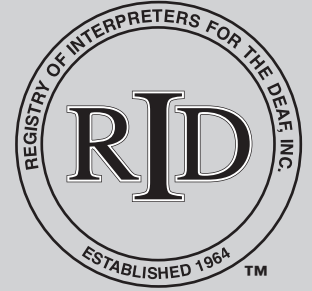


VIEWS



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Theoretical Approach Religious Interpreting as Performance

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African-American religious interpreting is one of the most complicated interpreting venues for skilled interpreters. To be effective, an interpreter in this arena first must know cultural norms and understand the African-American church aesthetic. Second, the interpreter must be able to navigate and negotiate mediated meanings and context-specific language. Third, the interpreter must be able to handle African-American gospel music. Many interpreters find such an experience daunting, and rightfully so. This article proposes a theoretical approach to the third aspect of interpreting in the black church: interpreting African-American gospel music.

African-American gospel music is composed of cultural aesthetic elements that are essential to the African-American church experience. In order to create equivalent, effective translations of gospel music consistently, the interpreter must know and understand these elements. In particular, the element of performance is key in both the makeup of gospel music and the black church.

In the field of interpretation, there are no theoretical approaches or models that include performance and music as essential parts of an equivalent translation. Currently, most theories of interpretation are text-centered. Such a limitation is problematic for the religious interpreter in the African-American church. Both the source language (gospel music) and the context (the black church) are performance centered. Yet, without a theoretical approach or model that includes the interpretation of music and text (lyrics) simultaneously, an equivalent message cannot be achieved. Effective and equivalent translations of African-American gospel music require the interpretation of both music and text. Performance theory provides the necessary framework needed to render an equivalent translation of gospel music.

Performance Theory

A performance is a bounded event within a given framework (context), and that event is appreciated (or not) by an audience/auditor. Richard Bauman, in his seminal work *Verbal Art as Performance*, puts forth an outline for understanding performance theory as it relates to speaking events. He discusses the need for a review of theories that regard verbal art merely as "text-centered" (Bauman, 1977). He suggests that such a view places "constraints on the development of a meaningful method for understanding verbal art as performance." To remove these theoretical constraints, Bauman proposes the following:

...[I]n artistic performance...there is something going on in the communicative interchange which says to the auditor, 'interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey.' This may lead to the further suggestion that performance sets up...an interpretive frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood.... (1977:11)

Bauman contends that artistic performance creates a context for special communicative interchanges between an audience and performer. Those interchanges include guidelines for understanding the communication taking place. The performer "assumes accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out..." (11). The audience evaluates that communication/performance for "the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of

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pretation as text centered or word centered. As such, they limit the development of a meaningful framework for understanding religious interpreting as performance. Thus, music is not included as a part of the translation process of rendering an equivalent message. Applying the above definition of performance to African-American gospel music interpreting, we find that black gospel music expressed in the African-American church is necessarily performance.

The African American Church

The African-American church is performance centered and therefore the ideal place to understand interpreting as performance, particularly as it relates to interpreting religious (gospel) music. From dancing to singing, the emotive physical expression of contentment, excitement, and joy connotes a cultural appreciation for performance. Although its focus is ministry, the black church values vocal gymnastics (e.g., melismas—also known as ‘runs’—bends, moans, guttural sounds) and original oratory (e.g., plays on words, subtle meanings, and witty rhetorical feats). With this in mind, the interpreted message must be equivalent (to the extent possible). Furthermore, the requirement of audience participation (call and response) necessitates the interpreted message be effective.

As an event, the black church is a created space that tells the auditor-congregant to interpret what is happening in a special sense. This event is also bounded by a change in communication mode. Outside the church, the overarching cultural language is low-context, which is to say that a given message tends to be communicated explicitly. Speech and time concepts are understood linearly. Words are viewed as denotative versus connotative.

However, in the frame of the African-American church service, the prevailing mode of communication is high-context language. This means that the spirit of the message is largely implied. Appreciation for meanings and expressiveness are more highly

valued. The subtext is chief. Phrases like “God will make a way outta no way!” or “I been running for Jesus a long time, and I ain’t tired yet” are in every part of the black church event. The words themselves are not the focus; rather, it is what they point to. The applicability of these phrases is to each his own.

