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A Study of Nigerian Gospel Songs: Implications on Christians Worship and the Society

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Abstract

The study examines A Study of Nigerian Gospel Songs: Implications on Christian Worship and the Society. In pursuing this, the study discusses the emergence of praise and worship songs (also referred to as gospel music) in Nigeria. It explores a brief historical background, Contemporary forms of Nigerian Gospel songs in Christian worship and Characteristics and Features of Nigerian Gospel Songs. Although Nigerian gospel music is defined globally as the Christian branch of religious music employed to propagate the gospel of Christ to non-Christians and edify the believers, its performance transcends strict religious settings as it, by extension, features in social gatherings and other areas of life. This study aims to discuss the impact of Nigerian praise and worship songs on the lives of those who sing. The theoretical framework for the study is hinged on the Theory of Functionality or Role theory in Christian Sacred Musicology by Adediji (1999). The study also employs two research methods. The first is an analytical method, and the second is the ethnographic research method. This method was adopted because the versatility of survey designs allows for a wide range of data collection methods – participant observation and interviews. Findings reveal that Nigerian praise and worship songs are a powerful medium for unity (among Christians of various denominations), active participation in worship, spiritual expression, cultural preservation, and communal worship. The study recommends, among others, a collaboration between artists and scholars and a need for documenting Nigerian gospel songs for future accessibility towards preserving our rich musical tradition and preventing its loss over time.

Keyword: Gospel music, performance, Christian worship and society

Introduction

Nigerian gospel songs stand out for their blend of traditional rhythms, native musical components, and Western influences. These songs have upbeat beats, catchy choruses, and contagious melodies, drawing influence from traditional Nigerian music genres, including highlife, juju, and Afrobeat. They frequently follow a call-and-response format, which encourages congregation involvement and fosters a sense of group

celebration. Nigerian praise and worship songs have a solid theological and spiritual foundation in their lyrics. The lyrics highlight God's strength, grace, and love while expressing appreciation, devotion, and respect for Him. They provide a way to communicate with the divine, express one's individual and group religion, and look for comfort and fortitude through happy, sad, and trying moments. Praise and worship services are energetic and dynamic in Nigerian churches, with fervent singing, clapping, dancing, and instrumental accompaniment.

These songs foster a fervent spiritual atmosphere that enables worshipers to enter a state of worship and have profound spiritual connections with God. They stimulate adoration, contemplation, and close spiritual interactions. The popularity of Nigerian gospel songs has increased outside of the religious environment. In a liturgical context, Christian music refers to all forms of music, including gospel songs, otherwise known as praise and worship songs, generated from the Christian faith. It is music written to express personal convictions and persuasions towards God from the Christian perspective. Daramola (2013), citing Dickson (1997) and Adedeji (2001), says *Christian music* has been defined as a generic term which encompasses all types of music with Christian texts. It includes all brands and categories of music engaged in Christendom, whether by the church, para-church and non - church organisations. From the above, it is inferred that the basis of any Christian music is the people and the word of Christ, having Christ as its basis for the people of Christ and the would-be Christians.

Nigerian Christian music, therefore, includes all the branches of the musical types that have emerged over the years as fallout from the performance of liturgical music in the church and its adaptation to Christian functions outside of the church and or in the church but not in strict liturgical settings. This includes the liturgical music employed in Christian worship in churches, which is generally referred to as church music or gospel music, which is Christian music performed within and outside the church setting but with a great deal of freedom of adaptation to different contexts, simply put, they are all forms of religious music with Christian intent and content.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this work is hinged on the Theory of Functionality or Role theory In Christian Sacred Musicology by Adedeji (1999). Functionality or Role Theory in Christian Sacred Musicology by Adedeji. Functionality or Role theory, as proposed by Adedeji (1999), recognises the 'anabolic' and 'catabolic' role of music in a religious milieu. He opines that no sacred music is or should be without a purpose and that, otherwise, it loses its sacredness. Considering the sacredness of religion and how it serves as a way of understanding and worshipping the supernatural, music is a handmaid of religion; it follows that music assumes different functions and plays diverse roles. (Mircea, 1987). Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. Society is more than the sum of its parts; each part is functional for the stability of the whole society.

