

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

TRADITIONAL IGBO MUSIC AND DANCE IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: AN INSTRUMENT FOR CULTURAL REVIVAL

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Abstract

African Indigenous Churches or otherwise called African Independent Churches in Nigeria has undoubtedly grown to counter the whole idea that Christianity is a white man's religion which the Africans could afford to practice accordingly in line with the tenets of their culture. These Instituted Churches are concerned with making Christianity universal and meaningful to the African man, they do this by bringing in and absorbing some of the rich cultural values in Christian worship which some mainline churches initially rejected in liturgical worship. Music and dance are part and parcel of the culture of most African societies through which we can entertain ourselves and also reverence God. Music and dance is a universal phenomenon which cuts across every tribe, race and Nation and has been a powerful tool of influence on societies and cultures from time immemorial; it has the power to incite, showcase and relay powerful emotions in individuals. In most African independent Church and in some mainline churches like the Catholic Church in Nigeria and especially in Igbo land, music and dance constitute a vital part of the overall ministrations; hence it becomes an inseparable element in liturgy and order of service. This paper, therefore, appraises the importance of and recommends the use of Igbo traditional music and dance in Christian worship as an instrument for a cultural revival.

Keywords: Igbo Traditional music and dance, Christian worship and cultural revival

Introduction

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life differs from one society to another. It is important to realize that since culture is usually learned and does not always depend on unborn instincts, it is almost wholly the result of social interactions and relationships. The Igbo passed on their culture from one generation to the other in a well-disciplined manner, usually in the form of myths, history, stories, music, dance, riddles, proverbs, arts and craft. Culture is the very life of a people, the life and religious beliefs and most aspects of the Igbo culture are expressed in their music and dance.

Culture and religion are intertwined. It is difficult to separate them; the culture of a people often indicates their mode of worship and colours the pattern of their faith. Every Prophet comes with a revelation fitted to his people and written in the language of the people he is sent to. This is true of Jesus Christ, who has brought the gospel, rebuked bad morality but not culture. Christian worship can be done using Igbo traditional music and dance, without reclining into syncretism and apostasy. God can be expressed within Igbo concepts other than erstwhile foreign perception; this revives our culture and makes Christianity meaningful to the typical Igbo man as he feels at home worshipping God in his cultural orientation.

Igbo Traditional Music and Dance

In defining and explaining this concept, the keywords: Music and Dance have to be defined, Many scholars and musicians have tried to define the concept of music without arriving at a generally accepted definition, this is because music is a conception of the mind as Okafor & Okafor (2009) asserts that "what is music in one culture may be sheer noise in another" (p.13), this notwithstanding some scholars give a clear definition of music, Pen (1992), defines music as "sound ordered in time-or from another perspective, time measured by sound. (p. 4). He explains further that music is a language, a form of communication which can elicit emotional responses and provoke thoughts. Music is a part of the activities of our everyday life that it tends to be all-important in contemporary living. It is a powerful tool for expressing our creative energy and which stimulates and guides imaginative thinking. Chuma-Udeh (2014) posits that:

Music is the universal language of the soul and the music of oral literature flows from the essence of a people's existence. Here it becomes a way of expression intricately tied to their social, cultural, and to a great extent becomes the determinant of the peaceful coexistence of the society of the people that spawns it" (p. 15).

This implies that music is part of human existence on earth. This existence comprises and implicates various activities in our society and environment; this in totality is what is loosely defined as culture. Okafor & Okafor (2009) also posits that music as sounds have been deliberately organized by man to specific expressions of emotions, communication of ideas, touching the senses etc. Traditional music which is also termed folk music as described by Agu (1990) is the indigenous music of the people which forms an integral part of their way of life. It is a music which is sung and written in the traditional language of a group of people and which is easily understood by them, it voices the values, expectations, sentiments, legends, myths, taboos and the history of a people.

