

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“All I See Is Your Booty and Cleavage”: Sex and the Contemporary Gospel Song (1988–2017)

Deborah Smith Pollard

Department of Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts, University of Michigan–Dearborn, Dearborn, MI, USA
Email: debpoll@umich.edu

Abstract

Gospel songs traditionally feature lyrics that glorify God. However, there is music by contemporary gospel artists that addresses pre-marital sex, homosexuality, and pornography. The fact that these topics are being lyrically confronted by some of the genre’s most recognized performers invites exploration into the content, purpose, and impact of the songs.

This article places these lyrics into categories: those that are testimonial narratives about the spiritual deliverance the singer has received after transgressing sexual mores of the Black Church and those that encourage the avoidance of specific sexual practices. These songs contribute to gospel music on several levels, providing a platform through which the artists can testify of their sexual journeys while giving listeners a format through which they can find direction regarding sexual steps, missteps, and spiritual realignment.

The article delineates the changes within US culture that led to less silence about sex and support for the LGBTQIA+ community from some within the Black Church. The major analysis involves the lyrics, the differences in what men and women tend to address, and the fact that despite breaking new ground, in virtually every instance, they reflect traditional Biblical interpretations.

*Ah, I’m tryin’ to live a godly life, be lyin’ if I say it ain’t hard
I can’t even open my eyes ’cause everything is rated R
Can’t believe what I’m seeing, I’m speechless
All I see is your booty and cleavage
You just tryin’ to find my weakness
I’m determined to pass your test*

—From “Fighting Temptation” recorded by Deitrick Haddon (2011)

Kirk Franklin, Mary Mary, and Lecrae¹ are among the contemporary gospel artists who have brought a range of dramatic changes to the genre involving a more relaxed dress code as well as R&B and hip hop influenced scores.² While attention has been given to these and similar transformations in gospel music,³ this article focuses on an expansion of the lyrical content that has occurred since the late 1980s—song lyrics that include a range of topics that were never directly addressed in the past, among them premarital and marital sexual relations, heterosexual and same-sex attractions, and pornography. To be clear, singing and/or rapping about the sexual behaviors that the Christian church has primarily been reluctant to confront has not become a standard practice. But the fact that some of gospel’s most recognized names, including Franklin, J. Moss, Trin-i-Tee 5:7, Deitrick Haddon, and the 116 Clique

¹Their representative recordings include: Kirk Franklin, *Losing My Religion*, RCA Inspiration, 2015; Mary Mary, *Thankful*, Columbia, 2000; Lecrae, *Church Clothes 3*, Reach Records, 2016.

²See Deborah Smith Pollard, *When the Church Becomes Your Party: Contemporary Gospel Music* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

³See, for example, Robert Darden, *People Get Ready: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2008); Guthrie Ramsey, “Santa Claus Ain’t Got Nothing on This!’: Hip-Hop Hybridity and the Black Church Muse,” chap. 8 in *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

which includes Lecrae, have approached this previously uncharted territory through their music calls for an investigation of this phenomenon.

Having analyzed more than three dozen songs by gospel artists who have produced extensive content devoted to sex and sexuality, I argue here that the majority of the lyrics can be placed into one of three categories: 1) narratives of confession and testimony: songs in which artists speak of having personally crossed into forbidden sexual territory and of receiving deliverance through faith in God; 2) narratives of caution and avoidance: warnings to others about the perils of taking part in certain sexual activities; and 3) narratives that celebrate Christian marital unions and sexual relations within those relationships. The focus here is on the first two categories since there is a limited number of songs on the third list.

The songs discussed here emerged within and in response to a multidimensional context: tell-all books and sexually explicit popular songs, a slow rise in the acceptance of LGBTQIA+ communities within the Black Church, an even faster embrace of those communities across the United States, and a demand from various segments of the Black Church for more transparency and discussion about sex and sexuality. The resulting compositions contribute to gospel music on several levels—contesting and extending the range of topics that can be referenced; and providing an accessible platform through which the artists can musically spotlight their struggles and triumphs in these areas while giving listeners a new format through which they can find direction and encouragement regarding sexual steps and missteps. All of this is achieved via lyrics that remain connected to traditional Biblical concepts.

This discussion focuses exclusively on contemporary songs recorded between 1988 and 2017 by Black singers who have been raised within the Black Church and/or the Black community. Their lyrics that are examined here certainly reflect the dynamics and aesthetics of those cultures. But this analysis also demonstrates the range of issues related to sex, sexuality, and sexual identity these artists boldly addressed even as the stances on such matters were shifting and creating divisions within individual churches, denominations, and other religious organizations across and beyond Black communities of the United States.

Pertinent Definitions and Demographics

It is important to note that these songs instrumentally and vocally build upon and expand the sonic dimensions of contemporary gospel, with its markers that Horace Clarence Boyer describes with such words as “pop,” “progressive,” “soul,” “rock,” and “jazz.”⁴ Since the publication of Boyer’s analysis in the mid-1980s, the use of the phrase “contemporary gospel” has expanded; fans, industry insiders, and scholars, including Tammy Kernodle and Melinda Weekes, incorporate it to cover several subgenres that reflect gospel’s more recent fusions of styles, including hip hop, reggae, trap, and more.⁵

Some of the gospel music that would fall within this category, such as Erica Campbell’s contested 2015 hit, “I Luh God,” would go unheard during most Sunday morning worship services, in this case because of its sonic qualities, borrowing as it does from the more recent contemporary secular forms, including hip hop and trap music.⁶ This sub-genre does not have the traditional sound of a recording by Reverend James Cleveland or Dottie Peoples and even goes beyond the popular gospel aesthetic incorporated by the Winans or Clark Sisters of the 1980s and 1990s. But each iteration of gospel does build upon earlier forms in many ways, especially because of its textual alignment with

⁴Horace Clarence Boyer, “A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Gospel Music,” in *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 128.

⁵See, for example, Tammy Kernodle, “Work the Works: The Role of African-American Women in the Development of Contemporary Gospel,” in “The Music of African-American Women: Secular and Sacred, Uplift and Self-Assertion,” special issue, *Black Music Research Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 89–109; and Melinda Weekes, “This House, This Music: Exploring the Interdependent Interpretive Relationship between the Contemporary Black Church and Contemporary Gospel Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 25, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 2005): 43–72.

⁶Campbell’s “I Luh God” uses the aggressive sound of trap music including layered drums, synthesizers and lyrics, and is an example of a contemporary gospel song that many would not find appropriate for Sunday worship. Campbell, “I Luh God,” *Help 2.0*. eOne Records, 2015. See also “What Is Trap Music?,” Run the Trap, <https://runthetrap.com/what-is-trap-music/>.

Biblical principles, such as “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

Contemporary gospel in this specific study is primarily created by artists born between 1965 and 1984 and labeled the “hip-hop generation” by Bakari Kitwana.⁷ A prolific commentator on that generation, Kitwana provides, among other insights, a succinct explanation of how hip-hop can be used by the Christian church to reach youth where they are spiritually, insights pertinent for this discussion: “It’s a mode of expression that tends to be a bit more gritty and edgy as it attempts to find a voice in a mainstream culture that has too long denied young people their say.”⁸

While fewer than half of the artists in this study are Christian rappers, they frequently include slang—vernacular terms popular at the time of the recordings—as they sing about issues they feel should be addressed in Christian contexts. By doing so, they represent both a lyrical and a generational shift in gospel music, one that also speaks to the audience that is more likely to hear and/or perhaps needs to hear these songs and perspectives. While some of the selections were sent to radio with the intention of getting major airplay, many of them would be considered “deep cuts”: the songs on an artist’s project that are not played repeatedly on radio. Record buyers would have generally listened to an artist’s whole project, heeded a referral from a friend, after discovering hidden gems during live performances, or clicked on links placed on various sites on the internet by record labels and artists. In recent years songs of every genre and their videos have often gained even more attention via online platforms, including YouTube and Instagram, with or without radio support. The enhanced views and posts, some of which are referenced below, indicate that the contemporary gospel songs analyzed here are created for younger audiences who are seeking spiritual answers concerning sex, identity, and Christianity, topics which remain unaddressed in many churches.

The Inclusive Focus of Gospel Songs

Because issue-oriented songs are not the central focus of gospel music, some performers who have been willing to comment on current affairs serve as a lens through which to assess the full context that supported the rise of gospel songs with lyrics about sex and sexuality. Though research reveals that artists often give personal reasons for releasing these songs, there are several elements that were part of the heightened cultural conversations about sexual matters that began during the late 1980s. There was the rising popularity of reality TV shows, such as *The Real World* and syndicated tabloid programs like *Jerry Springer* and *Jenny Jones*; as well as confessional, self-help broadcasts, among them *The Oprah Winfrey* and *Montel Williams* shows. Individuals were publicly sharing some of their secrets which helped to open the door for others, including those gospel singers who began singing and rapping their stories.

Other cultural elements that provided a backdrop for these lyrics over the last several decades include videos and songs by popular singers, including Janet Jackson and Beyoncé; and rappers, among them 50 Cent and Nelly. There were major scandals involving high-profile individuals, including Bill Clinton, R. Kelly, and gospel singers J. Moss and Deitrick Haddon, all of whom have admitted publicly to having had extramarital sexual relationships and, in some cases, children outside of marriage.

