

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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### THE USE OF AFRICAN INDIGENOUS MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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#### **Abstract.**

*The advent of Christianity in Africa was a huge influence on the culture and religion of the people. African Christians were made to adopt Western music in Christian worship in place of indigenous music. Foreign Christian music often estranges African Christians from worship and makes participation difficult. This study argues that African indigenous music is indispensable in Christian worship as it proclaims the Gospel within the African cultural context. In the African context, music is an intrinsic part of everyday life. The missionaries should have encouraged their converts to express their own feelings in praising God. This would make Christian theology and worship more relevant and contextualized for the African. This paper recommends that there is need for indigenization in the use of music in African Christian worship and liturgy. Indigenization here does not mean total replacement of Euro-Christian music with African indigenous music but a perspective which emphasizes on the dynamic relationship between the traditional and the external Euro-Christian change agent. Thus African musicians should be encouraged to compose African music for use in Christian worship as a strategy for establishing deep-rooted Christianity in Africa.*

**Keywords:** African indigenous music, Christianity, Culture, Christian worship, and Indigenization

#### **Introduction**

Music plays an important part in worship. It is the art of the true church and an expression of faith itself. It is clear that there are fundamental links between music and life. In fact, music is a mode of life, an expression of the existential dimension of life. This fundamental link entails, among other things, music as ritual, music as worship and confession, music as spirituality, and music as hermeneutics, that is, as a mode of giving meaning (Lebaka, 2015). All these attributes show the central place of music in human life. For Africans, music is an integral aspect of African culture and religion. As a culture, music is a means of communication and a factor of identity. Generally, music is a succession of organized sound that is pleasing to the ear. In the context of this paper, music is a sacred art because it is used in Christian Churches for worship and liturgy.

The advent of Christianity introduced a change in African culture, especially among African Christians. After many years of embracing Christianity, African Christians are still singing the great hymns of foreign musicians. It is not easy to distinguish between worshipping in the African Church and that of the Western Church. The new liturgies of our established Churches in Nigeria, for instance, are tailored in conformity with the Western liturgies of those denominations. For example the liturgies of the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches contain liturgical songs and prayers in foreign languages like Latin and English which are sung in some of these Churches in the same tunes as they are sung in the

West. The Nicene Creed is sometimes sung with a strange foreign tune. The use of foreign music in Christian worship is also observed, even more, in Pentecostal Churches. The foreign music in Christian worship often estranges African Christians from worship and makes participation difficult.

Some efforts have been made in some quarters however to introduce indigenous music into Christian worship in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. Whenever the indigenous music is introduced into worship it makes people wake up and feel at home. They will begin to be emotionally involved, expressing themselves in the familiar echoes of the music. Hence the need to introduce indigenous music into Christian worship cannot, therefore, be overemphasized. This paper, therefore, aims to offer some explanations as to what gave rise to the use of foreign music in Christian religious worship in African society. The concept of indigenization will be discussed as it relates to music and Christian worship in order to show the importance of using African indigenous music in Christian worship.

### **Music and African Religious Worship**

The value of music in African religious worship cannot be overemphasized. Admittedly singing and dancing constitute a major portion of African culture and Africans express it virtually in all things (Umeanolue, 2018). The Africans have been described by Gorer (2002) thus:

They dance for joy and they dance for grieve; they dance for love and they dance for hate; they dance to bring prosperity and they dance to avert calamity; they dance for religion and they dance to pass the time. (p. 53).

Indeed Africans have music for every occasion of religious worship. Thus they have music, instrumental or vocal, for burial or different categories of persons, birth, propitiation, thanksgiving, invocation, healing, moral and social activities among others.

The African is religious almost in all aspects of life. Religion permeates all aspects of African life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it (Mbiti, 1991). Religion permeates the life of an African so much that even when he/she sings for self-enjoyment, he is either unconsciously asking God for one thing or the other, praising God or teaching a moral lesson. When the African musician sings to entertain people, he/she at the same time runs a social commentary. There is almost always a moral lesson to hand over to the people.