Traditional/folk music is an integral part of Igbo culture. Its impact on the life of people cannot be overemphasized. In Igbo culture, music is not just performed for its aesthetic purposes; it is a medium for cultural transmission. Music is an essential part of the Igbo man's life. There are musical activities associated with every stage of development in one's life. Agu (1990) posits that among the Igbo, music serves not only as a medium for entertainment and social relationship but as an intricate part in the development of the mind, body and soul. It is assumed that the laws of the land are learnt through songs. The history of the tribe is learnt through songs and the accepted behavioural patterns in the society are all assimilated through music and dance.

Dance on the other hand as defined by Hornby (2005) is a series of movements and steps that are usually performed to music. It can be referred to as a noun to mean series of steps and movements that match the speed and rhythm of a piece of music or as a verb implying moving rhythmically to music, typically following a set sequence of steps. Music and dance are inseparable; music is always accompanied by dance while dance precedes music even though there can be music without dance, there cannot be a dance without music. Someone

dancing without music can be said to be mentally challenged this notion may have led Harper in Ugolo (2012) to assert that as in all forms of Nigerian dance, the fundamental formal elements of the dance is the close relationship between the rhythmic patterns of the dance and the rhythm of the accompanying music or song. He further noted that in many Nigerian societies, there is a very close relationship between dance and music. In fact, in many cultures, the same word is used for both music and dance. Therefore, in Igbo land, it could amount to madness to dance without music; this explains the closeness of dance and music as they feed on one another in their many forms and the reason why traditional music and dance has remained in Igbo culture despite the strong influence of western culture especially during the period of western colonization and evangelization in Igbo societies, music and dance are performed as a social event as is the case with other African societies. Music and dance are part and parcel of life in Igbo culture. The roles of traditional music and dance in shaping the lives of Igbo people are innumerable. It uplifts the mind of the people that make up the society leaving them as law-abiding citizens. Through traditional music and dance, the conventional rules of behaviour are maintained. This aim is achieved when the right values and behaviours are encouraged through praise and appreciation, and ill behaviours discouraged through caution and punishment.

Christian Worship

Christian worship is often thought of like the music portion of a church service - people singing songs to God, heads back, eyes closed, and hands raised in the air as they sing. Christian worship happens when we sing to God, whether in church or alone - in our cars or the shower. If we desire to please the heart of God, it is worship, no matter where the location or how many are involved. Music affects our emotions and the lyrics can swell our hearts, causing us to become lost in the experience. Christian praise and worship music is a great tool for helping us feel closer to God. It's not uncommon for people to even pick a church because of the style of its worship music. Often people will emerge from a service saying, "The worship was wonderful today," or "The sermon was great, I was moved by the worship. Christian Worship means showing reverence and gratitude to God by bowing down before God, as in this passage from Nehemiah: *"Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground"*(Nehemiah 8:6).

Both music and dancing are acts of worship; Christian worship begins with the acceptance of Christ as our Lord and personal saviour. All of us worship something, whether we know it or not. We may not physically bow down to it, or offer it songs of praise and adoration, but whatever we devote most of our time and attention to is often what we worship. Consider this Merriam-Webster definition of worship: "reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power; or an act of expressing such reverence; a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual; extravagant respect or admiration for or devotion to an object of esteem." Seen in this light, it's easy to see that we can worship God, we can worship money, or power, or a rock star, or we can even worship a lifestyle. Worship is more than an act of reverence. It is an attitude of the heart.

Throughout most of Christianity's history, corporate Christian worship has been liturgical, characterized by prayers and hymns, with texts rooted in, or closely related to the Scripture particularly the Psalter; this form of sacramental and ceremonial worship is still practised by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches, as well as some Protestant denominations such as Lutheranism and . In Evangelicalism, worship is viewed as an act of adoration of God, with a more informal conception.