Two individuals whose narratives were discussed within the Black community during this time period were Juanita Bynum and Tonéx. Preacher and gospel singer Bynum became a bestselling author with her book *No More Sheets* which focuses in part on her being single, female, and Christian while giving in to sexual desire.⁹ The spark for the heightened conversation about gospel artist Tonéx, now

⁷Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (New York: Basic Citivas Books, 2003).

⁸Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation*, 8.

⁹Juanita Bynum, *No More Sheets* (Lanham, MD: Pneuma Life Publishing, 1998).

known as B. Slade, is summarized by Alisha Lola Jones: “In a 2010 *Lexi Show* interview on The Word Network, Tonéx asserted he had had sex with men and that he did not need to be delivered from being attracted to men.”¹⁰ Jones later writes that his having “disclosed his unapologetic queerness” remains rare within gospel music.¹¹

The responses from Christians to these controversial issues and public declarations have not been unanimous by any means. Many hold to a traditional line that sex is to be enjoyed only by heterosexual married couples and that homosexuality is a sin, while some appeal for more progressive attitudes, including allowing individuals to be their unique selves; others have had responses that fall somewhere in between the two. Among the more visible and controversial responses of younger Christians to these sexual debates is Passion 4 Christ Movement (P4CM), headed by Pastor Justin Cox of California established in 2007. While P4CM’s positions appear to fall along the traditional lines mentioned above, the bold ways in which the movement has proclaimed its stances have attracted national attention including being the subject of a featured story on ABC’s *Nightline*. For several years, the members sold a line of “ex” tee-shirts (ex-masturbator, ex-fornicator, etc.) on their website, P4CM.com, which they encouraged youth to wear as a way of witnessing to others about their faith and transformation.¹²

In fact, movements like P4CM and lyrics such as the ones discussed in this article have emerged despite or perhaps because of what some scholars view as ambivalence toward and even suppression of open dialogue about sex and sexuality within Christian church and gospel worlds. For example, Jeffrey Q. McCune highlights the contradictions and complexities that exist between the Black Church and the gay community despite the former being an organization to which many members of the latter belong.¹³ Michael Eric Dyson similarly explains that while many Black Christians see themselves as “sexual saviors,” they refuse to “admit that the same sexual desire that courses through the rappers’ veins courses through the veins of its members.”¹⁴ Such research highlights the very human discrepancies that can exist between what some believers confess to be—followers of Biblical passages—and how they treat others they view as sexual violators even as they break similar edicts themselves.

Regardless of this resistance, scholars and activists note that there are those within the sanctuary who want frank discussions about sex to occur. Womanist theologian and priest Kelly Brown Douglas writes that “various voices have emerged from within the black community demanding that the implicit moratorium on forthrightly discussing sexual matters be lifted.”¹⁵ A similar assessment has been shared by the Reverend Dr. Carlton W. Veazey, president of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. In 2008, the organization held the National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality called “Radical Shift in Black Church on Sexuality and Choice.” In a summary posted on the website for Rewire News Group, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing “fair, accurate reporting on reproductive and sexual health, rights, and justice,” Veazey writes: “In place of the silence bred from fear and ignorance, we now see our youth and adults affirming God’s good gift of sexuality and seeking the wisdom to live responsibly as spiritual and sexual beings.”¹⁶ Such voices supporting openness and candor have helped make it possible for gospel artists to move beyond silence to sharing their narratives related to sex and sexuality.

¹⁰Alisha Lola Jones, *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 158.

¹¹Jones, *Flaming?* 176.

¹²P4CM.com is the website for the organization about which I first became aware through an article by Carlotta Morrow which detailed the specific “ex” tee shirts they were selling. However, neither that article nor those specific tee shirts are available online although other “passion” tee shirts and mugs are.

¹³Jeffrey Q. McCune, “Transformance: Reading the Gospel in Drag,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, nos. 3–4 (2004): 151–67.

¹⁴Michael Eric Dyson, “When You Divide the Body, Problems Multiply: The Black Church and Sex,” chap. 3 in *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 100.

¹⁵Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 1303.

¹⁶Carlton W. Veazey, “Radical Shift in Black Church on Sexuality and Choice,” Rewire News Group, July 15, 2008, <https://rewirenews.com/article/2008/07/15/radical-shift-black-church-sexuality-and-choice/>.

Lyrical Patterns That Extend the Boundaries of the Gospel Songbook

The recurring patterns reflected in the lyrics explored in this article can be summarized in these points:

- 1) The majority of these songs have been influenced by traditional Church ideology by reflecting and even citing Biblical verses and Christian tenets;
- 2) When the singer has stayed faithful to those tenets, they cite their belief in and love for God for keeping them sexually compliant;
- 3) When the singer strays from traditional Christian ideology, they outline their journey and in so doing make it clear that listeners who are walking a similar road can find deliverance just as the singer has done;
- 4) Male performers cover more sub-topics, including pornography and pre-marital sex, while female singers tend to focus most frequently on virginity and abstinence;
- 5) Gospel music is shown as a vehicle through which these formerly taboo topics can be addressed along with Christian faith and God's ability to help believers win their sexual battles.

In a majority of these songs, the messages are in line with what scholars, including E. L. Kornegay Jr. and Brown Douglas, have deemed as decidedly focused on traditional Christian sexual mores. These mores, however, are thought of by some within and outside of the church as heteronormative and sexist with LGBTQIA+ communities too often painted as deviant, and heterosexual women usually depicted as temptresses.¹⁷ There are also both male and female artists who provide a different narrative with men expected to be circumspect and in control of their own urges.

While these lyrics about sex fall outside of what most expect to find within gospel songs, this addition to the gospel songbook exemplifies the fact that some contemporary gospel music artists are extending the boundaries of what constitutes acceptable lyrical content. This contemporary extension builds upon the categories into which Boyer had placed lyrics. He writes that the lyrics in gospel music "are of three variations": 1) scriptural quotes and paraphrases as shown in "Peace Be Still"; 2) praise/adoration of the Savior, exemplified by "He's the Joy of My Salvation"; and 3) "supplication" as in "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." Though he does not create a fourth category, he shares that "a contemporary infusion of social commentary" had begun to emerge.¹⁸

Boyer offers another observation in describing some songs as having "rather unique lyrics." He notes that while "no overwhelming change" had been made in the lyrical content of contemporary gospel in the early 1980s, there had been "some advancement," which referred to the appearance of love songs about Jesus. He writes that some of them, like Andraé Crouch's "Dreamin'," "suggest a sensual relationship until the word Lord appears in the last line."¹⁹ Numerous songs released since that late 1970s appear to fall into that same lyrical category. In that cluster is the more recent release by Koryn Hawthorne, "Speak to Me" (2020), in which she sings that "nothin' comes close to what the vibe is and nothin's more excitin' than the time spent with you,"²⁰ a song that expresses what she calls her "super laid-back and "come as you are" relationship with God. The songs in this article move far beyond the textual changes that Boyer noted, even as they remain connected in many ways to his categories.

Mark Evans's expansive work on contemporary Christian congregational music examines elements of Christian congregational songs created at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries and sung by White Protestant congregations. Calling for sustained, rigorous research in every community where such music is sung, including Black churches, Evans identifies primary and

¹⁷E. L. Kornegay Jr., *The Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*.

¹⁸Boyer, "A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Gospel Songs," 131, 133.

¹⁹Boyer, "A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Gospel Songs," 133; Andraé Crouch and the Disciples, "Dreamin'," *I'll Be Thinking of You*, Elektra/Light Records, 1979.

Among the lyrics within Crouch's "Dreamin'" are these: "Cause I really wanna see You / And I really wanna be with You / Yes, it's true, I keep dreamin' about You / Ohh, Lord, I keep dreamin' about You."

²⁰Koryn Hawthorne, "Speak to Me," YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDF19goQD_c.

secondary song types and topics, using such labels as intimate/relational, body unity, salvation, testimony, transformation/dedication, and holiness.²¹ All of these categories reflect song content that have to do with a believer's enhanced connection with God.

My examination of gospel songs here reflects a determination similar to Boyer's and Evans's to demonstrate that music which promotes the messages of Christianity has multiple dimensions. Most of the songs cited have lyrics that could place them within either or both of Boyer's first two categories because the lyrics frequently reference or paraphrase Scripture, and/or they express praise or thanks to God for deliverance. Other songs have lyrics that would position them in several of Evans's categories, especially testimony and holiness, despite the fact that they are listed as gospel music and are not the genre he specifically researches. But this analysis is also a marked departure from their scholarship. The distinct difference between the songs analyzed by Boyer and Evans and the ones I examine is that the lyrics here directly address sex and sexuality, topics that still remain taboo in many Christian settings.

Confessional/Testimonial Lyrics

Traditionally, gospel artists have used lyrics to express, among other sentiments, their gratitude for having been spiritually delivered from whatever sins were part of their past. These lyrics have included such well-known gospel couplets as "He [God] picked me up, turned me around, and placed my feet on solid ground."²² These artists have often been more detailed in their spoken and written testimonies, frequently delivered in settings called testimony services,²³ during which they could outline the sins, behaviors, or habits from which they believe God has released them as well as what they understand to be the misdeeds others need to remove from their lives. These spoken testimonies could also be heard during introductions to, breaks in between, or within a series of songs during "live" performances, on recordings, or within the written autobiographies several gospel artists have published.

