

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

GOSPEL MUSIC: A RELIABLE TOOL IN CONQUERING SUICIDE - THE IMPLICATIONS OF COLOSSIANS 3:16 AND EPHESIANS 5:19

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Abstract

The paper investigated Gospel music as a reliable tool for conquering suicide. It employed the teachings of Apostle Paul in the Holy Bible to advocate such a possibility of winning over the pressures of suicide. Emphases were drawn from Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. Gospel music is a genre that speaks of comfort, encouragement, hope etc. It is that musical style that provides guidelines to qualify as a Gospel Musician in the Holy Bible, some of which Paul taught. The findings of the study reveal that suicide begins from the information stored up in the mind, and gospel music aims to depopulate the mind of listeners from information that makes them feel hopeless, worthless, or anything that promotes the ideas of giving up easily. The study went further to give examples of musicians in and outside Nigeria who used lyrics inspired by the scriptures in their songs. The paper concluded that Gospel music is a musical style for everyone because everyone deserves to live and also stated clearly that it is not written to place Gospel Music over other musical genres but to further promote the power in music and address this common global phenomenon – Suicide.

Keywords: Music, Gospel music, Reliable tool and Conquering suicide

Introduction

The existence of every living thing comes with challenges specific to that living thing. A plant that's not receiving enough sunlight or rain will be deficient of certain minerals; an animal that's not feeding properly stands the risk of inviting diseases and imminent death. Same goes to a man whose needs - security, shelter, food, clothing etc. when not available can render the heart weary. Man's day to day activities is full of things that can annoy, or cause rifts between one person to another. People go home after the day's job or job hunting with so much agitation and aggression angered about the shouting and misunderstanding of boss or colleague, misbehaviour of workers, and so on. And before you know it you hear words like "am tired of this situation or am tired of this world". Whatever the case may be, life, in general, does not always give us exactly what we want, so we either chose to be staying joyful or sad. Many people who could not handle these stresses have gone into depression, thereby registering suicide cases. This paper argues that there is, among others, a tool which can be used to conquer this and that's Gospel Music. This paper is not advocating that other genre of music should be treated as unimportant, but that gospel music offers hope, comfort and encouragement to listeners. It, therefore, implies that there is a pattern of composition and tool application to achieve its desired goal. The teachings of Apostle Paul alongside researches made by other scholars on the subject of suicide shall be the anchor of this paper.

Keys: NHEB - New Heart English Bible

- KJV - King James Version
- NIV - New International Version
- Col - Colossians
- Thess. - Thessalonians

Concept of Gospel Music

The task of the music ministry of the church is to preach the gospel in songs. That's why Apostle Paul encourages the Colossian and Ephesians churches (in Colossians 3:16 - which states "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to God" (NHEB) And Ephesians 5:19 reads "Speaking to one another in Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs; singing and singing praises in your heart to the Lord" (NHEB). It can be observed from the scriptures above that there are genres of music common to the church in the time of Paul. They were Psalms (books of the old testament with songs), hymns (songs written by the Greeks), and spiritual songs (songs that come spontaneously, maybe during worship). Paul was, therefore, saying that every song written in these genres must be those that bear the "word of Christ" - the gospel. It is interesting to note that Paul encourages the people to 'teach', 'speak', and 'admonish' one another in songs, which means music can be used to teach, to converse (talking to one another), and to admonish. What does it mean to admonish? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it this way:

1. To indicate duties or obligations to someone
2. To express warnings or disapproval to especially in a gentle, earnest or solicitous manner
3. To give friendly earnest advice or encouragement.

From the definitions above, it, therefore, implies that the music or songs Paul emphasized were to be such that can teach the listeners and indicate duties or obligations or able to express warnings or disapproval in a gentle and un-offensive way or give friendly advice or encouragement - this is gospel music. It should be recalled, that Paul highlighted 3 genres of music - Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, this, for reasons of religion and culture of his time and as a Roman citizen sent to preach to the Greeks. However, in contemporary times, one cannot limit himself only to these genres because of cultural influences and musical practices which has brought about an eruption in the emergence of music genres, largely experienced through trans-cultural influences gotten from merchandise (music trade inclusive), marriages etc. Presently, we have a lot of musical genres born out of these influences. Some of them are Rock and Roll, Disco, Fuji music, Calypso, Soul music, Reggae, Blues, Country music, Highlife, Juju music, Jazz and Gospel Music which is the focus of this paper. The term gospel music is described by Odunuga (2009) as:

A fervent emotional style of black spiritual and other religious singing, which we often rhythmically accompanied by handclapping and foot stamping. Gospel music is generally assumed to connote Christian religious music. The degree and manner, in which the religious in these times are portrayed, vary according to spiritual convictions. Its genre is numerous, juju, soul, rock and choir etc. The only unifying

factor is the message of the salvation of Christ (p. 61).