After Vatican II Liturgical Catechesis No. 1, December 2010, the word liturgy sprang into more common usage; the definition from the Greek word leitourgia is the work of the people or work on behalf of the people. Responsorial prayers are a series of petitions read or sung by a leader with responses made by the congregation. times for prayer during the day were established based substantially on Jewish models, and a festal cycle throughout the Church year governed the celebration of feasts and holy days of the events in the life of Jesus, the lives of the saints, and aspects of the Godhead.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on the forms of worship, as they were seen in terms of the Latin phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the rule of prayer is the rule of belief") that is, the specifics of one's worship express, teach, and govern the doctrinal beliefs of the community. According to this view, alterations in the patterns and content of worship would necessarily reflect a change in the faith itself. Each time a heresy arose in the Church, it was typically accompanied by a shift in worship for the heretical group. Orthodoxy in faith also meant orthodoxy in worship and vice versa. Thus, the African Independent churches in Nigeria and Igbo land, in particular, introduced a new mode of worship which incorporates music and dancing which is synonymous with the Igbo culture and this explains the reasons why they were able to gain more converts within a short period. This no doubt led to a serious and effective cultural revival in Igboland.

Cultural Revival

This concept will be well understood if the root word "culture" is defined and well understood, Uwandu & Nwankwor (2006) made it clear that "the word culture etymologically, derives from the Latin root word "colure" meaning to inhabit, to cultivate or to honour (P.62). Uche (2006) clearly defined culture as a total way of life of any given people. Agbanusi (2006) affirms this by maintaining that "culture is taken here to mean the ways of life of a people, including their customary practices, Dressing pattern and Language or Languages". (p.116). Culture is the overall characteristic and knowledge of a particular group of people encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Osborn (cited by Nnoyelu, 2009) posits that there are essentially two dimensions or faces of culture which he termed "material and non-material culture", he explained that material culture refers to the tangible, overt, physical or technological aspects of our daily lives while the non-material culture refers to ways of using object, customs, beliefs, philosophies and patterns of communication. Arinze, (2001) asserts that culture has some basic functions which it performs in a society, in his words:

Culture through its various institutions and normative pattern (norms) simplifies and

guides behaviour, provide roles, defines relations and exert social control. Culture serves as the "stamp" or "trademark" that distinguished one society of people from another. Culture integrates, systematizes and interprets the values, institutions and norms of society as it charges them with meaning and purpose. Culture furnishes society with the basis for social unity and solidarity. Culture unity normally inspires loyalty, patriotism and devotion. Culture functions as the matrix and guiding spirit of the social structure and life of the society. It relates and co-ordinates, integrates and stores the social heritage and values of the people. And finally, culture is the architect and moulders of social personality. (p. 98).

The term "Culture" permeates every human society, as it is practically impossible for any human society to properly lay claim to being one without first upholding her culture. Culture is relevant to an individual's identity as it helps to promote the survival of a group as well as the distinct identity of a tribe. Culture is a powerful tool for human survival and has kept the human race from going into extinction. Culture represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for individuals as well as members of a community. It plays a very important role in binding social relationship and the eradication of poverty.

No human being is born with a fixed culture. A person is a product of the culture he is exposed to. Culture is not innate but is passed on from one generation to another through language, dressing etc; an infant grows into the culture of the people who raised him; individual learns the ways of his culture and comes to participate more or less fully in it. A culture is a form of learned traditions, customs and innovation that govern behaviour and beliefs. Culture is shared and transmitted through language, literature, arts, music, oral traditions, rituals, rites etc. which are the primary tools through which culture is transmitted and passed on to succeeding generations. Culture is therefore cultivated through education. The integration of cultural elements in education programmes fosters linkages with one's root and provides for locally relevant content resulting in more relevant skills and better learning.