Among those who have made these types of declarations are superstar singer Donnie McClurkin who recounts having been sexually molested as a youngster and also discusses his subsequent "issues" with sexuality and the iconic Clark Sisters who for several years reportedly declared "a special ministry to homosexuals and lesbians."²⁴ While in some cases these spoken and written narratives have been direct, song lyrics, in contrast, have traditionally been unrelated to sexual acts, thus shielding the performers from revealing detailed information about past personal behaviors or about focused ministerial intentions. Simultaneously they have allowed listeners to concentrate not on the activities of the singer but on their own undisclosed transgressions from which God has set them free or from which they feel they need deliverance.

Before the emergence of gospel songs with lyrics related to sex and sexuality, there were recordings with brief allusions to such matters. These include Twinkie Clark singing wistfully on "The Word of God": "I can even remember when / women were women and men were men / Now you can't hardly tell a her from a him /oh, we've changed!"²⁵ Helen Baylor recalls in her spoken "Testimony" that when she was living with her drug dealer boyfriend, her "free" drugs were not secured without a price as she refers to herself as having been "promiscuous." This confession is contrasted by what she sings after each description of her out-of-control life: "But . . . I had a praying grandmother."²⁶ The Winans, in

²¹Mark Evans, *Open up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2006), 114–15 and appendix.

²²One song that includes this lyric is "Love Lifted Me," recorded by Hezekiah Walker and the Love Fellowship Crusade Choir, *Live in Atlanta at Morehouse College*, Verity, 1994. See also Hezekiah Walker, "Love Lifted Me," YouTube video, 0:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZik72kD_NA.

²³See a discussion of the music, prayers, and oral narratives that are entailed in a testimonial service in Arthur Paris, *Black Pentecostalism: Southern Religion in an Urban World* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

²⁴Donnie McClurkin, *Eternal Victim, Eternal Victor* (Lanham, MD: Pneuma Life, 2001), 33–45; Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (New York: Limelight, 1972), 249.

²⁵Twinkie Clark and Marvin Winans, lead singers, "Word of God," YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eALiAWXrk30>.

²⁶Helen Baylor, "Testimony," YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cus0WratJU8>.

the song “Bring Back the Days of Yea and Nay,” refer to a time “when boys grew into men, little girls to women then.” But, they continue, “It ain’t like that anymore.”²⁷ Certainly, there is nothing titillating or graphic in these lyrics, but sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, and/or transgender identity certainly seem to be referenced here, topics most would not expect to hear alluded to within a gospel song.

Within the songs I place in this first category, “Confessional/Testimonial Lyrics,” the artists initially declare that they have sinned, that is, that they have violated God’s commandments, and secondly, that God has transformed them, shown them a better way to live, and set them free from the situation that previously had them living outside of God’s will. The first time it registered with me that something different was happening within some gospel lyrics was in 2003. I heard Samantha Coleman’s “Funny Valentine,” which was sent to me as part of a CD sampler of songs compiled by *Gospel Truth Magazine* to be considered by radio, retailers, and subscribers; its lyrics were unlike anything I had ever previously heard related to gospel music. In this case, Coleman, who initially rapped as a secular artist under the name “Da Ganksta,” had written a post-conversion song which was later included on her CD *For Such a Time as This*.²⁸ As the title suggests, the iconic song “My Funny Valentine,” written by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart in 1937, is alluded to, and the three words from the title are actually sung as the refrain. But while the beloved one in the original lyric has qualities that are deemed “laughable” and “unphotographable,” the valentine in Samantha Coleman’s version is called “funny” as in the derogatory term for gay or lesbian.

Coleman begins the song by explaining why she is about to share this narrative. She sings: “I’ve got to tell it. Please let me tell it. God told me to tell it. I need to tell it. My funny valentine. My funny, funny valentine.” Coleman piques the interest of the listener with these words that express a spiritual and personal urgency; she also requests the listener’s permission to communicate something she refers to as “it,” the details of which are soon to follow. While the refrain may sound familiar to some listeners, they do little to prepare the audience for the unflinchingly candid rap lyric that is about to unfold. She details what happened when a longtime friendship became something else:

Eight years of being friends, three years of being lovers.
We ended up being wrong with it; we started under cover.
Discovered a new side of myself,
And I’m beginning to like it.
She treat me like a man, and it starting to excite me.

Coleman has clearly gone far beyond the non-specific, ubiquitous couplet: “God picked me up and turned me around.” And because this is both a confessional narrative and a testimony of deliverance, she shares the rest of her story: after a time, she apparently experienced the desire to step away from the sexual relationship she was involved in but was unsuccessful in doing so on her own. As Coleman states, “I dated guys, trying to be normal but I remained attracted to women. The spirit of sexual perversion had taken over my mind. At the age of twenty, I began to date a woman. Soon we were living together. I was living my life as a man providing for his woman. I had many problems with family and friends, but they just had to accept what I was.”²⁹

But the narrative takes an unexpected turn. An encounter with a Christian as well as participation in a Bible study leads to a major change in her direction. She says on the recording, “I gave my life to Christ/For my sins He paid the price.” Coleman turns to God and raps that she was “broken hearted” after separating from her partner and longtime friend, “stressed” and hit by “aftershocks of pain.” But her focus was on distancing herself from practices she wanted to leave behind; she raps that she successfully did so with the help of God. She closes by testifying of the radical nature of her conversion, as one who moved from “gangsta” rapping and living in a lesbian relationship to being a self-described

²⁷The Winans, “Bring Back the Days of Yea and Nay,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JroaQQHjmc4>.

²⁸Samantha Coleman, “Funny Valentine,” YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAL_dd_wjso.

²⁹“From Gangsta Rapper to Gospel Music Messenger, Samantha Coleman To Release Debut Gospel/Rap CD ‘For Such a Time as This,’” Dogon Village, June 30, 2015, http://www.dogonvillage.com/african_american_news/Articles/00000497.html.

“Proverbs 31 woman,” the kind, entrepreneurial, virtuous wife and mother extolled in the Old Testament chapter that is often used as the basis for Women’s Day worship services and events. An important part of her testimony is her clarity about what it takes to realign one’s life with what one sees as Christian values. It can be difficult, but the transformation can be achieved, a story she was able to share not only on the recording but in person at events held by Dr. Bobby Jones and CeCe Winans.³⁰

That same year, in 2003, B. Slade, then known as Tonéx, released his double CD *Oak Park 92105*.³¹ The Stellar and GMA Award winner and Grammy-nominated artist, who was signed to Verity Records, released this autobiographical project on his own label, Nureau. Pertinent to this discussion is the song “Now” which samples “Could We Start Again, Please?” from the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970). Tonéx explains that he was in a sexual relationship with a young lady. He sings: “But in our innocence, we started hopping fence.” While that phrase sounds like a reference to a fan game, there are graphic, vernacular meanings connected to it, including “changing the gender of one’s sexual partner just to see if the grass is greener.”³² Whether he is indicating that this did take place, an admission of this kind was still rare in a gospel song.

Eventually, the girl becomes pregnant. Later Tonéx sings about having a casual sexual encounter with another woman he meets at a church convention in the hotel lobby where, he says, “the freaks hang out”; months later, he discovers that he has contracted HPV, the human papilloma virus, which may be the first time that acronym appears in a gospel song. After describing these events, he addresses what he calls his “generation” by stating that there is no safe sex; therefore, they should use their “ATM card: abstinence ‘til marriage,” making his haunting narrative one of confession and one of caution, pointing listeners toward avoiding sexual involvement outside of marriage. His words are in line with Biblical warnings of the penalties to be exacted on those who are unmarried but engaging in sex.³³

The capstone of his song is a snippet of the refrain of one of his major hits, “Make Me Over,” which includes a plea to God to give him forgiveness and a new beginning, enhancing the relevance of the inclusion of the refrain from “Can We Start Again?” Tonéx’s double CD was the second by a Christian-based artist to carry an advisory warning sticker, the first being a CD from Chris Byrd for Christian married couples released in 2000. Both needed such a label because of their unflinching references to sex. What he describes is what many experience as they try to live according to Biblical principles but struggle with their sexual desires.

The confessional/testimonial category is also appropriate for some of the music recorded by Kirk Franklin, the most well-known of the gospel artists who have addressed their struggles with sex and sexuality in their lyrics. Franklin has been gospel’s most successful composer, arranger, and performer for almost three decades and is known for such songs as the 3.5-million-seller “Stomp,”³⁴ a song recorded with the youth group God’s Property that utilizes an interpolation of the Funkadelic’s hit “One Nation under A Groove.” Franklin also composes gospel songs that senior choirs, youth ensembles, and liturgical dance teams alike perform on Sunday morning.³⁵

On his CD *Hero*, released in 2005, he recounts in a three-part confessional/testimonial format, a story that many heard when he appeared on *Oprah* in November of that year;³⁶ however, he also addressed his past addiction to pornography in the first song of the trilogy called “Let It Go.”³⁷ Undoubtedly, some who purchased the CD may have been caught off guard by his approach to

³⁰“From Gangsta Rapper to Gospel Music Messenger.”