Gospel music, by default, is also high-context. The lyrics are generally the same phrases that are used in sermons and church rhetoric. They require reading-between-the-lines interpreting. The interpreter must first understand this special meaning so that the auditor (Deaf congregant) may receive the equivalent message and be able to fully participate.

To render a translation that is effective and equivalent, interpreting gospel songs requires analysis of both music and lyrics. Consider an excerpt from the contemporary gospel song, “Let Everything That Hath Breath (Praise the Lord).” The lead vocalist, Dr. Judith McAllister, is the praise and worship leader at a large, predominately African-American Pentecostal church in Los Angeles, California. In the beginning of the song, she alternately speaks and reads a passage from the Bible. Eventually, she joins in singing with the choir.

[DR. MCALLISTER (reading)]
“PRAISE THE LORD OH MY SOUL. WHILE I LIVE WILL I GIVE YOU GLORY AND HONOR. WHILE I HAVE MY BEING...”

[Choir joins in singing while DR. MCALLISTER continues reading]
Everybody praise Him! PRAISE GOD IN HIS SANCTUARY.
Everybody praise Him! PRAISE HIM IN THE FIRMAMENT OF HIS POWER. Everybody praise Him! FOR HIS MIGHTY ACTS...
Everybody praise Him! FOR HIS EXCELLENT GREATNESS...
Everybody praise Him! WITH THE SOUND OF TRUMPET...
Everybody praise Him! WITH THE PSALTERY AND HARP...
Everybody praise Him! WITH THE TIMBREL AND DANCE...
Everybody praise Him! WITH

THE STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AND ORGANS...Everybody praise Him! UPON THE LOUD CYMBALS...Everybody praise Him! UPON THE HIGH SOUNDING CYMBALS. LET EVERYTHING (!!!) THAT HAS BREATH PRAISE HIM!

[Altos 6 times]
Give Him the highest praise...
The highest praise

[Tenors 2 times]
Hallelujah! Sing Hallelujah!

[DR. MCALLISTER (singing with Choir)]

EVERYBODY PRAISE HIM.
Everybody praise Him! EVERYBODY PRAISE HIM. Everybody praise Him! EVERYBODY PRAISE HIM. Everybody praise Him! EVERYBODY LIFT THE SAVIOR... Everybody lift the Savior up!...

CLAP YO’ HANDS... Everybody praise Him! AND PRAISE HIM... STOMP YO’ FEET... Everybody praise Him! AND PRAISE HIM... HE’S WORTHY (...sung lively, with great conviction)...
Everybody praise Him! YES HE IS... Everybody praise Him! HE’S WORTHY... Everybody praise Him!

LET’S LIFT THE SAVIOR...
Everybody lift the Savior up!
HEY!!

As the volume and pace reach a crescendo, Dr. McAllister begins exhorting the choir and audience with greater passion. The song’s climaxing intensity all but forces audience members to follow the instructions. In the beginning, the choir simply admonishes the audience to praise God. This gentle nudging is manifested in their slight body movements and restrained facial expressions. To the auditors, the music’s tempo suggests that finger snapping and moderate side-to-side rocking is appropriate. Passion and excitement are unmistakably building

gious sentiment with appreciated freedom. The interpreter must not stand in the midst of the event detached: the text book definition of interpretation will not suffice. The interpreter must stomp his or her feet. S/he must perform!

Dr. McAllister soon orders everyone (“C’m on everybody”) to clap their hands. How must this charge be conveyed visually? The interpreter must move rhythmically demonstrating that the source is a song and not discourse. She must express with no doubt that Dr. McAllister is yelling. The Deaf congregant cannot hear the guttural sounds and exaggerated phrasing signaling the song’s approaching climax. The interpreter’s body, hands, face, and feet must summon the Deaf auditor’s inclusion and response. To do the aforementioned means to render an equivalent and effective translation.

The authors anticipate presenting the topic in greater detail at a national interpreter conference. To this end, a formal research project is in progress to determine how religious interpreters consistently produce effective and equivalent interpretations of religious music. Interpreters, religious interpreters in particular, are invited to participate by filling out a brief questionnaire. The online form may be accessed at www.RenaissanceOneCo.com/signlanguages.html.