The relevance of the Functionality or Role theory On Christian Sacred Musicology by Adedeji (1999) was also affirmed by the Functionalist theory of anthropology as popularised by Malinowski and Raddiffe-Brown (Kuklick, 1996, p. 161), who posit that the evidence of imported aspects of culture in a different society, serves an entirely different function from the original culture. In application to Nigerian praise and worship songs, the use of these songs from denomination to denomination differs. For instance, in some denominations, they do not constitute the proper songs of the service (worship); in others, these songs constitute the proper songs for worship. This is to say that the theory is rooted in the fact that gospel music as a religious phenomenon is a social product which defines itself in the context of the society within which it is performed and also redefines the society that produces it. The functionalist theory has also found its relevance in the study of religion with which gospel music is associated. As Samuel (2013, pp.32-33) observed:

It is quite unmistakable that Christianity, as a living faith, has adapted itself to societal changes. Therefore, the situation regarding contemporary Christian practices, including music in Nigeria, has been

different. All these point to the fact that Christianity, as an integral part of the Nigerian societal gamut, continually lends itself to the theory of continuity and change.

The functionality or role theory by Adedeji principally suggests that all sacred music must serve a purpose for it to retain its sacredness. We agree with this theory, but the question is, can there be any music without purpose? This theory states the obvious because, whether intended or not, music serves its purposes in whatever context it is performed. The intended purpose is the reason for embarking on the musical performance. However, the reality with performance is that there are derivatives from the original intentions, which are the music's purpose. In the specific case of sacred music, several purposes derive from the primary purpose of worshipping God. Some of them include the salvation of souls, encouragement of the believers, and enhancement meditation, and we want to add that even in a liturgical context, entertainment is a purpose.

Humans find all the theories above relevant to our study at different levels of our discussion of gospel music. Though not directly focused on Nigerian gospel music, all the theories discussed above deal generally with sacred music, under which gospel music can also be classified. According to Hammond and Scullard (1970:708), "no theory can profess to give more than the osteology of an art". Furthermore, to experience music's full potential, we must practice, compose, play, sing and listen (Blackwell, 1999, p. 13). This study on Nigerian praise and worship songs is based on these theoretical frameworks for practical interpretation.

Gospel Music

Gospel music is defined differently by various groups ranging from the musicians to their audience, patrons and scholars, emphasising various aspects such as its origin, functions and content. The definition of gospel music is also influenced by the culture within which it is developed and practised. Adedeji (2007:85-100) submits that gospel music may be defined from an African perspective as a type of Christian music that preaches the 'good news' of Jesus Christ made famous by public performances, the electronic media such as radio, television, the recording world and the Internet. It is a branch of Christian music that has become popular and well-grown but in divergent dimensions. However, Adedeji (2015, p.2) adds that gospel music is one of the Christian musical genres, the content of which is traditionally and theologically evangelistic, that is, aimed at preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to others to save their souls. He states further that gospel music seeks to show forth Jesus as the messiah and saviour of the world. Ajirire and Alabi (1992:73-78) define it as an arm of religious music. The definitions given above by Adedeji (2007, 2015), Ajirire and Alabi (1992) show gospel music as being rooted in the Christian religion, even though, in recent times, it has been associated with social and entertainment music because of its popularity.

Gospel music derives its essence from the word "Gospel" with which it is identified and distinguished from other forms of Christian music. Gospel Music was a genre of popular American hymnody that emerged about 1870 ("Gospel Music" 2006. Redmond, W.A: Microsoft Corporation, 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation 2005). At first, a predominantly white style, it became prominent in the urban religious revivals led by Evangelist Dwight Moody with the musician Ira Sankey. Its roots were in Sunday school hymns, camp meeting spirituals, and the melodies and harmonies of popular music; the text often deals with salvation and conversion. Black gospel music, which became distinctive by 1930, developed from the traditions of the Negro spirituals of the slavery period. In the twentieth century, it combined church hymns, black performance styles, and elements from Negro spirituals. Singing, which may merge into ecstatic dance, is usually accompanied by piano or organ, often with handclapping, tambourines, and electric guitars. Although the black-and-white varieties of gospel music have remained distinctive, the repertoire has been shared, and they have freely influenced each other stylistically.

Emielu (2014:114), commenting on the debate as regards the interpretation of 'gospel music from an African and Afro - American perspective, submits as follows:

History shows that "gospel music" in the West was popularised as an essentially Black American musical genre in the 1920s. Before then, religious music of Black Americans came under different names at different

times: 'spirituals or jubilees', 'church songs', 'holy roller' or 'Dorseys' (named after Chicago - born Thomas Dorsey, who was regarded as the father of gospel music in America) (Southern, 1997, p. 456).

Although scholars like Adedeji (2004, p. 64) and some others believe that the development of gospel music in Nigeria is independent of gospel music in America, a special note is to be taken of the reference to "Black gospel music", which became distinctive by 1930, and developed from the traditions of the Negro spirituals of the slavery period. It should be of particular interest to us that it was in the 1930s that the term gospel music was also used in Nigeria. This coincidence suggests that a level of influence cannot be ruled out, especially in the context of the wave of religious awakening that swept across the nations, including Nigeria, at this period. Adapting the same term "Gospel "used in America also suggests some influence. Therefore, Pentecostalism is the common link between gospel music in Nigeria and America. Pentecostalism is rooted in the event of the Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, which is seen as a fulfilment of an earlier prophecy by Joel in the book of Joel 2:28-32:

Furthermore, it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. Moreover, I will show wonders in the heavens, earth, blood, fire, and smoke pillars. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. Furthermore, it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

According to Emielu (2010), Pentecostalism could be seen as a global movement with roots in "Pentecostal Spirituality" a term used by Land (1993, p. 15) to describe the new concept in Christian worship which resisted the theology and formal worship of orthodox churches. Its global outlook does not suggest homogeneity, as distinctive regional identities exist from region to region. The African roots in Pentecostalism can be viewed from the perspectives of the African religious heritage and the slave legacy of the Afro - Americans. The Africans in diaspora came from a background of vibrant, jubilant and ecstatic worship in which spirit possession and its manifestations, which are now being exhibited in Pentecostal theology, is not an entirely new thing Gerlof (1999:65) submits that "early Pentecostalism drew on African traditional religion with its "we" feeling, a spirituality of belonging, the bringing of self into worship and the enrichment of community life ".

The link of gospel music in Nigeria to Pentecostalism is evident in the definition of Nigerian Gospel music by Adegbite (1994:83-94) as a new type of church music brought about by the move of religious fanaticism which has resulted in the proliferation of Christian churches in Nigerian society". The reaction of Olatunji, Babalola and Daramola (2011:153-154) to Adegbite's view is that neither Pentecostalism nor gospel music could be fanatical in concept and mode of operation. They, however, agree with Adegbite's submission that the growth and development of gospel music is a consequence of the proliferation of Christian churches in Nigeria.

We disagree with Olatunji, Babalola and Daramola's (2011) view and agree with Adegbite on using the word "fanaticism" in his definition of gospel music. Adegbite's use of 'religious fanaticism' is in the context of the Pentecostal movement of the 1970s and 1980s, which carry a kind of revolt against orthodoxy. This revolt was reflected in liturgy, doctrine, and music. Our position is further substantiated by Emielu's (2010:292-293) submission that:

Pentecostal theology reached Nigeria through a process of cultural diffusion. Its growth and spread can be viewed against African resistance to orthodoxy and the need to infuse vital African elements in Christian religious music.

Emielu (2010:293), Citing Babalola (2003:29), asserts that African Pentecostalism can be appreciated against this backdrop: "Many things European missionaries rejected and termed devilish are now being used to the glory of God in these Pentecostal churches ... *Sekere*, drums and local tambourine". To a great extent,

revolt against orthodoxy was fanatical, and Nigerian gospel music developed from this. The revolt against orthodoxy manifested in the rejection of the liturgy and music, which were considered monotonous and void of vibrancy, thus clamouring for self-expression in worship and music reflective of the influence of popular culture, especially the American culture. Modern converts to Pentecostalism revolt against orthodoxy because it does not allow the Pentecostal liberality in dressing and other doctrines, such as prosperity and freedom of believers to engage in something considered "worldly" by the Orthodox. The youths' desire to be allowed to do whatever they want, whenever they want, and however they desire, which is not allowed in the Orthodox Church, is another reason for the revolt. The new waves of speaking in tongues, dancing and shouting during worship and the use of popular musical styles in worship which characterise Pentecostalism, are considered fanatical by the orthodox tradition. Therefore, the term religious fanaticism by Adegbite is not out of place.

Gospel music as perceived in Africa may not be the same as in North America even though there may be some points of convergence, especially in the common term 'Gospel' portraying the activities and process of spreading the Christian message, also referred to as good news. For example, Costen (2004), Spencer (1990), and Halter (1955) trace gospel music as a genre that emanated from the clandestine enslaved person religious environment of Africans enslaved in America. This later became a part of the liturgy in black churches, expressing hope and preaching the good news in the blacks' hopelessness.

Spencer (1990:199), citing Harvey, Walkers, and Jackson (1960), stated that:

Black music is called gospel because it attempts to relate the good news of Jesus Christ primarily to the existence of black folk in this country. For blacks who encountered oppression and desolation upon migrating to Southern and Northern cities following reconstruction, this jubilant music has been a song of faith which rallies the hope and aspiration of the faithful in the face of devastating social conditions. Gospel songs deal with the immediate problems affecting Blacks and are specifically designed to help Black people surmount their lives' immediate circumstances (Spencer, 1990).

Gospel music is dualistic; on the one hand, it is a Christian religious form and, on the other, a part of urban popular culture. From their inception, Costen (2004:22) states that Black gospel songs deliberately combined the sacred with the secular. Therefore, it would be expected that the black gospel would find a home in and outside the liturgical space of black folks. The dual purpose of gospel music is emphasised in the works of Pass (1989) and Robert (2005). Emielu (2014:15) subscribes to the dual nature of gospel music when in his attempt to clarify the three terms used interchangeably to describe the music that relates to Christian religion - church, gospel and Christian music he cited Johnson (2008:17) also cited in Romanowski (1992) that : More recent studies provide not only new historical perspectives and connections between the three terms used to describe music associated with the Christian religion but also introduce fresh ones that connect the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. These are "Jesus rock", contemporary Christian music "and "evangelical popular music '. The music that resulted from the so-called 'Jesus Movement was known as 'Jesus Rock' and is said to be the predecessor of contemporary Christian music ...

Ojo (1998) describes gospel music as "a distinct kind of music composed and rendered by men and women who call themselves Christians, and who refer to their music as "Ministration of the Good News in songs ". He identifies similarities between Nigerian gospel music and Afro - American gospel music in their audience participation, the repetitiveness of song verses, constant improvisation during the performance, and the pattern of calls and responses. The inclusion of the performers and their religious claim to Christianity is worthy of note in the explanation given by Ojo. This further emphasises the claim of the gospel musicians and what their music is intended to achieve, which is to minister the good news about Christ to people through music.

Historical Development of Nigerian Gospel Music

The origin of gospel music in Nigeria has been put in the 1960s by scholars like Adedeji (2004). According to him, the term "gospel music' was first used in Nigeria by the pioneers in the same period though it had its antecedents from thirty years earlier. In his words:

Various names attached to it were '*orinigbagbó*' (Christian Song),' gospel, 'indigenous sacred songs' and 'Spiritual Songs '. Although there was contact with American gospel music before then, there is no evidence to suggest that the origin of Nigerian gospel music had any link with American gospel music. Thus one might conclude that it originated independently but was named as deemed fit by its pioneers and promoters. (Adédéji, 2005:145-152).

The specific date for the origin of gospel music in Nigeria is not specific but speculative, as observed by Adedeji. However, it is probably between 1964 and 1965 because of the musical activities that form the antecedents of gospel music in Nigeria. Adedeji (2004) discussed some antecedents of Nigeria gospel music first of which is the music used by the Nigerian Indigenous Pentecostal Churches on evangelistic parades between the 1930 and 1960s, and believes that it is the philosophy and practice of the music on one part that developed into gospel music. This position is supported by Emielu (2014:114-115) when in his attempt to distinguish between Church, Gospel, Christian and Popular music, he traced the origin of gospel music in the West to the famous camp meetings and street revivals as seen in Azuza street mission revivals of the early 1900s. He noted that Africans that had been introduced to Christianity in the diaspora found European religious music very dull and devoid of the ecstasy and hot rhythm of African music, and this made them seek opportunities to redefine European religious music in African terms. They found this opportunity in the Azuza Street mission revivals, which became the melting pot of Pentecostalism worldwide. The connection between the two submissions is the contribution of Pentecostalism to the development of gospel music at different ends - America and Nigeria, about the same period, experienced different episodes that culminated in the latter development of gospel music.

Other antecedents that contributed to the origin of gospel music in Nigeria discussed by Adedeji (2004:64) are the non - liturgical music of Nigerian indigenous churches used at Christian social functions such as naming and wedding ceremonies and other festal occasions and the music performed by missionary school bands during the colonial era. Another musical activity that contributed to the development of gospel music in Nigeria, according to Adedeji (2004:65), is the renditions by invited talented individuals, choirs and independent church musical groups that performed on Radio ELWA, Igbaja, which was broadcast from the 1950s. This led to the release of the first popularly known Christian religious album in 1965 by Prince S.A. Adeosun of Christ Apostolic Church, Yaba. The title of the album is "Kristi mofara mi fun (To you o Christ I give myself), followed by another album entitled 'T'èjè Re Ni Kóo Ro' (Consider Your Blood) by S.O. Akinpelu of Christ Apostolic Church, Oke Ayo, OpopoYemoja, Ibadan in the same year. Adedeji (2004, p.66) also noted that the choir of St. Peter's and Paul's Catholic Church, Ibadan, led by Rev. Fr. T.M. Ilesanmi in 1967, released an album titled "Mo Ti KoléMiSöriApita (I Have Built My House on The Rock).

We can conclude that antecedents of gospel music culminated in the emergence of a new form that was eventually classified as gospel music in Nigeria. Pentecostalism, non-influenced the gospel music - liturgical music at social functions and the activities of talented individuals originally resident in the church. The talented individuals later took the bold step of forming independent groups within the church and later as autonomous bodies to perform and venture into recording albums. Therefore, the origin of gospel music in Nigeria in the 1960s and, more precisely, 1965 because of the earliest known recorded Christian indigenous religious album may be correct.

It can be observed that the social influence on gospel music is a decisive factor right from its origin. It is our opinion that, whereas Nigerian gospel music is conceived and presented by some musicians as music other than or different from the secular, which focuses solely on the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, the musical type performs dual roles as the examination of its style, structure, content and performance reveal a strong secular social influence. However, this is not equating Nigerian gospel music with the secular forms that have existed; neither are we classifying the musicians as secular artists. However, we are pointing out the secular influence on Nigerian gospel music just as Christian music influence can be seen in some

contemporary popular secular music genres in Nigeria. Nigerian gospel music may, therefore, not be defined in absolute terms but can be defined from different perspectives.

It is also observed that from its formative stage in the 1960s to its developed stage in the 1990s, the different stages of the development of Nigerian gospel music present characteristic features peculiar to the period of development. Gospel music in its formative stage was purely church-based, with the predominant use of hymns and native airs. At this stage, it was purely spiritual devoid of any economic determinism. By the 1970s use of oratorios became a feature in Yoruba gospel songs and native styles of the 1960s. The 1980s marked a revolutionary trend in Nigerian gospel music. Gospel music as entertainment due to its social functions began, and the commercialisation of the music also started at this time. The themes of gospel music also started to include social-political issues. By the 1990s, gospel music had left its religious confines and became highly commercialised and competitive. The elaborate use of choreography and drama sketches, the recording of video tapes and the use of popular secular styles became a feature. Today Nigerian gospel music is also characterised by the use of different styles of performance, which, according to Adedeji (2004), have resulted in the evolving of different branches of Nigerian gospel music, such as Gospel Waka and Gospel Fuji, which, according to Ojo (1998, p. 215) have the same rhythm as the popular secular Waka and Fuji, except that their text is essentially Christian.