³¹Tonéx, “Now,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6O-Y1a2f58>. This unofficial remix with rap is the only version online.

³²“Hopping the Fence,” *Urban Dictionary*, September 10, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/zetnyts3>.

³³See for example Deuteronomy 22:22: “If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.”

³⁴Kirk Franklin, “Stomp,” *God’s Property from Kirk Franklin’s Nu Nation*, B-rite Music, 1997.

³⁵That list includes songs such as “Something about the Name Jesus,” *Nu Nation Project*, B-rite 2007 and “Now Behold the Lamb,” *Kirk Franklin and the Family Christmas*, B-rite, 1995.

³⁶Kirk Franklin, guest, “Porn Epidemic,” *Oprah*, July 1, 2005, <https://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/porn-epidemic>.

³⁷Franklin, “Let It Go,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=Rkc28ua09yc>.

creating a confessional/testimonial narrative within gospel music. Franklin turns to the 1985 Tears for Fears hit “Shout” (1985), sung as a poignant refrain in “Let It Go” (track 5), in which he, like Coleman, implores the audience to “Let me speak.” Abandoned by his mother on the doorstep of his middle-aged aunt when he was just four, Franklin explains in spoken word/rap form that while her actions didn’t leave a physical mark on him, “she killed my soul.” In the next lines he delivers the following lyrics:

I never had a chance to dream
 Ten years old and finding love in dirty magazines
 Ms. December, you remember, I bought you twice.
 Now I’m 30 years old and still paying the price.
 Sex was how I made it through
 Without love, what else was there to do?

His preoccupation with pornographic images affected his life for the next twenty years and was accompanied, he explains, by becoming sexually active to prove his virility with many girls. By the time he was seventeen, he was on the way to fatherhood.

After the confessional song, Franklin presents an instrumental interlude called “The Process” (track 6),³⁸ which as the title and sounds indicate, represents the fact that there was a period of working out of the addiction and coming to the point of deliverance. Unwilling to suggest that there was a single moment of transformation, Franklin indicates that time and a “process” were involved. Believing he needed to change his behavior if he were to please God, he nevertheless struggled: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” he reports in his narrative.

The final song of the trilogy, “Imagine Me” (track 7), which was a single released to radio, finds Franklin testifying of having been freed from his painful past—abandonment, insecurities, addiction to pornography, and other “controlling” thoughts. Included are these poignant words to God whom he credits with freeing him from these difficult memories:

I admit it was hard to see
 You, being in love with someone like me.
 But, finally, I can imagine me . . .
 Letting go of the past and glad I have another chance
 And my heart will dance
 ‘Cause I don’t have to read that page again.³⁹

He dedicates the song to those who have struggled for various reasons as he has. It comes to a celebratory conclusion with the word “gone” repeated frequently by Franklin and his singers as he encourages those watching to imagine God whispering in their ears that “every sin, every failure, every mistake” is now gone. This important element signals his intention to not only present a creative, cathartic recording but to also provide a testimony that could encourage others trapped in addictions or other challenges to believe that they, too, can find spiritual deliverance.

Hero was, according to Nielsen Soundscan figures, the bestselling CD by Black Christian artist in 2005 with 377,123 units sold, and it was number 5 among all Christian CD’s for the year. As of August 2021, the video for the song has had 49 million viewers on YouTube, including views posted in 2021 suggesting that the soul-baring testimony continues to reach many of those who wanted and even needed to hear it. The almost 8,000 posted comments also confirm its resonance with individuals writing that they have battled depression, abuse, and more; expressing gratitude that God has delivered them and appreciation for Franklin’s music.

³⁸Franklin, “The Process,” *Hero*, Fo Yo Soul/GospoCentric/Zomba Records, 2005, CD.

³⁹Franklin. “Imagine Me,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=I66SDeRQJSJ4>.

While Coleman, Tonéx/B.Slade, and Franklin each have unique stories, audiences, and platforms, they have helped to provide encouragement for those struggling to get their sexual lives to conform with Biblical texts while demonstrating that gospel music has room for and can be a powerful vehicle for this content.

Narratives of Avoidance

The second category of songs in my analysis features scenarios in which the artists demonstrate through their lyrics how to avoid sex outside of marriage or indicate the importance of doing so, without a personal testimony. One of the earliest songs of this type was “Let Me See Your Fruit” recorded in 1988 by the pioneering Christian rap group P.I.D. (Preachers in Disguise).⁴⁰ While there are no sexually explicit lyrics, the song does refer to a young woman who, when the rapper first sees her, is quite modest in her demeanor and behavior; but once she is in the young man’s car, she becomes physically flirtatious.

He puts the brakes on her moves, which include trying to touch his hair. He uses these words: “I don’t want to see what’s under your dress / I understand your state / But I think I’ll wait / ’cause I know that God is gonna give me a fresh mate / Let me see your fruit.” As titillating as that last line may sound to some, “fruit” here refers to what Galatians 5:22–23 calls “the fruit of the spirit,”⁴¹ otherwise known as visible proof that one is trying to live a Christ-like existence which would include using self-control and not trying to seduce someone to whom one is not married.

But just as the relatively mild “Testimony” from Helen Baylor appears to be, the beginning for the confessional narratives “Let Me See Your Fruit” provides an opening approach to these tales of caution and avoidance. Four years after P.I.D. released their song, the recording “No Wed, No Bed,” written and delivered in rap by Apostle Louis Greenup, was on the market; Grammy award-winning gospel artist Fred Hammond produced the song in 1992 and provided the musical hook.⁴² The apostle offers nothing in the way of personal revelations but focuses on a Biblical approach to sexual relations.

In his 1992 record review, Tony Cummings describes “No Wed, No Bed” as a “rap over a so-so dance beat extolling the virtues of leaving sex until after marriage.” Calling the theme “controversial in these perverse times,” the reviewer ends by stating that the song’s “message needs to be proclaimed loud and long.”⁴³ Fifteen years later, in 2007, Christian rapper Pettidee did indeed continue that proclamation by recording a song with the same name and similar theme—no sex without marriage—which he also performed without personal testimony.⁴⁴ Gerard Bonner describes this selection and the other related cuts on the CD as songs “that address many controversial issues, such as sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and adultery.”⁴⁵ That title and message reappeared in 2013 on a release by Mister ATL featuring Tasha Catour.⁴⁶ Clearly Greenup, Pettidee, and Mister ATL were willing to provide advice about avoiding pre-marital sex, a topic not found in gospel lyrics prior to the 1980s but a definite response to a growing call for directly addressing the subject.

Canton Jones, an award-winning singer, rapper, and composer, has also included several songs on his projects that encourage listeners to avoid sexual temptation. One song is “Cute” from the CD *Password: Access Granted*.⁴⁷ The song is framed as if the male singer, “C. J.,” is recounting a date

⁴⁰Preachers in Disguise (P.I.D.), “Let Me See Your Fruit,” *Here We Are*, Graceland Records, 1988.

⁴¹Galatians 5:22–23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

⁴²Louis Greenup, “No Wed, No Bed,” Pepperco, 1992.

⁴³Tony Cummings, Apostle Louis Greenup, “No Wed, No Bed,” Cross Rhythms, October 1, 1992, https://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/products/Apostle_Louis_Greenup/No_Wed_No_Bed/11429/.

⁴⁴Pettidee with Lady Like, “No Wed, No Bed,” YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=b2Qvynxa_zg.

⁴⁵Gerard Bonner, “Pettidee: The Legacy—Vol. 1,” GospelFlava.com, July 1, 2015, <http://www.gospelflava.com/reviews/pettideelegacy.html>.

⁴⁶Mister ATL featuring Lady Catour, “No Wed, No Bed,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=8x-eOPbGHbc>.

⁴⁷Canton Jones, “Cute,” *Password: Access Granted*, Arrow Records, 2005.

with a woman whose looks he says made her a “twelve out of ten.” After dinner and a movie, the gentleman sees his date home; that is the point at which she proposes that they sleep together. His response, which is also the refrain of the song, is, “You’re cute, but not cute enough for my salvation.” The woman states that he must be gay since, she claims, every other man in town wants to sleep with her. In contrast to Franklin, who explains in “Let It Go” that he tried to get as many girls as possible to avoid being called “a punk” (gay), Jones refuses to prove anything to anyone but God, for as he tells his date, if he must choose between her and Jesus Christ, “Baby, you don’t compare.” Among the comments for this song posted as recently as April 2021: “Don’t let her steal your purity” and “The music is for married folks[;] the lyrics are for those who are not.”⁴⁸ The comments reflect that there are men who relate to the lyrics and appreciate the idea that demonstrating one’s devotion to God and his rules is more significant than proving heterosexual masculinity.

