lines, and his language became more colloquial and personal.

The door is open  
 The door is open  
 Come to Jesus, just like you are  
 Sometime folk will make fun of you  
 They made fun of Jesus  
 Talkin' about Jesus, they made fun of Jesus  
 So it's no, it's no different  
 They gonna make fun of you  
 Some of your friends or your buddies, they gonna say  
 "Man, girl, I wouldn't have gone there"

Well, maybe not  
 But you remember, God, our God says  
 “If you will, then I will”  
 Sometime  
 And God is not gonna change His standard for us, but He will accept you just as you are.  
 Come to Jesus, just like you are.  
 No matter who you are, what your condition is,  
 Come to Jesus! [18].

At this point, one woman came forward to dedicate herself to Jesus (shepherded by one of the Mothers of the church), occasioning applause from the congregation and a break in the sermon. Rev. Goliday welcomed the woman in standard prose, before interjecting his sung “whoo!”, and then launching into full-fledged song. This he performed in very elaborate, melismatic and unmetred song, further reinforcing the relationship between music and the presence or the invocation of the divine [18].

God bless you, we glad to have you  
 [Song]: “There is so much that the Lord have done for me,  
 [Spoken interjection] That’s my personal testimony!  
 “When I was a sinner He set me free, Yes He did  
 All of my burdens, He helped me to bear  
 And all of my sorrow, He helped me to share  
 And I can’t pay the Lord, but oh-oh I can tell Him, “Thank yo’ Sir”  
 Through all of your sorrow you ought to tell the Lord  
 Whoo!  
 Thank yo’”

Following on the song, Rev. Goliday reverted to chant, and then to heightened speech as he referred back to his theme—surrounded (by bulls and dogs) [18].

I’m gonna hush, but God have been good to me  
 He been good to me  
 I’m only talkin’ about Goliday, but He been good to me  
 Surrounded [heightened speech], but God made me a promise  
 He said “I’ll never leave you, nor will I forsake you”.  
 So remember no matter what you goin’ through  
 The Holy Spirit, He’s right there with you through it all

Interestingly, at this juncture, where one might expect him to have called up the Andrae Crouch Gospel composition, “Through it All”, Rev. Goliday instead returned to normal speech, presumably having decided that it was time to end his sermon rather than launch into another climax.

Through it all, through it all  
 God bless you  
 May God keep you  
 God have been good to me

So you oughta know, no matter what you goin' through  
 God is right there with you  
 There might be some things that you can't tell folk because they couldn't deal with it  
 But don't be ashamed to admit that God have brought about a change in your life  
 Don't ever be ashamed to admit that  
 Because we all need the Lord  
 Don't ever be ashamed to admit that  
 Amen  
 Amen [18].

Thus, having concluded his sermon, even while eliding it into the Invitation to Christian Discipleship, Rev. Goliday proceeded to an “unannounced” (but not unusual) section, *i.e.*, extending the “Right Hand of Fellowship” to a man and a woman who had requested to transfer their membership to Clear Creek M.B.C., and to the woman who had come forward during the sermon who requested that she be re-Baptised. Thereafter, the service concluded as might be expected, with the slight alteration that Rev. Goliday moved the Benediction from the end of the service to before the Ministry of Giving, and Offertory Prayer. This he did in order that those who might have to leave after Holy Communion would not thereby miss the Benediction.

## 11. Conclusions

The essential presence of music in African American religious services goes well beyond the desire for participation in joyous worship, as important as that may be. The intersection of the physical and spiritual worlds, facilitated by music, occurs almost exclusively in the context of music and, most clearly and generally, perhaps, in the chanted sermon. In a tradition where the interaction of the Holy Spirit is expected, and where that interaction is facilitated by music, the constancy of a musical presence (as in the tonal consistency mentioned at the beginning of this article) mirrors, as it were, the breath of the Holy Spirit. Musical constancy calls forth and sustains the presence of the Holy Spirit. The musical and tonal system underpins the service, and allows for both spiritual insight (as explicated in the chanted sermon, in particular) and evocation of the divine.

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## Abbreviations

M.B.C: Missionary Baptist Church;

T.O.M.B.: Tallahatchie-Oxford Missionary Baptist

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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