Code-switching in rendition and fusion of styles is a recent trend in Nigerian gospel music. It is common to find a blend of English or Pidgin English with Yoruba and Hausa languages to appeal to the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Many Nigerian gospel artists now render songs in their various dialects to minister to people in local languages who may not understand the English language. The blending of styles in performance is a new trend in the performance of Nigerian gospel music. It is a case where a musician blends the Western and traditional styles or fuses popular traditional styles like Fuji with Hip Hop, as exemplified by the Midnight Crew. Ajirire and Alabi (1992, p.74) observe that apart from entertainment, churches have found in gospel music a means to elevate the audience's spirit making it in tune with the Spirit of God. Laden, with a heavy spiritual message, gospel music ministers to the audience and admonishes them to turn from their sinful ways of life while offering eternal life to repentant souls.

Characteristics and Features of Nigerian Gospel Songs

Nigerian gospel songs hold immense cultural significance within Nigerian society. Embedded within the fabric of Nigerian religious and cultural practices, these songs serve as a vital expression of faith and devotion, reflecting the Nigerian people's values, beliefs, and experiences. It is often characterised by a distinct musical style combining traditional Nigerian music elements with Western musical influences. These songs showcase diverse rhythms, melodies, harmonies, and instrumentation, creating a vibrant and engaging musical landscape.

Essential elements like repetition, variation, and contrast characterise Nigerian Gospel songs. Akpabot (1986:101) and Adedeji (2007) assert that "solo, call and response, strophic and canonic arrangements; characterise Nigerian praise and worship songs." Also, Idamoyibo (2007:24) explained that "various forms of Yoruba traditional music have been transformed from Christians worship and other Christian religious events." Nigerian gospel songs are significant in the country's rich cultural and religious heritage and deep-rooted in Christianity. These songs serve as a medium for expressing adoration, gratitude, and devotion to God. These songs are characterised by their heartfelt expressions of adoration, thanksgiving, and devotion to God. These are the various types of Nigerian praise and worship songs.

1. **Highlife Worship Songs:** Highlife worship songs combine the traditional West African highlife genre with Christian worship themes. They feature energetic rhythms, melodic guitar lines, and call-and-response patterns. Highlife worship songs often emphasise the joy and celebration of praising God.

2. **Gospel Reggae:** Gospel reggae is a fusion of Jamaican reggae music and Nigerian gospel music. These songs typically feature a relaxed, laid-back rhythm with spiritually uplifting lyrics. Gospel reggae songs often convey messages of hope, faith, and redemption.
 3. **Afrobeat Gospel:** Afrobeat gospel songs draw inspiration from the popular Nigerian genre Afrobeat, which Fela Kuti pioneered. They incorporate elements of funk, jazz, and traditional African rhythms. Afrobeat gospel songs are characterised by their energetic beats and powerful vocal performances.
 4. **Contemporary Worship Songs:** Global Christian music trends influence contemporary worship songs in Nigeria. These songs typically feature modern instrumentation, including keyboards, guitars, and drums. They often have a more reflective and intimate style, focusing on personal experiences of worship and spirituality.
 5. **Traditional Hymns:** Traditional hymns have been integral to Nigerian Christian worship for many years. These songs often feature theological content and poetic lyrics in churches. Traditional hymns are typically accompanied by an organ or piano and evoke a sense of reverence and solemnity.
 6. **Indigenous Language Worship Songs:** Nigeria has numerous ethnic groups, each with its own language and cultural traditions. Indigenous language worship songs are sung in various Nigerian languages, such as Urhobo, Isoko, Edo, Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. These songs reflect the cultural diversity of Nigeria and often incorporate traditional musical elements and instruments.
- Nigerian Gospel songs encompass various musical styles and expressions. From highlife worship songs to contemporary worship music and traditional hymns, these songs resonate deeply with Nigerian Christians, providing a means to express their faith and devotion to God. The rich diversity of Nigerian praise and worship songs reflects the country's cultural heritage and contributes to the vibrant Christian music scene.

Contemporary forms of Nigerian Gospel songs in Christian worship

The historical development of Nigerian praise and worship songs traces back to the early introduction of Christianity in the country during the late 19th century. With the arrival of Christian missionaries and the subsequent spread of Christianity, indigenous Nigerian musical traditions intertwined with Western hymnody, resulting in the birth of a distinct Nigerian Christian music culture. In Nigeria, praise and worship songs are one of the consolations of Nigerians because it touches every situation of the country and the life of the people, simply because their lyrics are not found in hymnals but in the hearts, voices and bodies of the Nigerian People having their root in inspirations, which despite negative influences and trepidation would not be kept bound by their problems and situations of life (Corbitt, 1998, p. 269). Peculiar to the Nigeria praise and worship songs is that God is talked to in dialects that speak to the listener's heart and spurs the listener into worshipping God.