From the submission given above, Odunuga made it succinct that Gospel music incorporates different musical styles to pass across one message "the gospel of Christ".

The Gospel of Christ - An x-ray of Sproul's submission

Paul the Apostle in the Holy Bible used this term interchangeably with the word of Christ signifying His words as the gospel. According to Sproul (2016), the gospel is the possession of Jesus, but even more, Jesus is the heart of the content of the gospel. Sproul provided the word for "gospel" as *euangelion*. Offering that the prefix eu-, comes into English in a variety of words like euphonic or euphonious music - simply expressing a good sound, or eulogy - speaking good about a person at his/her funeral services. While the prefix eu often connotes "good", the other part *angelion* or angel means 'message'. These beings called Angels are the carriers of message. Hence the word *euangelion* means "good news" or "good message". Implying that the basic meaning of the term gospel is "announcing a good message". This will then mean that "Gospel music" is a term that explains the art of musical composition which bears within it, the words of Christ, intending to pass across the "good news" or "good message" to its listeners. Many times good message could mean the message of hope, encouragement and or comfort. The question will then be "how can gospel music be used as a tool to conquer suicide?"

Sproul (2016), likened the term gospel to a situation where a doctor examines a sick person and afterwards declared that the problem was nothing serious or when soldiers go out to battle, a scene obtainable in the ancient times, the families obviously awaiting in anxiety their return. The gospel is when the battle is over and they received the news that their sons are back home. Just as joy comes at the entrance of good news, that's the same way ideas of suicide are built at the inception of 'bad news'. Bad news may be one of the causes of suicide but not the only cause. However, if a close look is taken to examine the words "bad" and "news" (bad news), it can be inferred that the ideas of suicide. Bad news could be reporting on the death of a loved one, a fire outbreak, loss of a pregnancy, loss of a job, loss of a huge sum of money, or it could be a long period of struggle, disappointments or maybe comparing people of same age towards their achievements. The consistent reception of these negative information, analyzing them and drawing conclusions usually result in depression and when not properly handled, ends up in suicide - a product of many factors. I will like to quickly define two terms mentioned briefly above - depression and suicide.

Depression

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019) defines the word as:

1. A state of feeling sad.
2. A serious medical condition in which a person feels very sad, hopeless and unimportant and often is unable to live in a normal way.
3. A psychoneurotic or psychotic disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness and sometimes suicidal

tendencies.

Suicide

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019) defines this word as the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally especially by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind. Rosenberg in Wagner defines suicide as "death arising from an act inflicted upon oneself to kill oneself" (p.8). In essence, it is an act associated with a person's decision. It is a death resulting from an intentional, self-inflicted act (McLean, J., Platt, S., Harris, F., Jepson, R 2008). From the definitions above, it is clear that an individual who permits "bad news" to take hold of the mind would have given room to a disorder known as depression. This depression can be noticed in the way that individual responds to sadness, sleeplessness, loss of appetite and so on. When this happens consistently without a system of "mind check", it often results in suicide or suicidal-attempts or behaviours. One of such systems is "Gospel music" because it is one of those musical compositions that speak to the mind of its listeners. It speaks good news, glad tidings. That despite the failures, despite the struggle, the disappointments; there is hope and that hope is the Christ. Recur, the message of Christ is the centre or the main theme of Gospel music and Apostle Paul in his letters teaches that this word of Christ, this word of hope (Col.1:27, 1 Thess. 2:19, Titus 2:13 KJV), this word of encouragement (Acts 13:15; 15:30-31 NIV), should dwell in the singers "richly" as they teach, speak to one another and admonish in songs. I believe strongly that Paul understood the fragility of a man's mind that it can be easily tossed, especially when troubled and over the years, Gospel artists, at least from the 1950s have written songs which speaks of hope, encouragement, of good news as against some secular Lyrica like "get rich or die trying"; Gospel music presents reasons for joy, happiness, laughter and not hatred, unhealthy comparisons, revenge, unforgiveness, bitterness etc. which often lead to depression and has overtime resulted in suicidal cases.