Works Cited

Bauman, R. (1977). *Verbal Art as Performance*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers. ■

THE PASSION OF THE PROCESS: Religious Interpreting in a Catholic Setting

by Suzanne Terrio, C.S.C., Ed.M.,
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Pre-conferencing the “Word of God” requires having an “in” with the Almighty or having the privilege of a lot of free time with the priest of your choice. Since it is a challenge to find enough priests, deacons, and pastoral workers in general, imagine what is

involved in finding consulting time prior to a religious interpreting assignment. In response to this need, various priests and people in the Catholic Deaf ministry have authored resource material to present some background information to interpret scripture into ASL, a very high-context language. Side-by-side “translations” with English in one column and a variation of an ASL gloss next to it are not meant to be followed as cookbook formulas. Instead, this material may serve as a loose guide for Deaf readers or for English to ASL interpreters at the Catholic mass.

An example of Catholic translation material was presented by Fr. Len Broniak, from Houston, in his Grapevine, Texas workshop for religious interpreters. Interpreter trainers may present the English text to interpreters sitting at tables through an ASL discussion process, and interpreters may create various versions of interpreting the English text into ASL. The groups work better if at least one Deaf ASL signer views the interpretations and provides feedback in ASL. Representatives from each group can model their rendition of the reading to the group at large. The ASL gloss can then be posted on a power point or overhead transparency. Hopefully, interpreters will then experience an “Ah hah” moment in response to the material.

For example:

Reading I: English

A reading from the book of Exodus. *The Amalekite people came and fought against the people of Israel. So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some men and go and fight the Amalekites tomorrow. I will stand on the top of the hill and watch you. I will be holding the walking stick God gave me.” Joshua obeyed Moses and went to fight the Amalekite people the next day. At the same time, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. Any time Moses held his hands in the air, the men of Israel would win the fight. But when Moses put his hands down, the men of Israel began to lose the fight. After some time, Moses’ arms became tired. (The men with Moses wanted to find a way to keep Moses’ hands in the air.) So they put a large rock under Moses for him to sit on. Then Aaron and Hur held Moses’ hands in the air. Aaron was on one side of Moses and Hur was on the other side. They held his hands up like this until*

the sun went down. So Joshua (and his men) defeated the Amalekites in this battle. Word of the Lord—Thanks be to God.

READING I: ASL EXODUS 17:8-13

BOOK NAME E-X-O-D-U-S TAKEN FROM
MAN NAME A-M-A-L-E-K (CL) HAVE
ARMY. WAR WITH ISRAEL. MOSES
LEAD PEOPLE ISRAEL, JOSHUA BOSS
ARMY ISRAEL. MOSES TELL JOSHUA:
“TOMORROW YOU FIGHT ENEMY”
HAPPEN? (rhq) I STAND ON TOP HILL.
WATCH. GOD’S STAFF-STICK (CL F)
HOLD WILL. JOSHUA GO TO BATTLE-
WAR. FIRST, MOSES CLIMB TO TOP
HILL. TWO MEN, AARON, HUR GO
WITH MOSES. THEN, JOSHUA START
FIGHT ENEMY. HAPPEN? MOSES HOLD-
UP HANDS, ISRAEL WIN WIN WIN. BUT
MOSES TIRED, HANDS (SLOWLY) FALL
DOWN, ENEMY START WIN. DO???
FIND BIG ROCK MOSES SIT (CL 2)
AARON, HUR, HOLD UP HANDS
MOSES, HANDS STAY UP STRONG
HOLD UP ALL DAY. HAPPEN? JOSHUA
AND ARMY ISRAEL KILL MANY ENEMY.
WIN FIGHT. INFORMATION FROM LORD
THANK GOD

The Story Before BACKGROUND

God saved the Jews from Egypt and promised to give them a new land for a home. After 40 years in the desert, the Jews finally came to the new land, but there were other people already living there. So the Jews had to go into battle to drive away the people and take the new land.

The Story NOW MEANING

In the battle, Moses must “keep praying” to win and defeat the enemy. God already promised them a new home, but it wasn’t going to be easy to move in. That shows not only that God keeps His promises, but we also must “keep praying” to know and do God’s will.

The Story’s Feeling EMOTION

While this is just a story about what happened, there is also feeling with it. To win a war is a lot of work and effort. The feeling is one of tired, fearful, determination. But at the end, the feeling changes to one that is proud and triumphant! (Like DPN PAH!!!)

Reading II: English

The second letter of Paul to Timothy: