

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

MUSIC: A DIALOGICAL TOOL FOR ECUMENISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The priority of the social dimension of ecumenism over the theological dimension has been spotted as the major barrier towards attaining the ecumenical goal by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The uneasiness and unwillingness exhibited among members towards the ecumenical discussion, believed to have been spurred by pre-CAN tensions and animosities among denominations are evidence of the misplaced priority. Recommendations such as a well-articulated ecumenical formation and information programs were seen as fundamental steps towards addressing the observed ecumenical challenges in CAN. Unfortunately, there seems to be little consideration on the possible and effective channels through which these proposals can be actualized. The study aims to explore the capacity of music serving as one of the tools in the entire scheme. The study is qualitative, employing a descriptive phenomenological design. Data for the study was collated through a review of related and relevant materials. The findings reveal that music remains a universal language and a means of communication; communicating emotion, thoughts and inspiration transcending race, religion and emotional wellbeing of our life. On this revelation, the study beckons on CAN among other strategies to adopt music as a dominant tool, which should not be restricted only to prayer meetings but constantly employ in the entire ecumenical process and dialogue.

Keywords: Music, ecumenism, ecumenical movement, ecumenical dialogue

Introduction

Ecumenism (Oikoumena) in modern usage has taken on a new meaning relative to the unity of separated Christianity. It refers to the movement of thought and action concerned with the reunion of Christians. It is in this sense that expressions such as "ecumenical spirit", "ecumenical movement" and "ecumenical dialogue" have come to refer to the impulse and efforts to bring about concord, agreement and unity among Christians. Therefore, any initiative, effort and activity geared towards realizing this vision are termed effort towards ecumenism. In Nigeria, though there have been traces of early ecumenical discussions and moves at the regional levels, the birth of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the mid-70s was believed to have begun a new phase in the history of ecumenism in the country. With the birth of CAN, the agenda for unity was shifted from mere regional plans towards a national agenda; an agenda that would embrace the entire Christian churches in Nigeria. Having been entrusted with this task, article 2 of the 1988 constitution of CAN defines the association as "a fellowship of churches working together to promote the glory of God by encouraging the growth and unity of the churches, and by helping them to salvation and all its fruits". The first among the objectives of the association states "to serve as a basis of action for the unity of the church, especially as intended in our Lord's

pastoral prayer: 'That They All May Be One (Provisional Constitution of the Christian Association of Nigeria, 1988, Art.2 & 3).

The extent to which CAN has been able to meet up with the above vision and objective remains a serious topic of concern to scholars and stakeholders in the country today. Appraising the entire activities of CAN in Nigeria, some describe the association as a mere pressure group, liaison committee and non-governmental organization or social organization merely concerned with the protection of Christian interest at the detriment of its major objective. There is not much done to promote theological discussions, no serious attention to theological discussions (Hammawa, 2014). Much emphasis is believed to have been placed on social ecumenism than on theological ecumenism. Among the identified confrontations to ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue in CAN were the traces of pre-CAN tension and animosities. It was discovered that members feel uneasy whenever they come together, which is spurred by their different theological backgrounds and unsettled thorny issues bordering on political interest. The denominations that made up CAN, as observed, have their different ideologies about Christianity and Christian unity; some of which are biased. The present study aims to explore how music (melody, rhythm and harmony) could enhance ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue among denominations in CAN.

The Concept and Importance of Music

Though traced to the ancient world and languages, such as, Old French, Latin and Spanish, Old High German, Dutch and Danish, the term music was believed to originally derived from Ancient Greek Mousike (art) of the Muses (the goddesses who inspired literature, science and the art), believed to be the source of the knowledge embodied in the poetry, song-lyrics, and myths in the Greek culture (Henry & Robert, cited in Wikipedia, 2021). Ancient Greeks, observe Ivana (2018), considered music not only as a type of art but as one of the seven free arts (Artes Liberales). It is on this very premise that music is defined as the art of arranging sounds in time through the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre (Encyclopedia Britannica 2021). Elements or aspects of music as captured by both Australian and USA versions are; pitch, timbre, texture, dynamics, rhythm, expression, form, structure, harmony, style, meter, and articulation (ACARA, 2015, NAFME, 2015, cited in Wikipedia, 2021). Types of music include popular music, traditional music, art music, music written for religious ceremonies and work songs. However, different styles or types of music may emphasize, deemphasize or omit some of these elements, and music is performed with a vast range of instruments and vocal techniques ranging from singing to rapping (Wikipedia, 2021). The creation, performance, significance and the definition of music, as meant to understand, vary according to culture and social context.