With these, one can now ask the question, what is cultural revival all about? According to encyclopaedia.com, the term *cultural revival* refers to the formation of group identity around a common culture, where a claim is forwarded that the aspects of culture with which the group identifies with have been recovered after losses due to colonization, forced or voluntary relocation, oppression, or modernization. Cultural revival is predominantly associated with minority populations and frequently underwrites demands for rights, restitution, and political or legal recognition as an ethnic group. Cultural revival can be explained as an improvement in the condition, strength, or fortunes of a culture, an instance of making a culture becoming popular, active, or important again.

Traditional Igbo Music and Dance in Christian worship as an Instrument for Cultural Revival

Okafor & Okafor (2002) asserts the fact that "in a society like Nigeria with many diverse cultures, Music becomes a powerful process of intercultural communication. Traditional

music is an integral part of Igbo culture. Its impact on the life of the Igbo man cannot be overemphasized. In Igbo culture, music and dance is not just performed for its aesthetic purposes; it is a medium for cultural transmission. Music is an essential part of the Igbo man's life. There are musical activities associated with every stage of development in one's life. Agu (1990) asserts this when he opines that:

Among the Igbo, it is said that music serves not only as a medium for entertainment and social relationship but as an intricate part in the development of the mind, body and soul. It is assumed that the laws of the land are learnt through songs. The history of the tribe is learnt through songs and the accepted behavioural patterns in the society are all assimilated through music and dance (p. 49).

Roger (2008) affirms the above when he explained the importance of music in every human society, "Music plays an important role in human society, it provides entertainment and emotional release and it accompanies activities ranging from dance to religious ceremonies. Music is heard everywhere, in auditoriums, homes, elevators, sports arenas, places of worship" (p.2). Also, Emurobome (2002) asserts this when he posits that "as people desire to live together as a group, so does music keep and ensure their lasting relationship" (p.7).

Priests, Pastors and church worship leaders should get a better understanding of the need for using traditional Igbo music and dance in Christian worship and know how to lead church members to achieve the aim of worship. If the display of dancing in the Bible as in (Psalm. 150:35) "praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with harp and lyre, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals", admonishes us to worship God with music; they should see that the display of music and dance in the Old Testament was a way God used to teach his people how to respond to his love and express the gratitude of their deliverance to him, they should dispel negative thoughts about using traditional Igbo music and dancing in liturgical worship. There is much controversy among Christians as to whether traditional music and dance should be allowed in Christian liturgical worship of the church. Music and dance are not well elaborated in the New Testament but it is spoken of in many places in the Old Testament. "Let them praise his name with dancing, and make music to him with tambourine and harp" (Psalm 149:3). "Praise him with tambourine and dancing" (Psalm 150:4). Music and dance took many forms in the Old Testament. Miriam, Aaron's sister, was so excited about God's deliverance from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army that she led a group of women in dancing to the music of tambourines (Exodus. 15:20). The Israelites danced to music when they observed victory (1 Sam. 21:11). David danced in celebration before the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6:14- 15). David was so excited that he stripped to his underwear and danced excitedly and enthusiastically before the Lord (1 Chron. 15:29). These music and dances mentioned could be free-spirited or choreographed. From the above verses, we can draw some basic conclusions: music and dance was an accepted part of Israel's corporate worship, Israel regarded music and dance as a natural and valid expression of gratitude to God and a festive way to celebrate a joyful event, men danced with men or women with women or they danced alone. No religious music and dancing had anything to do with touching the opposite sex.

Music and dance can be evil as well as good. When Israel fell into unbelief, they made a golden calf and worshipped it, singing and dancing in a lewd way (Exodus. 32:18-19). This negative incident compared with other positive incidents in the Bible indicates that dancing can either be an appropriate exuberant response to God's grace, or it can be an occasion for degenerate revelry. It all depends on the motivation of the heart. The purpose of music and dance is to worship and honour God with the body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). By bodily movement, the worshipper communicates his or her emotions to God. Making music and dancing to it can be a very powerful form of Christian worship if done correctly.