Also among the songs in the avoidance category are those about same sex relationships. One of the first was recorded by Angie and Debbie, the two youngest siblings from the famous Winans family of Detroit. Their contribution was the controversial song “Not Natural” from their 1997 release *Bold*. The song, which addresses violence and sex outside of marriage, also includes Angie and Debbie’s traditional commentary on same sex relationships; in fact, the song was written the day after Ellen DeGeneres came out on her TV sitcom *Ellen* and reflects that:

I was chilling on my couch one night
 Looking at my screen TV
 There were people celebrating and congratulating
 The new addition to the gay community
 I was vexed in the spirit
 And I began to write this song
 It may seem cold but let the truth be told
 I’m here to let you know
 It’s not natural
 No, that’s not the way it goes.⁴⁹

Despite the inclusion of other topics in the song, such as “babies having babies” and gun violence, the duo was challenged by GLAAD and others for what they called anti-gay lyrics. Angie and Debbie allegedly were told not to perform that song at the Million Woman March to which they had been invited, due to some performers canceling in protest of their inclusion. They even received death threats. Their response was that they were singing what God inspired them to sing.⁵⁰

Most Christian congregations in the late 1990s would have applauded Samantha Coleman for her major life change and Angie and Debbie for their song. However, some churches today welcome gay members and would be critical of Angie and Debbie’s lyrics. In May 2019, Gallup polling showed 63 percent of Americans in general were supportive of gay marriage which placed the results in line with the 64–67 percent Gallup had found in favor of these unions since 2017.⁵¹ As for the specific responses of church goers, Andrew L. Whitehead examines research that has delved into how factors, including geography, history, and the education levels of pastors, have seemed to affect a congregation’s acceptance of gay individuals. While there are what he refers to as “weaknesses” in some of the methodology used, the overriding conclusion he found is that there are more churches that have moved beyond the traditional stance.⁵² Among the congregations that are welcoming of LGBTQIA+ people and gay unions are those who are members of the United Church of Christ’s Open and Affirming Coalition

⁴⁸Jones, “Cute,” YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_amIfyeeNwc.

⁴⁹Angie and Debbie Winans, “Not Natural,” *Bold*, Against the Flow, 1997.

⁵⁰“Angie and Debbie Winans criticized for lyrics denouncing homosexuality on song, ‘Not Natural,’” *Jet*, November 24, 1997; and “BET Trips Up Taking Anti-Gay Winans Sisters to Teens,” *GLAADAlert*, October 31, 1997.

⁵¹Justin McCarthy, “U.S. Support of Gay Marriage, Stable at 63%,” GALLUP, May 22, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3ksdOlb>.

⁵²Andrew L. Whitehead, “Religious Organizations and Homosexuality: The Acceptance of Gays and Lesbians in American Congregations,” *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 2 (June 2013): 303.

and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, a largely Black organization of multi-denominational churches in the United States, Mexico, and Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Cote d'Ivoire.

Despite the existence of these supportive groups and congregations, the Black Church, Sallie Cuffee writes, has not become a “prophetic ‘drum major’ for the voiceless, the excluded, the marginalized, or the closeted—in this case, those who are being singled out for civil and religious persecution because they lack legal recognition of their sexual identity and its endowed privileges.”⁵³ The artists who have recorded gospel songs about homosexuality, with one exception, sing lyrics in keeping with the Black Church’s tradition of signaling straightforward avoidance. That is, identifying as gay and/or having sexual relations with someone of the same gender are two acts that must not be a part of a devout believer’s life.

One example is Tye Tribbett’s hit “Victory” (2006) which includes these spoken words during the bridge: “Come out of depression. Come out of low self-esteem. Come out of poverty. Come out of lesbianism. Come out of homosexuality.” While the song does not have a singular focus on same sex relationships, the lyrics are unequivocally aligned with traditional teachings. That is important to note since, unlike most of the other songs examined here, it was a single sent to radio. It peaked at #1 in gospel airplay in April 2006; the live CD of the same name debuted at the top of the Gospel Sales chart in June of that year.⁵⁴ Tribbett’s usual energetic delivery and the condemnation of specific practices appear to have been a powerful combination attracting listeners and purchasers.

But the song also provoked responses from those who were unhappy with what they viewed as anti-gay lyrics. One of the 1,500 who were still commenting in 2020 on YouTube wrote: “Wow I was actually feeling this song until he said come out of homosexuality . . . really.” Another posted: “Did anyone hear him say come out of Lesbianism? God loves everybody.”⁵⁵ While those comments reflect the absence of a unanimous response to these lyrics, the vast majority express being carried away by the sound of the choir, the rhythm of the track, and the words they see as reflecting Biblical text.

Christian rap artist Flame recorded “Desires in Conflict” (2007) which deals in its entirety with this topic. His lyrics summarize his encounters with a man who explained his challenges with being gay and with a woman who, after being molested by a man, could not get past that pain and was only with other women romantically. The artist says “wow” after recounting each story, acknowledges the struggles, but places their sexual desires in the same category as heterosexual ones outside of marriage—that is, not permissible: “Just like I can’t go off and participate in any type of sexual act that I want to with my sexuality—pornography, premarital sex, adultery—So it is with your sexuality concerning homosexuality. God has established The Divine order, and we must follow.”⁵⁶

Flame delivers the same basic avoidance message that is expressed in the earlier songs. The difference is that he does so with a bit more compassion and with an important acknowledgement: “We all have these sexual struggles.” The comments posted online reflect the divided thoughts regarding homosexuality and Christianity, including one writer sending “blessings” to Flame and his family while another, self-describing as a “gay Christian,” labeling the song “offensive.”⁵⁷ What is most significant is that on some level Flame is helping to end the silence about this subject.

Only one song discovered during this research, “Conversation” recorded by B. Slade in 2016, contains lyrics that do not hold homosexuality in the traditional, negative light. B. Slade reaffirms what he had declared in 2009 on the “Lexi TV Show,” that he is a same-gender loving man. After that widely-watched interview, which has since gained almost 350,000 views for part one, he eventually changed

⁵³Sallie Cuffee, “On Sex and Sexuality in Black Churchwomen’s Lives: A Womanist Call for a Moral and Justice Conversation in the Black Church,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 59–60, no. 1 (2006/2007): 46.

⁵⁴“Sony Urban Music & Columbia Records Congratulate Tye Tribbett & G. A. as Victory Live Debuts at #1,” Sony Music Entertainment, June 1, 2020, https://www.sony.com/content/sony/en/en_us/SCA/company-news/press-releases/sony-music-entertainment/2006/sony-urban-music-columbia-records-congratulate-tye-tribbett-ga-as-victory-live-debuts-at-1-on-the-current-gospel-sales-chart.html.

⁵⁵“Sony Urban Music & Columbia Records Congratulate Tye Tribbett & G. A. as Victory Live Debuts at #1.”

⁵⁶Flame, “Desires in Conflict,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=desktop&v=xrsstYogS9g>.

⁵⁷Flame, “Desires in Conflict.”

his name, fully embraced his new persona, and began recording music other than gospel. In October 2016, he recorded the song “Conversation” in response to the negative chatter about his performance and the attire he wore at a tribute to gospel artists Kurt Carr and Lynette Hawkins Stephens. The song was a musical cover of Beyoncé’s song “Formation” released a few months earlier while the outfit looked similar to part of her wardrobe for the song.⁵⁸ The recording begins with voices discussing what he wore for that service with one asking, “How do you even minister wearing something like that?” Among the buzz-worthy lyrics he delivered were these:

Y’all haters corny with that
 ‘He needs deliverance’
 Check out your choir stand
 They all need deliverance (wildin’)
 Attack my character
 But half of y’all closeted
 The last convention I attended was emptiness
 But you discriminating
 I snatched them wigs
 But you ain’t gonna snatch my salvation.⁵⁹

This gospel song is groundbreaking not only for B. Slade’s straightforward embrace of his sexuality but in his revealing the hypocrisy of those who were speaking negatively of his being gay while ignoring the sexual dalliances going on in their own churches. Regardless of the tone of the chatter about him, he refuses to let anyone make him doubt his faith or hide who he is. Other lines, “we need a real conversation” and “self-confrontation” are also worthy of attention. There are several male gospel artists who have said they have been “delivered” from homosexuality, but B. Slade remains the only one to request that everyone be allowed to be their authentic selves and love God without having to hide who they are in order to look “saved” or be viewed as acceptable.⁶⁰ In that regard, he is an outlier in that this song of avoidance is about moving away from hiding one’s true sexual self.

Problematizing Sexual Content: Women and the Jezebel Lyric

Several of the male artists presented in the previous sections, including Canton Jones and Preachers in Disguise, responded to the women in their songs in ways that are grounded in Biblical principles. Women in these scenarios are often depicted as sexually aggressive. In fact, women are frequently described this way, not only in the avoidance category but within the songs that are confessional/testimonial.

On his CD *Church on the Moon*,⁶¹ gospel singer, composer, and reality TV star Deitrick Haddon includes the song “Fighting Temptation” in which these non-traditional lines appear:

Ah, I’m tryin’ to live a godly life, be lyin’ if I say it ain’t hard
 I can’t even open my eyes ‘cause everything is rated R
 Can’t believe what I’m seeing, I’m speechless
 All I see is your booty and cleavage
 You just tryin’ to find my weakness
 I’m determined to pass your test.

⁵⁸B. Slade, Formerly Known as Tonex, Releases Response to Christians Opposing His Performance at Musical Tribute Honoring Kurt Carr and Lynette Hawkins-Stephens,” *Black Christian News Network One*, October 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/dyx6khvs>.

⁵⁹B. Slade, “Conversation,” *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Bslade-conversation-lyrics>.