The importance of music, that is, the worth or value and significance as previous studies observe, cuts across various aspects of human life and existence. Music was referred to as one of the universal cultural aspects of all human societies. In many cultures, music is an important part of people's way of life, as it plays a key role in religious virtues, the rite of passage ceremonies, social activities and cultural activities. It is, for Liam (2020) a universal language. According to him, despite our division, age, culture, religion, upbringing etc; everyone has a song they love; a song that gets turned up every time it comes on. Two people who know nothing about each other or their language could start sharing the music they like and have a wonderful time. Music Liam maintains:

Helps to communicate the inexpressible and free the mind from the boundaries of speech, especially, in times when it finds difficulty in expressing our thoughts and emotions in words. Music does this by transporting us to an alternative place of emotion, rhythm and imagery, thus

enabling us to come to accept and come to terms with our emotions and situations (pp.7-8).

The importance of music in education and training has been high overemphasized by Psychologists, Neuromusicologists and Philosophers. Musical education, observe, was considered to be important for the development of an individual's soul, and the ones who received a musical education were seen as nobles and in perfect harmony (Savage, 2012 & West Martin, 1994, cited in Wikipedia, 2021). Making references to the ancient world, music according to him, was an important part of education, since it makes kids smarter. The mental health benefits of music were so well-established that there is an entire field called music therapy. Music is a medium of processing emotions, trauma and grief, but it brings with it the possibility of great joy and calm. Active listening can be used to regulate anxiety and mood. Music activates the neocortex's impulsive thoughts. "Music is something that has put people in touch with their innermost feelings. Different kinds of music work upon different emotions of an individual and release the various incomplete emotions leading towards total healing of body and mind" (Bhakthin.d, cited in Ruth, 2009, p.7). Music as observing Ruth (2009) communicates emotion, thoughts and inspiration transcending race, religion, and emotional wellbeing of our lives. Hearing a certain piece of music in one's mind observes Steven (in Ruth) is often transported very vividly to a place or a memory that means something to you. Research shows that when you join up words and music, information is moved from the left side of the brain over the right where long time memories are stored (p.7).

Music as a wonderful tool in education can also be seen in the work of Psychologist Howard Gardner's "Frames of Minds", where he presented the theory of "Multiple Intelligence". He identified nine different kinds of intelligence, which are developing through all our life. "These are verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, music intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic intelligence. The good news, he continues, is that musical intelligence is so powerful that through playing some instrument, all other types of intelligence are developing" (Ivana, p. 182). The contributions of Plato and Aristotle on the importance of music and education in music cannot be ignored. In Book II of the Laws, Plato defines education as the virtue that first comes into being in children. Education is how:

Pleasure and liking, pain and hatred, become correctly arranged in the souls of those who are not yet able to reason, and then, when the souls do become capable of reasoning, these passions can in consonance with reason affirm that they have been correctly habituated in the appropriate habits(Plato, Laws trans. 1980, 653b.p.32, cited in Lelouda, 2002).

He believes that education in music is important because rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the soul and exercise a strong influence upon it. According to Plato, a man enjoys the music to which he has become accustomed. This is why he considers the teaching of appropriate songs crucial, to "prevent the child's soul from becoming habituated to feeling delighted and pain in a way opposed to the law and to those who are persuaded by the law, to make the child's soul follow and feel the same joys and pains as an old man" (659d. pp.6-10, cited in Lelouda, 2002). The ability to feel delighted and pain in the appropriate way, as Plato observed, can be developed by teaching children those melodies and rhythms that have been decided by the wise men in the city to be the appropriate ones for children's education. Thus, children will eventually develop a taste towards good and bad. He concluded by insisting that education is coextensive with chronic song; a combination of vocal rhythms and modes with rhythm in bodily movement. The aim of music training, however, is not musical expertise but the cultivation of the soul. As he says, "the vocal aspect reaching the soul we regarded as education in virtue and we named it music (Laws, 673a, pp.4-5, cited in Lelouda, 2002).

