

**WORSHIP MUSIC AS SPIRITUAL IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION
OF MUSIC IN THE LITURGY AMONG BLACK AND
WHITE ADVENTISTS IN THE UNITED
STATES FROM 1840 TO 1944**

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Date completed: January 2018

Topic

This study examines Black and White Seventh-day Adventist liturgical music along with its historical context in the United States from 1840 to 1944. Little scholarly attention has been given to the development of Adventist liturgical practice, the function of music in the liturgy, and the effect of music upon the spiritual identity. This study utilized liturgical history, ritual studies, musicology, and liturgical theology to derive and compare the spiritual identity fostered through music in the liturgy by these ethnic groups. This study considered both the shared and distinct spiritual identities of Black and White Adventists, as cultivated by the music in the liturgy, and as situated in the context of the American racial climate, from the first colonies to the middle of the twentieth century.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the development of spiritual identity among Black and White Seventh-day Adventist worshipers as derived from their experience of music in the Sabbath liturgy, in the United States through 1944. To do so, this study created a methodology for deriving spiritual identity from music in liturgy, in order to support the thesis that music in the liturgy promotes, develops, and often establishes spiritual identity in the existential experience of the worshiper. It tested the hypothesis by situating the historical context of liturgy and music among Black and White Christians in the United States before 1840, and tracing the development of music in liturgy among Black and White Americans from 1840–1944. Within this historical development, the study explored the historical spiritual identity of these communities, as fostered through the music in the liturgy.

Sources

This documentary study primarily relies on published and unpublished primary sources produced in Seventh-day Adventist churches through 1944. Primary and secondary sources provided historical context and perspective. Archives housed some of the primary sources useful in this study. Four Adventist congregations were targeted for the study, two Black and two White, respectively: Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, New York City; Oakwood University Church, Huntsville, Alabama; Battle Creek Tabernacle, Battle Creek, Michigan; and Takoma Park Seventh-day Adventist Church,

Takoma Park, Maryland. Bulletins of the orders of worship provided important liturgical context. Oral histories were also conducted for this research, featuring interviews with twenty-nine persons with memories of Adventist music in the liturgy in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Most of those interviewed for this study were members of one of the four churches.

Conclusions

Adventism developed within the context of American revivalism, drawing from this tradition for its early liturgical practice, including fervent singing of spirituals and gospel hymnody. Black and White Adventist pioneers augmented this milieu with their developing views on the great controversy between Christ and Satan, conditional immortality of the soul, Jesus Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, His soon second coming, and God's love. Adventist hymnody contributed significantly toward establishing these beliefs into their spiritual identity. Though early White Adventists were ardent abolitionists, by the late nineteenth century, few Adventists championed social justice for Black Americans. Society's systemic racism had infected Adventist leadership, liturgy, and music publishing. In 1908, as a misappropriation of Ellen G. White's counsel, Blacks and Whites throughout the country began worshipping in separate meeting houses. In 1944, the denomination instituted regional conferences to advance the gospel ministry among Blacks, without White oversight. Throughout the denomination's first one hundred years, Black and White Adventists worshiped through music similarly, due to a shared identity in the Adventist message. Differences in worship can be attributed to differences in the experience of privilege or oppression. Black Adventists always sang the Black spirituals and leveraged European composers, like Bach and Beethoven, in order to express their praise to God and their protest of social injustice.