

On Beyonce's "Church Girls"

Beyonce' is not a part of the soundtrack of my life. I still listen to women singers I heard when I was a girl – Nina Simone and Nancy Wilson. I fell in love with Sting in 1985 after hearing him sing "Roxanne" accompanied by Bradford Marsalis on saxophone during the Live Aid concert. I listen to Sting's "A Touch of Jazz" while I meditate. Some days I listen to BeBe and CeCe Winans when I meditate. I ride around with the various WOW Gospel compilations in the car along with Valerie June, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Tim McGraw, Al Jarreau and Hamilton. I love the love songs of the Great American Song Book. Still, I recognize and respect Beyonce's importance to American popular culture, so I check in with her from time to time. I last turned my attention to her in 2016 when she released "Lemonade." I bought the video album and thought it a masterpiece. I understood it. It was a love song about love betrayed, broken, and repaired. The images were a collection of beautiful blackness in all our terribleness. (See Amiri Baraka's "In Our Terribleness".)

I had no idea that "Renaissance" was on the way. Watching Tiffany Cross's program "The Cross Connection", (July 30, 2022) she and her guests were talking about Renaissance weekend. I had no clue about what this was. Later, it became clear they were talking about the release of Beyonce's album. In the segment with Ms. Cross, Brittany Packnett Cunningham and Joshua DuBois, they talked about the song "Church Girl." They said it would become their theme song. I was a church girl who became a church woman, a church mom, and now, a church elder-woman. I thought it was time again to check in with Beyonce'.

I listened to the album. I listened to "Church Girl". The album was incomprehensible to me, including "Church Girl." However, it is easy to dance to. One reason "Church Girl" was incomprehensible to me was because there were terms in it that I did not know. "I'll drop it like a thottie." What is a thottie? After I searched the term, I thought this must be about the various positivities that have currency these days – body positivity, sex positivity, party positivity. I am in agreement with them all because I cannot stand in judgment.

When I was a young, I wore mini-skirts and form-fitting midi skirts. I have heard preachers preaching against women wearing mermaid skirts and short skirts because they are a distraction in worship to both men and women. I partied on Saturday night and went to church on Sunday morning. I wore hot pants. Smoking. (not cigarettes) I did my time in three-inch spike heels. So, I think church girls and every other girl ought to live their lives the way they see fit. However, as a church elder-woman, I say: we all have to be woman enough to stand up to the consequences of our decisions. With freedom comes responsibility. We will hurt people and be hurt by them. This is part of the friction of human life.

However, the good news is: we are not alone. There is a line in the song: "I've been up, I've been down. Felt like, I move mountains. Got friends that cried fountains." The thing about being a church girl/woman/elder-woman is that church gives us friends with whom we share a common belief. We have people who provide a shared safe space for our griefs and our joys, for our laughter and for our tears. We have prayer partners. The fountain of tears that we shed connects us to the fount of living water that is Divine Love incarnate in humanity. In Christianity, that incarnate love is Jesus.

There is another line in the song that demands a response from a church elder-woman. "I'm finally on the other side. I finally found the urge to smile swimming through the oceans of tears we cried." Our faith gives us the power to walk on the oceans of tears we have cried. We have the power to walk on water, to stand when the surface beneath our feet is not solid but fluid. Tears are another way to pray. Praying tears do not ask for anything or even offer praise and thanksgiving. They see transcendence, a recognition that we are connected to the cosmic mystery of Divine Love that is as expansive as infinity and is as timeless as eternity. We are connected to that Is-ness to the I Am that existed before the beginning and that will exist after the end. We are loved by a love that loves us personally, and the only proof of its existence is us and our own experience.