Aristotle, on the other hand, devoted a substantial part of his views on the educational and social aspects of music, as can be seen in his work "Politics" (Aristotle, trans. 1984, cited in Lelouda, 2002). Like Plato, Aristotle believes that a proper curriculum should include the usual subjects of general instruction in is contemporary Greece-music, gymnastics, letters and drawing. He suggested that gymnastics should be taught from the age of seven to that of fourteen because according to him, young children are not able to understand music sufficiently to derive pleasure or edification from listening to it when they become older (p.433). The major functions of music as identified by Aristotle are; music is one of the greatest pleasures and means of relaxation after the pain with which all work is attended, music is as the employment of leisure (what men use to make their free time), music as an agent of moral instruction and finally, music as a means for the purification of such excessive feelings as exalted excitement or strong feelings of pity or fear (Aristotle, 1984, pp.1341-1342, cited in Lelouda, 2002).

Aside from the social, cultural and psychological importance of music lies the religious or spiritual value. Music as Ruth (2009) observes, has strong connections with religion, which can be used to help pupils engage with religious themes. Through musical encounters, pupils can experience learning about religion and the way music is used in that tradition. They can also learn how to express themselves and apply what they have learnt to their own lives. Music as Ruth observes, is an important part of Christian worship, thanksgiving and celebration showing how worshippers feel towards God. "Music unites the congregation so that God is worshipped with one voice. A wide variety of music is used in Christian worship including hymns, psalms, choral music, gospel songs, contemporary music and instructional music played for meditation and reflections" (p.24). From the above, is very obvious that the importance of music indeed cuts across the entire aspects of man's life; the social, cultural, religious, psychological, mental health and philosophical aspects.

Ecumenism and the challenges in CAN

Ecumenism, especially in modern usage, is a concern with the communion of Christians, covering all impulses and efforts to bring about concord, agreement and unity among Christians (Omonokhua 2015, Ibebuike 2006). Any initiative, effort and activity geared towards the realization of this vision have termed an effort towards ecumenism. Ecumenism or ecumenical dialogue, be it intra or inter-religious has two major dimensions; the spiritual and social. Spiritual ecumenism is both the soul and heart of the ecumenical movement, which is concerned with interior conversion and emphasizes the use of spiritual methods such as inner conversion, a change of heart, the sanctification of personal life, love, self-denial, humility, patience, renewal and reform of the church and finally, prayer (Vatican Council II, 1964, Onwubiko, 1999, Okonkwo, 2015). Social ecumenism, on the other hand, focuses on the issue of social concern and common cooperation among Christians as a point of departure, with less emphasis on doctrinal differences and reforms (Vatican Council II). Social ecumenism can be rightly described as ecumenism of action. Principles of ecumenical dialogue include; a sincere and honest search to understand, know and learn from one another and reconciliation and unity in truth.

Ecumenical movement on the other hand, "covers all efforts, activities encouraged and organized according to the needs of the church to promote Christian unity" (Vatican Council II, UR.4); that is, practical manifestation of the ecumenical vision and aspirations. It can be seen as a process which Christian churches that had been separated by doctrinal, social, ethnic, political, and institutional factors move towards cooperation and unity, by mutually understanding and respecting one another through dialogue, common witness to whatever gifts and gospel value they already share and experiences, and by a common search for that unity which the Lord wills

for His only church (Stratisky, 1995). Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is an ecumenical movement that promotes ecumenism among Christian groups in Nigeria. It emerged as the fruits of the earliest ecumenical cooperation among Christians in Nigeria, with the motto “That They May All Be One”. Three major strategies greatly used by CAN across the nation are the media, the workshops or study groups; either in institutions of learning or in Christian homes and finally, the churches and church-related social groups. The first strategy- the media, relies primarily on church-owned media networks, where it features articles devoted to either the issue of religion and politics or the need for Christian unity. The second strategy – the study group is largely carried out in the guise of prayer meetings and often held in people's homes, while the third strategy involves the use of the church and church-related social groups to educate and disseminate information about the mission of CAN to the grass root.