Traditional Igbo Liturgical music and dancing with proper choreography can truly honour God and at the same time revive and uplift our culture, it signifies that we can truly worship God irrespective of our tribe or race since it uses major elements of our culture such as our mode of dressing, instruments of music like *Oja*, *Ekwe*, *Udu*, etc, bodily movements and most importantly our local dialect. Music and dance in Christian worship can be effective if it does not get out of control; emotions are very powerful whether used by God or by Satan. The Bible says there is a time to mourn and a time to dance (Eccl. 3:4). There is also a time to dance in a worship service and a time not to dance. If traditional Igbo liturgical music and dance is used, it should be done skillfully. Most Christians do not dance in the Spirit because they are embarrassed or are afraid of the abuses that come from doing so. Certainly, no one has to dance in worship if he or she does not want to use this form of worship. It is a matter of conscience. There is Christian liberty in forms of worship. However, dancing should not be rejected because it makes us feel uncomfortable. We may never do religious dance ourselves but we must not reject or despise those who do unless they are somehow abusive. We are commanded by God to correct all abuses of doctrine or practise according to the Word of God. When the dance is done with worshipful and God-focused ways, it can have a proper place in our worship. Igbo Christians can utilize their traditional music and dance as an appropriate worship form and also a means to make Christianity meaningful to the typical Igbo man to achieve a deep-rooted Christianity in Igbo land. Even though we might not be professional dancers, we can teach and seek out some artists who can enable our church members to see into beauty in God's creation by offering music and dancing performances and ideas about corporate dancing in our worship.

Conclusion

When traditional Igbo music and dance is to be used in worship more often than before, there are some important and necessary things for us to keep in mind. It must be faith-filled, worshipful, and prayerful. Dancers must be able to form their worship dance by getting in touch with their faith rather than own feelings. In other words, the importance of the use of Igbo traditional music and dance in our future worship lies in the fact that it should encourage church members to come into the presence of God. It is important to understand that dance in the context of worship should not be simply self-expression. It should be done in a way that is helpful to each congregation. As far as I know, there are some Christian churches in Igbo land that are already using liturgical dance as a principal part of worship such as the Catholic

Church as Emurobome (2002) asserts this when he affirmed that "in any of the various categories of religions such as animism, Fetishism, Polytheism and Monotheism, Music is a functional element."(p.3). When we choose the style and type of movement of dance in worship, it should be appropriate for the cultural context. Any inappropriate movements could distract us from a focus on Christ.

Finally, I am sure that music and dance were pictured well as a form of worship in the Bible and it should be carried out in our churches today. But, we should be reminded of that when practised properly, it could be a beautiful, communicative, and useful form of art that helps us glorify our God and have a delightful communion with him in worship. When traditional Igbo music and dance is done in a worshipful and God-focused ways, it can have a proper place in our worship. Igbo Christians can utilize it as an appropriate worship form. If and when our traditional Igbo music and dance is to be used in worship more often than before, our rich cultural heritage which has been enveloped by slavery, colonization, western supremacy and Christian missionaries' activities will come into play again but there are some important and necessary aspects of using Igbo traditional music and dance in Christian worship for us to keep in mind; It must be decent, faith-filled, worshipful, and prayerful. Dancers must be able to form their worship dance by getting in touch with their faith rather than their feelings. In other words, the importance of the use of such music and dance in our future worship lies in the fact that it should encourage church members to come into the presence of God. It is important to understand that dance in the context of worship should not be simply self-expression. It should be done in a way that is helpful to each congregation.

When we choose the style and type of movement of dance in worship, it should be appropriate for the cultural context. Any inappropriate movements could distract us from a focus on Christ. Finally, I am sure that music and dance were pictured well as a form of worship in the Bible and it should be carried out in our churches today. But, we should be reminded of that when the use of our traditional Igbo Music and dance in Christian worship which if practised properly, could be a beautiful, communicative, and useful art form that helps us glorify our God and have a delightful communion with him in worship and at the same time reviving and uplifting our culture.

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