In the face of life's uncertainties in the country, the feelings of helplessness associated with living in Nigeria, and the ever-present socio-economic hardships which have shattered our hopes for anything good to come, gospel music provides a sense of relief and hope for the average Nigerian. The genre vocalises our longing that one day, life circumstances will change. It has never mattered what language the songs are performed in or whether or not we understand them; the message – of love, hope, and faith – is (and always will be) felt deeply (Native: 2021, <https://thenativemag.com/evolution-gospel-music-nigeria/>, accessed on 6th July 2021).

Nexus between Nigerian Gospel songs and other Nigerian musical genres.

Nigerian gospel songs and other genres of Nigerian music, such as highlife, juju, and Fuji music, are closely related for various reasons. First, these musical subgenres have an everyday cultural and historical basis deeply ingrained in Nigeria's numerous ethnic and religious traditions. Secondly, other traditional musical styles like highlife, juju, and Fuji music significantly affect many Nigerian praise and worship songs. For instance, some gospel performers in Nigeria use highlife rhythms, melodies, and instruments in their songs to create a distinctive and authentically Nigerian sound.

In addition, spirituality and cultural identity are prominent themes in Nigerian gospel songs and other music genres. Highlife, Juju, and Fuji music frequently represent cultural and social values and customs essential to Nigerian life, even if Nigerian praise and worship songs are religious. Also, praise and worship songs from Nigeria and other musical genres play a similar role in the nation's society, building social cohesion and entertainment. Highlife, Juju, Fuji, and praise and worship songs are frequently included in Nigerian churches' musical performances and activities, drawing people from all walks of life. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (<https://www.britannica.com/art/juju-music> accessed 26th April 26, 2023), Christian congregational singing, Yoruba vocal and percussion traditions, and various African and Western popular genres all came together to form the Nigerian popular music known as juju. The world-music industry's acceptance and marketing of the music helped it establish a sizable international following in the 1980s.

The distinctions between Nigerian gospel songs and other music genres sometimes need to be clarified since so many musicians move between them. For instance, some gospel performers from Nigeria have worked with highlife and juju musicians to create a fusion of sounds and genres that is distinctively Nigerian. Nigerian praise and worship songs and other music genres such as highlife, juju, and Fuji music share a close relationship due to their common cultural and historical roots, a similar focus on spirituality and cultural identity, and shared functions in Nigerian society. This relationship has resulted in a fusion of sounds and styles that is uniquely Nigerian and has contributed to the country's rich and diverse musical heritage.

Impact of Nigerian Gospel songs on individuals and communities.

Nigerian gospel songs profoundly impact individuals and communities, playing a central role in religious practices and shaping Nigerians' social and spiritual lives. These songs can evoke strong emotions, inspire deep faith, and foster a sense of unity among believers. Its significant impact on individuals and communities must be considered. Notable impact of Nigerian praise and worship songs: In 2015, Nigerian women used praise and worship songs to protest against the government's refusal to register their association. The women sang songs about God's greatness and prayer's power. Their protest was successful, and the government eventually registered their association.

In 2017, a group of Nigerian Christians used praise and worship songs to help rebuild their community after a natural disaster destroyed it. The Christians sang songs of hope and resilience and used music to comfort those who had lost loved ones. Their efforts helped to bring the community together and to rebuild hope for the future. Also, in 2018, a group of Nigerian prisoners used praise and worship songs to cope with the challenges of incarceration. The prisoners sang songs about God's love and forgiveness and used music to express their hopes and dreams for the future. Their music helped them to find peace and strength amid arduous circumstances. All of these attest to the fact that Nigerian gospel songs can:

Increase spiritual growth: The lyrics of Nigerian praise and worship songs often focus on theological themes, such as repentance, forgiveness, the mercy of God, the greatness of God, the love of God, and the salvation of Jesus Christ. Singing these songs can help believers to grow in their understanding of God and his love for them.