⁶⁰Alisha Lola Jones examines B. Slade’s trajectory and the challenges of those gospel singers who have discrete queer identities. Jones, *Flaming?*, 36–69, 149–71.

⁶¹Deitrick Haddon, “Fighting Temptation,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=FdJqrrAngk>.

Here, he accomplishes that which would have seemed unthinkable at one time: he uses the words “booty” and “cleavage” in a song about striving to live for God. While the song has four verses, including one that addresses the lure of illegal money, two of the verses directly address sexual temptation. On one level, temptation appears to be personified as female, but because of the reference to the seductive individual as using her wiles—“trying to get a brother in your bed”—the words can just as easily be aimed at a scheming woman. Haddon could be cleverly merging the two by employing language that is aimed at the amorphous entity temptation and at an enticingly shaped lady. But given the specific body parts named, he is clearly calling upon listeners to identify that which is inappropriately alluring and refuse to be seduced by it.

J. Moss has made similar references to seductive women within his song’s lyrics, but he has done so without making them the culprits for behavior unbecoming of celibate Christians. Moss, a chart-topping gospel singer and award-winning producer who currently records on the PAJAM label he co-owns, was signed to the GospoCentric label when he composed and recorded songs about sexual enticement. The CDs *The J. Moss Project* and *V2*⁶² contain lyrics that seemed confessional due to a personal scandal that became public knowledge and fodder for online chatter. The news of his indiscretion leaked out via attention-getting coverage in the *Detroit News* which was later linked throughout the Internet in 2009.⁶³

In “Livin’ 4,” Moss sings this chorus: “Enticed by the things you do/It’s a one-way ticket to a devil’s hell foolin’ with you.” Later, he is more descriptive: “You had my arms and hands wrapped around your lust.”⁶⁴ Within the song “Let It Go,” Moss achieves even greater specificity when he sings, among other things, “stop all of this cheatin’, stop all of this creepin’” as well as these words:

One day I was checking this girl but I wanna stay saved
I got a wife and a kid at home I love and they all share my last name
But looking at them thighs, it was like a twinkle in my eye
I kissed her; she kissed me, and now who’s wrong and losing their home?⁶⁵

With specificity that in the past would have been relegated to a Friday night testimonial service, Moss presents scenarios that previously would have been found exclusively in the songs of secular rappers and R&B singers.

But what is most fascinating and non-stereotypical is that while the line about lust seems to make the singer the one who is entrapped, the male “I” in the song, unlike the male singers named earlier, takes ownership of his behavior—he’s the one checking out the woman, noticing the thighs, the first to move in with a kiss, the one with something akin to a twinkle in his eye as he looks her over. Owning his part of the assignation finds him departing from the familiar trope of the scandalous female entrapping the seemingly helpless, hapless male.

The 116 Clique also departs from the “blame the woman” paradigm. This collective consists of several Christian rappers who have individual careers, most of them from Reach Records; they record and tour together for various projects. Their group name comes from Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” On their joint project *Man Up* and the related DVD,⁶⁶ they focus on men taking responsibility for every aspect of their lives, including their sexuality. On the song “Temptation,” featuring KB, PRO [*sic*], Andy Mineo, and Tedashii, they like Deitrick Haddon acknowledge how difficult it is to keep control of sexual urges. However, they refuse to demonize women; instead they see themselves as responsible for being in control of “it”—sex and sexual activity—with the help of God:

⁶²J. Moss, *The J. Moss Project*, GospoCentric 2005; and J. Moss, *V2*, GospoCentric, 2007.

⁶³Mike Martindale, “J Moss Paternity Suit,” *Detroit News*, October 8, 2008.

⁶⁴J. Moss, “Livin’ 4,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=deecHB7NT94>.

⁶⁵J. Moss, “Let It Go,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=f1Ku8sBEzzk>.

⁶⁶116 Clique, “Temptation,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=hrfjckBcbYA>.

And we worship it, and so it comes out in all kinds of profane ways
 And so we blame the women for what they're wearing
 And we blame the media for what they're producing
 But we never blame ourselves.

They end by acknowledging that “manning up” is not about an individual using his best effort but about giving control to God and trusting that He will help that man meet the challenge of being sexually faithful to his spouse or of remaining celibate until he is married.⁶⁷ Because these rappers do not lean on excuses, make allowances for womanizing, or characterize women as being the predators, their songs present a fresh counter narrative to that which is often presented within Black Christian culture as well as to those gospel songs in which the women are the culprits.

Women Taking the Mic about Sex and Sexuality

Most of the songs by gospel artists that deal with sex and sexuality have come from male artists. There are several possible, even probable reasons for this. First, there are more male recording artists in gospel, especially on national labels, even though or perhaps because the audience still tends to be largely female in churches and at concerts. The rosters of several of the top gospel labels reflect the imbalance. *The Gospel Music Industry Roundup* lists RCA Gospel as having eleven artists on its roster at the time of its 2016 publication, only one of whom was a woman. For Motown Gospel, the ratio for that year was 11:2, and Tyscot Records' ratio was 12:5 including one male/female duo.⁶⁸ While that source is no longer being published, a former vice president with one of the aforementioned labels assured me that in 2020 the percentages remain comparable.

Some of the female artists who have recorded songs referencing sex and sexuality have their own explanations as to why there are so few featuring women's voices. Recording artist Lexi, who is also a television interviewer on the WORD cable network and an entertainment reporter for Radio One's gospel stations, recalls that in the late 1990s there were very few female contemporary gospel artists recording at the time.⁶⁹ Among them were Trin-i-Tee 5:7, The Clark Sisters, who did not record entire songs focused on sex and sexuality, and the youngest siblings in the Winans family, Angie and Debbie, whose work was discussed earlier.

While Angie and Debbie's detractors expressed anger over the content of “Not Natural,” one of their peers, Michele Welch, who records under the name Sonnie Day, believes that Black Christian culture accepts sexual conversation from men far more readily than it does from women, even if the content of the message is about abstinence.⁷⁰ That assessment is fit for examination at some point given the discrepancies that exist within the recording industry and within the religious world. There does appear to be less stigma and a great deal of tolerance within the Black Church and the Christian Church in general as it relates to men being involved in pre-marital and extra-marital heterosexual relations. Some churches, regardless of the congregations' racial makeup, continue the practice of having the pregnant unmarried young woman stand and apologize to the fellowship while too often the man, even if he is a member of or a leader within that same congregation, is not always compelled to do the same.⁷¹

That practice of ignoring the sexual exploits of male Christians also surfaces in Franklin's song “Let It Go (Shout).” Besides outlining his addiction to pornography and his attempts to be freed from it, Franklin also implores pastors to forego passivity, winking and nodding at the “boys will be boys” behavior, and to actively help those who are trying to live a sexually responsible life. He makes the

⁶⁷116 Clique, “Temptation.”

⁶⁸Lisa Collins, ed., *Gospel Music Industry Round-Up 2016* (Inglewood, CA: Eye on Gospel Publications, 2016), 18–21.

⁶⁹Lexi, email exchange with the author, September 15, 2013.

⁷⁰Michele Welch (Sonny Day), email exchange with the author, September 12, 2014.

⁷¹One article that addresses this disparity in treatment is Michelle Van Loon, “The Trouble with Confessing in Church,” *Christianity Today*, September 29, 2010, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/septemberweb-only/trouble-with-confessing-in-church.html>.

request with these words: “Preacher teach me how to dance and to speak in tongues, but show me how to live when the tongue is done.”⁷² In other words, do something more than say, “You’ll outgrow it,” which is what Franklin reports his pastor said to him early on. His addiction continued until 1999 when another pastor, Dr. Tony Evans, worked with and counseled Franklin; he credits that guidance with being a key to his overcoming his addiction.⁷³

But while Franklin shares his dismay that few church leaders give specific directions to young men to be celibate until married and in fact appear to give them tacit permission to be sexually active, churches rarely offer such passes to women, and certainly no acceptance is expressed within any of the songs discussed in this article. The probable consequences for women having sex outside of marriage, beyond pregnancy, are generally greater than they are for men. At the time that these abstinence songs were being recorded in the late-1990s and early 2000s, the rate of single-parent households had “soared” since 1970, according to a Brookings Report. In 1965, 24 percent of Black infants and 3.1 percent of white infants were born to single mothers. By 1990 the rates had risen to 64 percent for Black infants, 18 percent for whites.⁷⁴ That means that these songs were speaking to a situation that most churches were not addressing at that time and would help substantiate why Lexi, Sonnie Day, Ametri, and Trin-i-Tee 5:7 have abstinence until marriage as the central message in their gospel songs about sex. It is worth noting that today, two decades later, there are ministries that not only cater to single adults, but congregations and denominations that support single parents; among them is a division of the Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

The first of these abstinence-focused songs by women was a song from the top-selling, Dove and Stellar Award-winning group Trin-i-Tee 5:7. They reached a large secular audience in 1998 with their first hit, “God’s Grace” (written and produced by R. Kelly), and the full self-titled CD which eventually went gold.⁷⁵ The group had a sexy R&B vibe from the start of their career and was often compared to En Vogue and TLC. All of those reasons made it easier for the single, “My Body,” to not only get gospel airplay but to become one of the Top 100 songs of 1999 on urban stations.⁷⁶ Selling more than 2.5 million CDs during their initial run (the group disbanded in 2013 but reconfigured in 2018), Trin-i-Tee 5:7 helped to change what is expected of female singers, on one hand, and what is acceptable lyrical content for gospel artists as they sang these lyrics, on the other:

Tryin’ to save myself. Don’t pressure me.
 My spirit leads me to celibacy.
 I have to just be real, and I know it’s fair.
 I want to please my God, and I don’t care.
 My body is the Lord’s temple.
 Don’t mess with me—God’s property.

