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## *Letters to A Young Episcopalian: Soul*

*This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.*

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Dear Anna,

You asked where the soul fits into the spiritual life.

I think you should listen to some of the music that I grew up calling soul music.

Soul music started with traditional African-American gospel music and then blended in elements of rhythm & blues and jazz. The term "soul" came to mean the experience of being black in America. The musicians talked about the music as dignifying a people by finding meaning in their suffering and their love and, in doing so, giving them life.

I think of it as the soul at work.

David Benner, in his book *Soulful Spirituality*, describes the soul as a perspective and not a thing.

The soul, he says, is the womb of experience. It is the part of our consciousness that connects our body and our spirit. It makes us aware of things that happen to us in a way that allows us to reflect on them and experience them as having meaning for us.

Whether you feel it in the music or hear it in the words, I'm hoping that you will see that, in many ways, the soul is the heart of our spiritual life. It's the soul that opens us up and allows us to be present to whatever we might encounter.

The spirit is always inspiring us, calling us upward to places that we haven't seen. But it's the soul that goes down into our depths, taking us to all of the places inside of us that we don't want to see. It's the soul, it seems to me, that keeps healing us and getting us ready to go where we want to go.

I'm serious about listening to soul music.

Just thinking about Etta James, Otis Redding, and Aretha Franklin brings back a lot of good memories for me.

I didn't really appreciate what I was listening to at the time and I still loved it!

Your affectionate uncle,  
Ames