However, the intention of African music is not necessarily on melodious coherence, but on the impetus for life that music can provide. The African has some music which he/she uses for religious purposes, based on different themes, times and occasions. Music is all about bringing people back to the right rhythms of life. In African spirituality, music and dance provide an opportunity for people to participate emotionally and physically in prayer and worship. There is a growing body of evidence to support this view; for example, Maboe (1982) observes that 'traditionally, when Africans worship, they sing and dance together. They tend to become emotionally or spiritually involved in the service'. It is noteworthy in this context that music is an intrinsic part of everyday life, as well as in religion. One could

even argue that music in all its forms is the central theme, which runs through all aspects of life, including the church. Along similar lines, it is worthwhile to mention here Kubik's (2001) view on music and movement; according to him, music in Africa is almost naturally associated with movement and action, such as playing percussion instruments, clapping of hands or dancing.

From a cultural point of view, African people do not always feel comfortable in a controlled and/or solemn church environment where emotions are not expressed freely. Mainstream churches, where African traditional music is seldom used, may lose members to African Independent Churches, because of passive participation. It is noticeable that while indigenous African religious music is carried out with the help of traditional musical instruments, this enables the worshippers to encounter God within the context of a worship service.

Through music, the African expresses his/her religious emotion in an attempt to reach the gods. The African evokes the gods through singing, drumming, dancing or even reciting or a combination of all. Oracle diviners, before getting into serious divination have to stimulate the gods into action using different types of music and musical means, including rattling, blowing of horns or trumpet, beating the gong or tortoiseshell. All these are accompanied by an interminable stretch of incantations in which the names, the attributes and the appellations of the gods are expressly mentioned.

While the god is being stimulated into action or evoked through music, the diviner himself is charged or frenzied to the extent that he lives beyond the realm of humanity. At this point, there is supposed to be a rapport between him and the god within the spiritual realm. This could not have been so without the spell of music.

### **Exclusion of Indigenous Music by the Early Missionaries**

The early missionaries were inclined to believe that the Nigerians were in their grip of a cruel and irrational system from which they ought to be liberated. They included among the preconditions for entry into the Christian fold, the abandonment of such customs as initiation ceremonies, bride price, polygamy, vernacular names, traditional dresses, traditional music and even some traditional musical instruments. Renunciation of the old order of things was a prerequisite to acceptance of the new. A spokesman of the International Missionary Council cited in Oguike (1997) affirmed this purpose as follows:

The Missionary is a revolutionary and has to be so for to preach and plant Christianity means to make a frontal attack on the beliefs, the customs, the apprehensions of life and the world, and by implication (because tribal religions are primarily social realities) on the social structures and bases of primitive society. The Missionary enterprise need not be ashamed of this, because colonial administrators, planters, merchants, western penetrators etc., performs a much more severe and destructive attack. (p. 62).

Some of the missionaries believed that African religious elements such as African music and musical instruments should not be included in the Christian religion. They believed that it would create dangerous psychology among the people that the new religion (Christianity) adopting some traditional elements, was not going to be different from the one practised in Africa. Under this situation, there would be no reason for a foreigner to introduce such a religion. Some writers like Ekwueme (1974) upheld the view that imposition was a means of penetrating the tenets of a new religion, thus:

Early Christian Missionaries, however, branded all indigenous forms of arts as the work of the devil, especially as almost invariably these were associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremony. To these Christian proselytizers, it was important that no 'pagan' art should continue to be practised by less their newfound faith be shaken by idolatrous and sensuous ceremonies. (p. 13).

Many works of art were destroyed by overzealous missionaries and their converts. Several shrines, musical instruments and other religious objects were burnt with the hope to rid the new converts to Christianity of all contacts with the visible signs of traditional religion which the missionaries derogatorily termed paganism (Wambutda, 1987; Oguike, 1997). The only thing that the missionaries could not avoid to adopt was the African language in propagating the gospel. Attempts were made to translate the Bible, the Prayer Book, Liturgy and the Hymn Book. These Christian religious texts were translated or rather transliterated, into the different African languages without any attempt being made at finding a poetical or musical form native to the language in question.