Gospel Musicians and their Songs

A lot of Gospel musicians within and outside Nigeria have written songs that through the years have become a healing balm to many souls. Some of such musicians are Dr Panam Percy Paul, Don Moen, Nathaniel Bassey, Kirk Franklin, Preye Odede, Spinach, Frank Edwards etc. These musicians have given their time to compose lyrics inspired by the scriptures (word of Christ) to address the troubled, anxieties and sorrows of the heart. Below are some of their songs. First imagine a man or a woman who has been in the hospital, fighting for his/her life, and suddenly the doctor brings a report that the case is now a probability between life and death; or a young man or woman who just lost both parents and wondering how he/she will survive through life, and suddenly this music breaks out:

My Life is in Your Hands - Song by Kirk Franklin

You don't have to worry and don't you be afraid
Joy comes in the morning, troubles they don't last always
For there's a friend in Jesus, who will wipe your tears away
And if your heart is broken, just lift your hands and say:

"I know that I can make it
I know that I can stand
No matter what may come my way
My life is in your hands

With Jesus, I can take it
With Him, I know I can stand
No matter what may come my way
My life is in your hands"

So when the tests and trials, may seem to get you down
And all your friends and loved ones are nowhere to be found
Remember there's a friend in Jesus, who will wipe your tears away
And if your heart is broken, just lift your hands and say
"I know that I can make it
I know that I can stand
No matter what may come my way
My life is in your hands (Source: Musixmatch)

Below is another song lyric by Dr Panam Percy Paul, and he calls it "cheer up". Here Dr Panam gave a story of himself, thereby using it to encourage people who may have been worn out of life, telling them that instead of suicide, instead of "throwing in the towel", instead of giving up on life, they should cheer up and not give up, because, if he in his condition then could still make it, then they can also make it.

This is a song for those who are down
This is a little song that the Lord gave to me to cheer you up
I just wanna tell you a little bit about my life
This is my story
I just wanna tell you my story
I've been through hell on earth
I've seen frustrations
But when I try and failed I just tried again
Whitney God on my side nothing is impossible

Chorus - Come on, Cheer up x2
Cheer up Brother, Cheer up sister
You can make it
Come on, Cheer up x2
Don't you stay down
Wake up right now and Jesus will help you

I remember the three Hebrew Children down in the furnace
Daniel in the Lion's den

It seemed the world was crashing on them
They cried to the Lord
they lifted their voices
and the Furnace became an air conditioner
Daniel had a lion for a pillow

(Go back to chorus)

I have seen many trials in my life
But my God is not a man that He should lie
All the things He promised me He has done every one of them
And what so ever He says I know
He will do
He will do

(Go back to chorus)

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The last song this paper will be sharing is called "Ebezina" meaning don't cry by Preye Odede. He uses his song written in English and Igbo dialects to serve as a source of comfort to those who mourn.

Ebezina by Preye Odede

It's the same God, who was there for you in the midnight hour
It's the same God Who is able to wipe your tears away
It's the same God Who was there inside of lack and wants
It's the same God Is Jehovah, My great provider

Tell me why you're giving up on God
Tell me why you're giving up on Him
Tell me why you're giving up on God
Tell me why you're giving up on God
Hold on, change is on the way

Ebezina, Chukwu non nso (Don't cry, God is close)
Ogini bu nsobu gi (What is your problem?)
Ima-na odi adigideh (He does not take long)
Nwa nnen mo, Jide si eh ike (Beloved, hold on to Him)
Hi si anya gi eh (Wipe your tears)
Chukwu di gi atu asi (God never lies)
Oge a diri gi nma (It's going to be alright)

Don't you cry, change is here

Weeping may endure for a night
Joy is gonna come in the morning
You don't have to cry any more
Hold God by His word, he's gonna do what he says
Lift your hands and give Him praise

I know you've been crying – I understand
I know you've been wounded – But it's OK
I know you've been broken But I'm here,
To mend your broken heart
Believe in me, you will overcome
Your yesterday will be a story
I'm the God of all flesh
Nothing is too hard for me to do
Don't you forget (I calmed the sea)
Don't you forget (I raised the dead)
Don't you forget (I came to die that you might live forever)
Don't you cry is gonna be over, You will overcome today
Wipe your tears and give him all the praise

Conclusion

In this paper, the scriptures were used to provide grounds for a fight for survival, as it relates to the term "gospel music". This paper has offered suggestions on how to see life from the perspective of the word of Christ embedded in songs. It provided rooms for one to imagine the possibility of using those inspired lyrics to face a difficult situation. It never tried to condemn other genres of music, but simply amplifying the benefits domicile in gospel music. This paper believes strongly, that if everyone who in one time or the other committed suicide or attempted suicide were exposed to the ideas of encouraging one another through the medium of the song which has the power to permeate the soul, probably, they wouldn't have attempted such. The writer, therefore, believes that gospel music is for everyone because no one is above being given hope, comfort or love. It should be understood quickly that, the gospel music doesn't just preach messages of hope, comfort, encouragement etc. but also advocates living a good life befitting to the society, love for one another, and so on, as were the teachings of Jesus. However, for what this paper discusses, it has limited the subject to the aspects of giving hope, encouragement and comfort.

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