The second to the last two lines above refer to 1 Corinthians 3:16 which reminds believers that they are God’s temple.⁷⁷ The line that follows, telling someone not to “mess with me” or approach me with sexual intentions, is without lyrical precedence in traditional gospel music as it models a specific set of responses to such invitations. Equally important is the fact that Trin-i-Tee 5:7’s contemporary look, which helped them catch the attention of equally attractive young men, communicates to young viewers of their music video that they too can back away from pre-marital sex, even if the man asking is good looking and drives an expensive car. As group member Chanelle Haynes once said, “We can be

⁷²Kirk Franklin with Tobymac, “Let It Go (Shout),” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=iDZ6krccmHw>.

⁷³Shannon Woodland and Scott Ross, “Overcoming Porn: Kirk Franklin’s Freedom,” Christian Broadcasting Network, <https://tinyurl.com/wpvbnfbp>.

⁷⁴George A. Akerlof and Janet L. Yellen, “An Analysis of Out-of-Wedlock Births in the United States,” *Brookings Policy Brief Series*, August 1, 1996, <https://tinyurl.com/3v7824xu>.

⁷⁵Trin-i-Tee 5:7, “God’s Grace,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=AJcl5WNPOv4>.

⁷⁶Trin-i-Tee 5:7, “My Body,” *Spiritual Love*, GospoCentric, 2000.

⁷⁷1 Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

stylish, hip and saved.”⁷⁸ Also worth noting is the fact that by the end of the video of “My Body,” the young men are also mouthing the lyrics to the chorus, an indication that if the young women repeat the phrase often enough, even those with raging male hormones might get the message.

Lexi also recorded a song with that theme in 1999. Joined by a younger friend, Gwen Burton, Lexi begins the song “The Conversation”⁷⁹ as if it is a conventional telephone call. Then Gwen sings about the boyfriend with whom she says she has done almost everything, but with whom she has one thing left to do. Responding to the sexual activity the younger friend hints is the “one thing” still not explored, Lexi sings: “One and one can lead to three, and then he’s through, and then there’s two.” In other words, if you sleep with this guy to whom you are not married, you can end up without him but with his baby. She ends the song by singing “obedience is better than sacrifice.” This line alludes to 1 Samuel 15:22, which indicates that following God’s rules should be the top priority. In this case, the top priority would be remaining celibate until marriage.⁸⁰

Ametria Dock, on the song “Wait” which was recorded in 2000, adds a different layer to the theme by having Wanya Morris of Boyz II Men sing with her.⁸¹ He tries to coax her to give in to desire since they love each other, but she says if he is going to be her man, he’s going to have to accept her decision to remain a virgin: “God told me to wait; he promised to send me a mate.” The word “mate,” in this context, has everything to do with a husband and nothing to do with a temporary arrangement. By the end of the song, Morris has joined Ametria in saying that he will wait, just as the young men do in the video of Trin-i-Tee 5:7’s song. This time, it’s not just any good-looking guy, but a member of the internationally popular R&B group learning a lesson about abstinence, a rule many young women might gladly break in that instance. The point is that no matter what the man’s background, if he’s not your husband, the answer to his sexual invitation has to be no. That message is also carried by Michelle Welch, who records under the name Sonnie Day, in her song “My Virginity.” Proud to share that she was a virgin when she married, she teaches this and other values to the teenagers she mentors through her Ruby Girls program and stands firmly behind the lyrics she penned in 2009:

Won’t be no zippers down, no messin’ around
And no going downtown
’Cause if you really wanna be blessed
Don’t lower your standards and settle for less.⁸²

While celibacy is a virtue championed in the songs cited here by women artists, some womanist writers have declared it to be an unrealistic stance for today’s Black Christian women. Susan Newman presents the argument that the differences between the sexual demands and mores of Biblical times and those of Black Church women today are so vast that there needs to be a contemporary mindset that replaces abstinence with something more reasonable.⁸³ She finds that adherence to these traditional mores has led many of these God-fearing Black women to feel guilty for being single, sexually active Christians.

Similarly, Cuffee makes a five-point call for what she labels “a moral and justice conversation in the Black Church.” She continues: “How can we forget that many black women are living casualties of the present sexual ethic of a patriarchal faith?”⁸⁴ What these scholars make clear is that they view those standards as antiquated, and that being a sexually active woman and an unmarried Christian can

⁷⁸Tony Cummings, “Trin-i-Tee 5:7: Spiritual Love Affair,” Cross Rhythms, February 1, 2000, <https://tinyurl.com/y5kza6wl>.

⁷⁹Lexi with Gwen Burton, “The Conversation (Hold On),” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ngwhQB9Mn1U>.

⁸⁰1 Samuel 15:22: “But Samuel replied, ‘What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.’”

⁸¹Ametria Dock with Wanya Morris, “Wait,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=HEWtChS2iGQ>.

⁸²Sonnie Day, “My Virginity,” *Good Life*, Rooted Records, 2011.

⁸³Susan Newman, *Oh God!: A Black Woman’s Guide to Sex and Spirituality* (New York: One World, 2002).

⁸⁴Cuffee, “On Sex and Sexuality in Black Churchwomen’s Lives.”

be part of the identity of the same human being. Unfortunately, as of the time this article was written, I found no songs by female gospel artists supporting this more liberal approach. So, while these singers are progressive in recording songs related to sex, they remain in alignment in almost every instance with the more traditional position that sex is for heterosexual married couples.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s gospel artists, including some of its leading names, have found it important to sing about sex and sexuality within the context of their Christian faith. The lyrics discussed here clearly underline their reasons for doing so. During an email exchange regarding her song “My Virginity,” Sonnie Day responded to the question of why it was created:

There should be more gospel songs that address sex; we have more than enough music that glorifies God. The greatest temptation among young people in church is SEX. There has to be a sound given to their ears to help them abstain, wait for marriage, and reveal the consequences for the lack thereof. Unfortunately, secular music is doing a great job, providing the opposite. While we’re in our religious circles and holy boxes, our youth are struggling in this area and want help.⁸⁵

These incisive words indicate why the delivery of these songs is significant to many of the artists and to those who listen to, enjoy, and find inspiration from their music. The performers view sex and sexuality as being as worthy of attention as any other part of human life placed within gospel songs, and it is apparent that they believe that the same God who is asked to provide food and shelter and is praised and worshipped for giving life and salvation can also be implored to direct one’s sexuality. Their songs indicate that God who created people to have sexual urges forgives indiscretions as seen in the lyrics in which performers admit their transgressions, take the necessary steps toward realignment, and emerge as changed individuals.

These songs signal to gospel fans who may be struggling with their own sexual issues that they are not alone, that some of their favorite artists have faced challenges and are testifying about their journey. Without question, the songs discussed in this article primarily advocate sexual purity for reasons related to compliance with traditional Christian values, often follow the cultural norm of vilifying women for having sexual desires, and do not embrace the LGBTQIA+ community. However, the existing songs do extend the boundaries of relevant, necessary content for gospel music, content many fans have applauded and embraced. And the possibility does exist that even more gender and sexual identity barriers will be removed as other contemporary gospel songs are written within a US culture that continues to transform and slowly affects change among believers.

References

- “Angie and Debbie Winans criticized for lyrics denouncing homosexuality on song, ‘Not Natural.’” *Jet*, November 24, 1997.
- “BET Trips Up Taking Anti-Gay Winans Sisters to Teens.” GLAADAlert, October 31, 1997.
- Bonner, Gerard. “Pettidee: The Legacy—Vol. 1.” *GospelFlava.com*, July 1, 2015. <http://www.gospelflava.com/reviews/pettideelegacy.html>.
- Boyer, Horace Clarence. *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel*. Washington, DC: Elliott & Clark, 1995.
- Boyer, Horace Clarence. “A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Contemporary Gospel Music.” In *More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, edited by Irene V. Jackson, 127–46. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Brown Douglas, Kelly. *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- “B. Slade, Formerly Known as Tonex, Releases Response to Christians Opposing His Performance at Musical Tribute Honoring Kurt Carr and Lynette Hawkins-Stephens.” *Black Christian News Network One*, October 2016. <https://tinyurl.com/dyx6khvs>.
- Bynum, Juanita. *No More Sheets: The Truth about Sex*. Lanham, MD: Pneuma Life, 1999.
- Collins, Lisa, ed. *Gospel Music Industry Round-Up 2016*. Inglewood, CA: Eye on Gospel Publications, 2016.

⁸⁵Sonnie Day, email exchange with the author, October 19, 2010.