Some scholars rather blame the rejection of African music in the Christian church worship and liturgy on Africans themselves (Lury, 1956). Thus, some Africans in their conversion to Christianity wished to make a complete break with traditional culture and practices including indigenous music. The deplorable consequences in regard to music and other matter are that there is therefore never any possibility of building on African music in Christian churches. This conclusion by scholars like Lury leaves much to be desired. It lacks factual merit. If the African thinks of the African music as heathen, such an African might be a victim of European missionary indoctrination or even brainwashing.

No doubt Christianity and Western civilization came together, no one could distinguish one from the other – collar and ties or the Bible. The early native Christians were known by their Western dresses. Now it is dawning upon the African of today that he could have one without the other. This is the tremendous significance of this stage of our progress. What is demanded today is Christianity without the system that has been built around it in the West.

### **Indigenization of Music and Christian Worship**

The word 'indigene' means 'native'. Something 'indigenous' (the adjective) is 'native', belonging naturally (to soil). Indigenization thus presupposes the making, or becoming, indigenous of that which originally is not so. With particular reference to the church, it means the church in every land should belong in its locality in such a way that it will not be seen as a

foreign body, an absurd intrusion., or an engine of a certain ulterior purpose which will no longer be necessary for a free, independent country, or in a society which is claiming to have come of age. It means further, and more significantly, that the Church has to be of an intimate, meaningful, and creatively operative and relevant by meeting the spiritual and moral needs of the people and thus serving to inform and give guidance to national activities and aspirations.

The objective of indigenization of music is to give expression to Christian music in African religion-cultural terms. It is an attempt to create a synthesis between African culture and Christianity. It aims at abolishing syncretism, which renders African Christianity ineffective. In observing Christian worship in a way that is congenial to the African experience and reality, African Christians will be enabled to live out their faith authentically and creatively. According to King (2008), “In profound ways, African church music reveals the life of Christian faith communities within their unique contexts, which are communities of believers seeking to know and understand who Jesus Christ is within their local setting.”

Obviously, Christianity, as imported from Europe and America, contains strange features with which Africans are most uncomfortable (Wambutda, 1987; Madu, 2004). This points to the need to indigenize music in Christian worship and especially the liturgy which is the climax of all worship. Indigenizing music and especially in Liturgy makes worship livelier for the African Christians. African Independent Churches were instituted based on indigenization of Christianity. The Church has produced such spiritual churches as the Aladura, the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, the Healing churches and prayer houses whose liturgies have found a strong parallel with the traditional African cosmologies. Orthodox Christian churches in Africa have equally introduced some indigenous cultural practices in their liturgies and worships. Evidently, traditional artifacts like gongs, drums and ikoro among others which were branded as paganism by early missionaries have now been re-introduced into orthodox Christian Churches including the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church (Ejiofor, 1984). To emphasize the need for indigenization of Christianity in Africa, Nwadiakor (2011) submitted, “The fact remains that unless the Church is firmly planted in the cultural soil of the people, it is on the quick sand of instability and in danger of losing its credibility and hold on that culture”.

### **Conclusion**

This study argues that African indigenous music is indispensable in Christian worship as it proclaims the gospel within the African cultural context. In the African context, music is an intrinsic part of everyday life, as well as in religion. The missionaries should have encouraged their converts to express their own feelings in praising God. Christianity was brought to Africa by the missionaries as a ‘potted plant’ with ‘white soil’ in the pot all the way from Europe. Although this ‘plant’ (Christianity) is growing in Africa it has hitherto drawn nutrient from the white soil in the pot with which it was imported. In the context of Indigenization, the ‘pot’ containing this potted plant should be broken so that the plant (Christianity) could draw nutrient from the African soil. This will make Christian theology

and worship more relevant and contextualized for the African. Thus there should be indigenization in the use of music in African Christian Liturgy and worship. Indigenization here does not mean total replacement of Euro-Christian music with African indigenous music but a perspective which emphasizes on the dynamic relationship between the traditional and the external Euro-Christian change agent. African musicians should be encouraged to compose African music for use in Christian worship as a strategy for establishing deep-rooted Christianity in Africa.

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