Encourage hope and resilience: Nigerian praise and worship songs can provide comfort and hope to believers facing difficult times. The lyrics of these songs often remind believers that God is with them and

will never leave them. This can help believers to persevere through difficult times and to maintain a positive outlook on life.

Promote unity: Nigerian praise and worship songs are often sung in large groups, such as churches and community gatherings. This can promote unity and fellowship among believers. People come together to worship God and are reminded of their common bond with Christ. This can help to break down barriers and to build relationships.

Empower social change: Nigerian praise and worship songs can promote social change. The lyrics of these songs can sometimes address issues such as poverty, corruption, and political instability. When believers sing these songs, they express their faith and call for change in their communities. This can raise awareness of important issues and inspire people to take action. Overall, Nigerian gospel songs positively impact individuals and communities. They can help to increase spiritual growth, encourage hope and resilience, promote unity, and empower social change. These songs are a valuable resource for believers looking for ways to grow in their faith and make a difference in the world.

Promotion of Nigerian Gospel Songs through Technology.

Technology has significantly impacted the production and dissemination of Nigerian praise and worship songs. According to Usiobaifo (2021:13), technology gives significant opportunities to improve pastor education, spread the gospel, and develop Christian knowledge in this new information age. Technology has positively impacted the production and dissemination of Nigerian praise and worship songs. It has increased accessibility, improved recording quality, facilitated promotion and marketing, enabled collaboration, and made distribution easier. The technological influence on the promotion of Nigerian Gospel music is as follows:

1. Increased accessibility: With the advent of technology, praise and worship songs can be easily accessed through various digital platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music. This has made it easier for people to access and listen to these songs from anywhere in the world.
2. Recording quality: Technology has improved the quality of music recordings, making it possible to produce high-quality praise and worship songs. Recording studios in Nigeria can now produce high-quality sound recordings, contributing to the music industry's growth.
3. Promotion and marketing: Technology has made it easier for music producers to promote and market their songs. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter provide a cost-effective way for artists to reach a wider audience and promote their music.
4. Collaboration: Technology has made it easier for artists to collaborate and produce music. Through digital platforms, artists can collaborate on projects in different parts of the world.
5. Distribution: Technology has also made distributing praise and worship songs easier. Digital platforms make it possible to distribute songs globally, contributing to the growth of the music industry in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The focus of this work, "A Study of Nigerian Gospel Songs: Implications on Christians Worship and Society", has thoroughly examined the critical cultural, social, and religious factors ingrained within the Nigerian praise and worship music field. In pursuing this, the study discusses the emergence of praise and worship songs in Nigeria and explores a brief historical background and development of gospel music in Nigeria. Nigerian gospel music is defined globally as the Christian branch of religious music employed to propagate the gospel of Christ to non-Christians and edify the believers through its performance in strict religious settings and social gatherings. This study illuminated the significant influence of these songs on people, communities, and the larger Nigerian culture.

The study also recognised the immense popularity and influence of Nigerian praise and worship music beyond the borders of Nigeria. It examined the rise of Nigerian gospel music as a global phenomenon, exploring its impact on the African diaspora and its integration into international Christian worship scenes. This investigation highlighted the power of music to transcend cultural boundaries and that Songs of praise and worship have a significant role in Nigerian culture, reflecting the country's intense religious fervour and dynamic musical legacy. Christians of all faiths treasure these songs and play a significant part in Nigerian Christian worship rituals thanks to their rhythmic rhythms and poignant lyrics.

The findings highlighted these songs' cultural and religious significance, lyrical themes, musical characteristics, and impact on the Nigerian Christian community. Nigerian praise and worship songs in Churches serve as a powerful medium for active participation, unity, spiritual expression, cultural preservation, and communal worship. Understanding and appreciating the richness of these songs can enhance the worship experience, promote intercultural understanding, and contribute to the overall spiritual growth of individuals and the Nigerian Christian community. Based on the research, the study recommends exploring, preserving, promoting, and enhancing the understanding and appreciation of Nigerian praise and worship songs. By implementing these recommendations, scholars, musicians, educators, and communities can work together to ensure this rich musical tradition's continued vibrancy and relevance.

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