Even with these strategies, the overall appraisal of ecumenism in CAN indicates a minimal ecumenical impact among Christians and Christian denominations in Nigeria. This, as previous studies observe, was attributed to many factors, such as theological, fundamentalism, proliferation and proselytism, the quest for power (internal politics) and the romance of church leaders with politicians. CAN as the findings reveal, had departed from the original concept of her founding fathers and as such, do not take as a priority the motto “That They May All Be One”. As observed by Hammawa (2014), there is not much done to promote theological discussions, no serious attention to theological discussions. CAN is more of a social organization or non-governmental organization that mobilizes Christians for one thing or the other. “CAN scores high on serving as a liaison committee for common statements and action to the detriment of her other objectives. Unfortunately, CAN have failed woefully ecumenically speaking...” (Salihu, 2015, pp.12-13). Concerning the pre-CAN tension and animosities, as Akagha (cited in Enwerem, 1995) observe, is the uneasiness of members when they come together. This, according to him, is because of their different theological backgrounds and unsettled thorny issues bordering on political interest, that is, a clash of ideology. The denominations that made up CAN, Akagha maintains, have their different ideologies about Christianity and Christian unity; some of which is biased. None of them, he concludes, is presenting a centralized Christianity. The same was observed by Salihu. According to him, the reason why the Christian bodies in Nigeria are unable to engage Koinonia (communion) is that they are in serious competition with each other, competition that cripples ecumenical endeavours. Christian leaders may pay lip service to the unity of Christians and the legitimacy of Christian bodies in public, but in private they uphold their denomination as the only true church, presenting the other denominations as false (p.4).

On the proliferation of churches and proselytism, ecumenism, as observed, faces serious challenges today not only because of the plurality of religious beliefs but also because of the never-ending proliferation of churches. Onaiyekan (cited in Enwerem, 2014) observes that “churches are found largely by drawing people out of existing churches, and where proselytism in its most negative sense is the order of the day, we might not make much progress in any genuinely ecumenical way until this is addressed” (p.12). The quest for power (internal politics) and romance of church leaders with politicians(external politics) have been identified by most studies as the two sides of political influence and threats to ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue in CAN. The quest for control manifesting in sectional politics, political rivalry and tussle are been played in CAN. The desperation of some Christian leaders to capture the leadership positions of CAN is unhealthy to the ecumenical prospect of the association. The result, as to observe Kukah (1993) has always been the unending animosities and grudges over one another, especially after elections. Inter-denominational rivalry, according to him, becomes staunch amidst such a political tussle. Undoubtedly, observe Kunuba (2015) “the seedling of genuine Christian ecumenism cannot grow to maturity amidst this quest for power “(p.7). The second

dimension of political quest and threat in CAN is external politics. The romance among the leaders of CAN had succeeded in dragging CAN into partisan politics thereby compromising its ability to play its true role as the conscience of the nation and the voice of the voiceless, especially as slated in the 1988 Constitution of the association. This objective, according to Rengshwat (2014) may at the moment remain largely in the realm of wishful thinking. According to him, CAN tends to be at "ease in Zion" with the political culture of Nigeria instead of criticizing it. CAN have not always spoken loud and clear enough against corruption and corrupt officeholders because of their romance with the political leaders.

The study so far reviewed, reveals quite some proposals towards actualizing the ecumenical goal and vision of CAN. These include a sincere and honest search for truth, openness to truth, trust in the cosmic confidence of the "other" qua "other", and honest search to understand, know, learn and share from one another, reconciliation and unity in truth. Added to these, is "an urgent need for a well-articulated ecumenical formation and information programs for both the ordained and lay faithful" (Allison, 2015, p.331).

