



# Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation

By Gerardo Marti

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Many scholars and church leaders believe that music and worship style are essential in stimulating diversity in congregations. Gerardo Marti draws on interviews with more than 170 congregational leaders and parishioners, as well as his experiences participating in worship services in a wide variety of Protestant, multiracial Southern Californian churches, to present this insightful study of the role of music in creating congregational diversity.

Worship across the Racial Divide offers a surprising conclusion: that there is no single style of worship or music that determines the likelihood of achieving a multiracial church. Far more important are the complex of practices of the worshipping community in the production and absorption of music. Multiracial churches successfully diversify by stimulating unobtrusive means of interracial and interethnic relations; in fact, preparation for music apart from worship gatherings proves to be just as important as its performance during services. Marti shows that aside from and even in spite of the varying beliefs of attendees and church leaders, diversity happens because music and worship create practical spaces where cross-racial bonds are formed.

This groundbreaking book sheds light on how race affects worship in multiracial churches. It will allow a new understanding of the dynamics of such churches, and provide crucial aid to church leaders for avoiding the pitfalls that inadvertently widen the racial divide.

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**Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Marti's attention to music is timely, important, and eminently sociological." --*American Journal of Sociology*

"A fascinating sub-theme in Marti's analysis is the role of African American religious experience. He found a universal romanticizing of Black worship experience as being of a superior spiritual quality, one uniquely soulful. Certainly, Marti's work raises questions that should stimulate other research." -- *Review of Religious Research*

"Marti provides an ethnographically rich study that is quite timely, especially given that race and reconciliation are such vital topics in today's academic theology and popular church writing." --*Theology*

"This is a brave book that dares to challenge conventional wisdom regarding the intersections of race, worship and music. It is a model of engaged scholarship and will be essential reading for pastors, worship leaders, and students of congregations. Gerardo Marti is emerging as one of the leading sociologists of religion in the United States with a distinctive methodological approach in the field of Congregational Studies."

---William McKinney, President Emeritus, Pacific School of Religion

"Dr. Marti makes a unique and important contribution to our understanding of multi-racial churches as worshipping communities. His central focus on the worship ritual helps us to understand the meaning and lived experience of multiculturalism for participants. For social scientists and other scholars, he helps us to understand the social processes which forge commitment and identification across the most divisive of social barriers. A smart, interesting, and humane book."

---Penny Edgell, author of *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*

"Marti is a master at unpacking the culture of a congregation. Music, he shows us, is never just about sound. It's about who and how, feelings and bodies and ethnic identities. What he tells us about how music works is far more interesting and complicated than the how-to books would have us think."

---Nancy Ammerman, author of *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners*

"Gerardo Marti adds another valuable volume to his works as an accomplished researcher and sociologist

about multiethnic churches in America. What is most valuable about the book is the large collection of quotes sprinkled throughout from a plurality of voices that illustrates the diversity, complexity, and richness of worship in multiracial congregations."--DJ Chuang, *Worship Leader Magazine*

"A thoughtful and provocative read...Gerardo Marti has produced an interesting book focused on music as a key variable in the life of multiracial churches, and how music may help promote particular religious and social outcomes. For this, he is to be commended, and I believe others should follow his example and pay more serious attention to the role of music in the life of multiethnic, or other, religious congregations."--*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*

"This book is a paradigm shifter. To me, it represents an advance to the next stage of multiracial/ethnic/cultural ministry. Focus on people as people, bonding them together, helping to create the unity Christ prayed we'd have. Go ahead and seek musical forms that speak to many people simultaneously, and feel free to play different types of music. But you need not be in bondage to either. And the truth shall set you free."--Michael O. Emerson, *Christianity Today*

"What actually brings diversity is what Marti calls "racialized ritual inclusion," a strategy with problematic moral implications...Marti shows that these are fluid cultural constructs that "racialize" differences."--*Church Times*

"One cannot underestimate the importance of this topic and Marti's study...this is a watershed work that should be read by anyone interested in works about race, identity, and music."--*Religion*

"This book is more scientifically grounded in research and study than the title suggests...A scholarly, thought-provoking examination of this topic. Highly recommended."--*CHOICE*

"A valuable contribution to the literature...I find Gerardo Marti's sociological analysis to be most helpful and complementary to the theological and liturgical analysis explored by others."--*Worship*

"I have been teaching the foundational course in Christian worship at my school, North Park Theological Seminary, for the last two years. Since this is a new course for me I have been doing a good deal of reading, observing and reflecting on this most important aspect of Christian faith. By far the most provocative book I have read is Gerardo Marti's *Worship Across the Racial Divide*."--John E. Phelan, Jr., Senior Professor of Theological Studies and former President of North Park Theological Seminary

"*Worship across the Racial Divide* is necessary reading for anyone interested in the study of race, religion,

and worship music."--*Sociology of Religion*

"Marti's analysis has provided an insightful and important Durkheimian description of the sociological shell of worship in multiracial congregations." --*Contemporary Sociology*

#### About the Author

**Gerardo Marti** is L. Richardson King Associate Professor of Sociology at Davidson College. He is author of *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* (2005) and *Hollywood Faith: Holiness, Prosperity, and Ambition in a Los Angeles Church* (2008).

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