- Cuffee, Sallie.** "On Sex and Sexuality in Black Churchwomen's Lives: A Womanist Call for a Moral and Justice Conversation in the Black Church." *Journal of Religious Thought* 59–60, no. 1 (2006/2007): 45–65.
- Cummings, Tony.** Apostle Louis Greenup, "No Wed, No Bed." *Cross Rhythms*, October 1, 1992. https://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/products/Apostle_Louis_Greenup/No_Wed_No_Bed/11429/.
- Cummings, Tony.** "Trin-i-Tee 5:7: Spiritual Love Affair." *Cross Rhythms*, February 1, 2000. <https://tinyurl.com/y5kza6wl>.
- Darden, Robert.** *People Get Ready: A New History of Black Gospel Music*. New York: Continuum, 2008.
- Dyson, Michael Eric.** "When You Divide the Body, Problems Multiply: The Black Church and Sex." Chap. 3 in *Rac Rules: Navigating the Color Line*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996: 78–108.
- Evans, Mark.** *Open up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2006.
- "From Gangsta Rapper to Gospel Music Messenger, Samantha Coleman To Release Debut Gospel/Rap CD 'For Such a Time as This.'" *Dogon Village* June 30, 2015. http://www.dogonvillage.com/african_american_news/Articles/00000497.html.
- Gaines, E. J.** "He Said: Exclusive Interview with J. Moss." *Gospelpundit.com*. August 21, 2009.
- Harrison, Kathryn.** *The Kiss*. New York: Random House, 1997.
- Heilbut, Anthony.** *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*. New York: Limelight, 1997.
- Jones, Alisha Lola.** *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Kernodle, Tammy.** "Work the Works: The Role of African-American Women in the Development of Contemporary Gospel." Special issue, *The Music of African-American Women: Secular and Sacred, Uplift and Self-Assertion: Black Music Research Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 89–109.
- Kitwana, Bakari.** *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003.
- Kornegay, E. L. Jr.** *The Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- McClurkin, Donnie.** *Eternal Victim/Eternal Victor*. Lanham, MD: Pneuma Life, 2001.
- McCune, Jeffrey Q.** "Transformance: Reading the Gospel in Drag." *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, nos. 3–4 (2004):151–67.
- McCarthy, Justin.** "U.S. Support of Gay Marriage, Stable at 63%." GALLUP, May 22, 2019. <https://bit.ly/3ksdOlb>.
- Martindale, Mike.** "J. Moss Paternity Suit." *Detroit News*, November 28, 2008.
- Morrow, Carlotta.** "Passion for Christ Movement-P4CM.com." *Christocentric.com*, July 31, 2009.
- Newman, Susan.** *Oh God!: A Black Woman's Guide to Sex and Spirituality*. New York: One World, 2002.
- Paris, Arthur.** *Black Pentecostalism: Southern Religion in an Urban World*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.
- Pollard, Deborah Smith.** *When the Church Becomes Your Party: Contemporary Gospel Music*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008.
- Ramsey, Guthrie.** "'Santa Claus Ain't Got Nothing on This!': Hip-Hop Hybridity and the Black Church Muse." Chap. 8 in *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- "Sony Urban Music & Columbia Records Congratulate Tye Tribbett & G. A. as Victory Live Debuts at #1." Sony Music Entertainment, July 6, 2006. https://www.sony.com/content/sony/en/en_us/SCA/company-news/press-releases/sony-music-entertainment/2006/sony-urban-music-columbia-records-congratulate-tye-tribbett-ga-as-victory-live-debuts-at-1-on-the-board-current-gospel-sales-chart.html.
- United Church of Christ Open and Affirming Coalition.** <https://openandaffirming.org/ona/find/>
- Van Loon, Michelle.** "The Trouble with Confessing in Church." *Christianity Today*, September 29, 2010. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/septemberweb-only/trouble-with-confessing-in-church.html>.
- Veazey, Carlton W.** "Radical Shift in Black Church on Sexuality and Choice." *Rewire News Group*. July 15, 2008. <https://rewirenewsgroup.com/article/2008/07/15/radical-shift-black-church-sexuality-and-choice/>.
- Weekes, Melinda.** "This House, This Music: Exploring the Interdependent Interpretive Relationship Between the Contemporary Black Church and Contemporary Gospel Music." *Black Music Research Journal* 25, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 2005): 43–72.
- "What Is Trap Music?" *Run the Trap*. <https://runthetrap.com/what-is-trap-music/>.
- Whitehead, Andrew L.** "Religious Organizations and Homosexuality: The Acceptance of Gays and Lesbians in American Congregations." *Review of Religious Research*, 55, no. 2 (June 2013): 297–317.
- Woodland, Shannon, and Scott Ross.** "Overcoming Porn: Kirk Franklin's Freedom." *Christian Broadcasting Network*. <https://tinyurl.com/wpvbnfbp>.

Discography

- 116 Clique.** "Temptation." *Man Up*. Reach Records, 2011. CD and DVD.
- Baylor, Helen.** "Testimony." *Helen Baylor: The Live Experience*. Word, 1994. CD.
- Byrd, Chris.** *Between the Sheets*. Minstrel House Music, 2000. CD.
- Campbell, Erica.** "I Luh God." *Help 2.0*. eOne Records, 2015.
- Clark, Twinkle.** "Word of God." *Ron Winans Family and Friends Vol. 2*. Sparrow Records, 1990. CD.
- Cleveland, James and Southern California Community Choir.** "Where Is Your Faith?" *Where Is Your Faith?* Savoy, 1981. CD.
- Coleman, Samantha.** "Funny Valentine." *For Such a Time as This*. Glory with Volume Records, 2007. CD.
- Crouch, André and the Disciples.** "Dreamin'." *I'll Be Thinking of You*. Elektra/Light Records, 1979. CD.

- Day, Sonnie.** “My Virginity.” *Good Life*. Rooted Records, 2011. CD.
- Dock, Ametria,** with Wanya Morris. “Wait.” *It’s Not About Me*. Geffen, 2000. CD.
- Flame.** “Desires in Conflict.” *Our World: Fallen*. Cross Movement Records: 2007. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** “Now Behold the Lamb.” *Kirk Franklin and the Family Christmas*. B-rite, 1995. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** “Stomp.” *God’s Property from Kirk Franklin’s Nu Nation*. B-rite Music, 1997. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** “Let It Go.” *Hero*. Fo Yo Soul/GospoCentric/Zomba Records, 2005. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** “The Process.” *Hero*. Fo Yo Soul/GospoCentric/Zomba Records, 2005. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** “Imagine Me.” *Hero*. Fo Yo Soul/GospoCentric/Zomba Records, 2005. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** “Something about the Name Jesus.” *Nu Nation Project*. B-rite 2007. CD.
- Franklin, Kirk.** *Losing My Religion*. RCA Inspiration, 2015.
- Greenup, Louis.** “No Wed, No Bed.” Pepperco, 1992. CD.
- Haddon, Deitrick.** “Fighting Temptation.” *Church on the Moon*. Verity Gospel, 2011. CD
- Hawthorne, Koryn.** “Speak to Me.” *I Am*. RCA Inspiration, 2020.
- Jones, Canton.** “Cute.” *Password: Access Granted*. Arrow Records, 2005. CD.
- Lecrae.** *Church Clothes 3*. Reach Records, 2016. CD.
- Lexi with Gwen Burton.** “The Conversation (Hold On).” *And That’s the Way It Is*. Real Deal Records, 1999. CD.
- Mister ATL featuring Lady Catour.** “No Wed, No Bed.” MisterATLmusic, 2013. CD.
- Mary Mary.** *Thankful*. Columbia, 2000. CD.
- Moss, J.** “Let It Go.” V2. GospoCentric, 2007. CD.
- Moss, J.** “Livin’ 4.” *The J. Moss Project*. GospoCentric, 2004. CD.
- Pettidee with Lady Like.** “No Wed, No Bed.” *Legacy Vol. 1*. Shabach Entertainment, 2007. CD.
- P.I.D. (Preachers in Disguise).** “Let Me See Your Fruit.” *Here We Are*. Graceland Records, 1988. CD.
- Slade, B.** “Conversation.” *Black Belt*. Suxsess Records, 2016.
- Tonéx.** “Now.” *Oak Park 92105*. Nureau, 2003. CD.
- Tribbett, Tye.** “Victory.” *Victory Live*. Sony, 2006. CD.
- Trin-i-Tee 5:7.** “God’s Grace.” *Trin-i-Tee 5:7*. GospoCentric, 1998. CD.
- Trin-i-Tee 5:7.** “My Body.” *Spiritual Love*. GospoCentric, 2000. CD.
- Walker, Hezekiah and the Love Fellowship Crusade Choir.** “Love Lifted Me.” *Live in Atlanta at Morehouse College*. Verity, 1994. CD.
- Winans, Angie and Debbie.** “Not Natural.” *Bold*. Against the Flow Records, 1997. CD.
- The Winans.** “Bring Back the Days of Yea and Nay.” *Tomorrow*. Light Records, 1993. CD.

Deborah Smith Pollard is professor of English Literature and Humanities at the University of Michigan–Dearborn. She has lectured internationally on gospel music. Her research has been featured in academic journals and in *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World*, *Black Women and Music* and *Contemporary Congregational Music*. Her first book was *When the Church Becomes Your Party: Contemporary Gospel Music* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008). She is currently researching the global impact of “Oh Happy Day.”