Music as a tool in Ecumenical Dialogue

The major challenges of ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue in the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as seen in the previous section, revolves around the departure of members from the theological (spiritual) background of her founding founders. This as the studies reviewed is a result of pre-CAN tension and animosities exhibited by the different groups that constitute the association. As such, CAN is described as dwelling more on the social and secondary dimension of ecumenism to the detriment of her primary and fundamental dimension- the theological. It is on this premises that Hammawa (2014) described CAN as a social organization or non-governmental organization that mobilizes Christians for one thing or the other. For CAN to attend its objective especially, as reflected in her motto "That They May All Be One", they believe that she must accord priority attention to promoting peace and unity among Christians. Suggestions such as the sincere and honest search for truth, openness to truth, trust in the other, honest search to understand and know, learn and share from one another and reconciliation and unity in truth were made by these studies. The question is how could music help to actualize this vision?

Music as explored above remains a universal language and means of communication. CAN comprises Christians from different cultural, religious and social backgrounds. It is made up of Christians from different denominational and theological backgrounds. This often constitutes a barrier in communicating and coordinating the activities of the association. Music, being a universal language can help to address the challenge of different ideologies among members of CAN. As Ruth (2009) observes, music helps to communicate the inexpressible and free the mind from the boundaries of speech, especially in times when it finds difficulty in expressing our thoughts and emotions in words. According to him, music communicates emotion, thoughts and inspiration transcending race, religion, and emotional well being of our lives. This can serve as a powerful tool for CAN in the pursuit and actualization of her vision.

Still in the list of the challenges of ecumenism in CAN has been the uneasiness among members whenever they come together, which is because of their different ideologies about Christian faith and unity. Using music can help to debunk biased ideologies, by promoting the right knowledge about the Christian faith and Christian unity. The value of music in education cannot be compromised. Music as revealed in our previous section serves as a medium of processing emotions, trauma and grief and then brings the possibility of great joy and calmness. As such, active listening to music can be used to regulate anxiety and mood. Like Plato (Laws trans. 1980, cited in Lelouda, 2002) observe, education is the virtue that first comes into being in children and

a means by which pleasure and liking, pain and hatred are correctly arranged. He considers the teaching of appropriate songs crucial, to prevent the child's soul from becoming habituated to feel delighted and pain in a way opposed to the law and to make the child's soul follow and feel the same joys and pains as an old man. The ability to feel delighted and pain in the appropriate way, he maintains, can be developed by teaching children those melodies and rhythms that have been decided by the wise men to be the appropriate ones for children's education. Music, he concluded is the cultivation of the soul.

By implication, to address the long-accumulated animosity and fundamentalist mindset among members in CAN, there is the need to start early to inculcate the right knowledge and understanding. It is undeniable that these exhibited animosities and biased mindsets are developed at much early stage of life, which is carried into the later stage (old age) of life. Using musical elements, such as melody, harmony and rhythm can help to propagate the right ecumenical principles and understanding, which will help to debunk the fundamentalist's mindset as experienced among members in CAN. Music can unite the congregation so that God is worshipped with one voice.

Conclusion

Ecumenical discussion and dialogue as revealed have not been accorded full attention in CAN. There has been much emphasis on the social dimension of ecumenism to the detriment of the theological dimension of ecumenism, which is believed to be both the soul and heart of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement. The reason for such negligence has been traced primarily to the uneasiness and unwillingness exhibited among members towards ecumenical discussions, which is caused by pre-CAN tension and animosities among denominations in CAN. Among the recommendations proposed is an urgent need for a well-articulated ecumenical formation and information programs for both the ordained and lay faithful. The means or tool through which these recommendations will be carried out has not been given due consideration. The present study recommends the use of music among other tools considering the inherent value of music. Music, as seen, serves as a powerful means through which information penetrates deeply into the most soul and exercises strong influence upon it. As meant to understand, music is the fastest means to reach the soul of man and it helps to communicate the inexpressible and free the mind from the boundaries of speech, especially in times when it finds difficulty in expressing our thoughts and emotions in words. To address this long animosities and hatred among denominations, which will directly enhance the willingness towards ecumenical discussions and dialogue, CAN should among other strategies and tools make music a dominant tool. The use of music should therefore not be restricted only in prayer meetings but should be used constantly. Ecumenical principles and vision should be translated and communicated through melody, harmony and rhythm at much early stage of life. Children should be exposed to such ecumenical principles earlier in life, which will enhance their ecumenical disposition and understanding at the later stage of life. This can be easily achieved through the use of music.

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