

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF MUSIC ON RELIGION: CHRISTIANITY AS CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Christian activities and especially worships have been greatly impacted and influenced since the introduction of the kind of musical ideas we have now, especially with Western modernization and influence in Nigeria. This has brought a development that cannot be denied and is so visible within Christendom. This has encouraged many if not all religious activities among Christians to give the music its rightful place. Consequent to the above, a lot of resources are being spent to ensure that music in every Christian gathering and Church is what it is supposed to be, as this is what has kept many in Christianity today. The thrust of this article is to look at what Christian music is all about, and this is examined under the place of Christian music in their worship and the impacts that are seen. Such impacts include; the life that music adds to the worship, the expression of religious experience through music, how it acts as a uniting force among the people, how music contributes to mobilizing the youths and empowering them and finally how music acts as a recreative activity.

Keywords: Music, Christian, Religious, Impact.

Introduction

Music and songs continue to play an important role in the life of God's people today. Of course, even in the secular, music is all around us. Modern technology daily brings music closer to us. Our lives are surrounded by music, from the television, radios, CDs, music players and today on our phones. This music serves different purposes for different people at a given time and the Churches today have created room for greater access to what music can do even in Christendom. The various Churches do all manner of Christian music ranging from Choruses, hymns, psalms, canticles and many other forms it takes. Music, centuries ago was perhaps for the background but today music has taken a great front role in the society. The same way it affects society, it affects the Church community even more. This is why many Churches and Christian gatherings dedicate quality time in their services or gatherings for music, be it praises or otherwise. People through music express their deep feelings for God. Music gives deeper meanings to words when they are heartfelt. The impacts of Christian music in worship are both physical and spiritual and cannot be exaggerated. No Christian gathering or service today can do without the place of music. Music is all around us like the air we breathe.

An Attempt to Define Christian Music

One of the greatest questions people ask today is what makes a piece of music Christian or secular. Most people have argued that it is on the words of the music; that is to say, that once the words contain such religious terms as Jesus, God, and perhaps Spiritual passages or contents, then the music is Christian music. Others argue from the point of view that it is about the author or singer. They claim that what makes a song or music Christian is in who performs it. This is

confusing because we can find a person who is not a believer or Christian singing Christian songs beautifully. Another confusion is that one who is a Christian can be seen singing to songs that has no Christian content. Many therefore try to define Christian music either from the singer or the words being sung. Unfortunately, there is no universal definition of what specific qualities a song has to possess before it could be called Christian music; but in a few lines, we can say that Christian music is music that revolves around the beliefs, structures, cultures and narratives of Christianity. The main topics may include fasting, praise, worship, penitence, lament and repentance. This is different from religious music. Religious music on the other hand can be music for the use of various religions. What music means to religion may not be exactly what it means to another. Music in Islam for example may not be the same as music in Christianity. In a nutshell, Christian music is a category under religious music that concentrates only on Christianity; its belief and way of life.

The Place of Music in Christian Worship

Music serves some special purposes in our lives and especially within the Christian Circle and some of them are as follows:

Music informs us about the Gospel

One of the most beautiful things about many Christian songs is that they are coined out from the verses of the Scriptures. With this, we find that not only do we sing Christian music just for the listening pleasure; they also teach us about Christ and what our faith is all about. Before we hear a portion of the scripture read or preached in a service, we have already taken in page after page through our singing the teachings of the scripture. So hymns and other forms of music instruct us in the Good news, touching our hearts as well as our minds.

Christian Music is a Relationship with God

Music connects us to God in a unique way. There are situations that prayers, fasting and many others do not link us up to God the way praises or music in general does. It allows for a direct relationship with God in ways that sermons cannot. When we sing deeply in worship, we allow a part of our hearts to speak to God in a way that does not happen usually even during preaching. Something great happens when believers sing. This is not fully felt when one sings alone but when one sings in the community of God's people, something awakens not only in the heart of each person but also in the collective heart of the body of Christ, connecting us and to God in the deepest part of who we are. The bottom line is that God created us this way, to communicate with the very depths of our Spirit and have a close relationship with Him that way. That is what music can do.

Christian Music is Fulfillment of God's Command

There is no greater joy a Father has than finding that the Children are obedient. Throughout the scriptures, we are encouraged and commanded to sing praises to our God. The Psalms in the Holy book is an expression of this command because it is a book of worship to God. The psalm talks about singing praises to the Lord with the lyre and making the sound of melody. On the other hand, it speaks about serving the Lord with gladness and coming into His presence with singing. God calls us to sing praises to Him and to exalt His Holy name. In worship, music affords us the privilege to fulfil this command. Imagine worship of God without music. Such worship will be incomplete. Singing is an important part of who Christians are and who God created them to be and this is why they are filled with the Spirit whenever they do that.

Music in Christian Worship is an Expression of Love for God:

How can one say he/she loves God without singing His praises? The scriptures again demand us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength. This

has to do with both the outer and inner man. Christian music is one way in which we express our love towards God with our whole being. We engage every part of our being in the worship of God. The interesting thing about this is that when we express our love for Him in praises we are changed and transformed, our hearts are drawn closer to God, we are strengthened even in the most difficult moments, we are built up, convicted of our shortcomings and restored, and something godly happens to us.

The Impact of Christian Music on the Religious Worship

Here is the major thrust of this article and we discuss some impacts music have made in Christendom. We may not be able to discuss all but we take a few of such tremendous impacts.

a) Unity in Diversity:

This is of course one of the most important benefits of Christian music in worship. When Christians gather to worship, they lift their voices and instruments in the worship of God, and this is done in one accord. There is no room here for barriers, whether from language, tribe, country, sex, class, age, among many others. The foregoing reason is why you may find people of a particular language lifting their voice to sing songs from another language in worship. For example, you can find the Igbo singing Yoruba songs, you can find the Yoruba singing Ghanaian songs among numerous examples. Music is therefore doing a lot in bringing people together in worship at this time, the nation is crying for national unity. Not only is this about languages or tribes, but we also find individuals of various classes, (rich and poor) of different ages coming together to worship the same God at the same place and at the same time, nothing would have done this easier if not for music. There are also such music and hymns that encourage and stand for unity and oneness, and this can be found in the wordings of such music. Take for example, in Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised: The Book of Common Prayer (1662), you find in Hymns Two hundred and ninety-four “Brothers joining hand to hand in one bond united, pressing onward to the land where all wrongs are righted: let your words and actions be worthy your vocation. Chosen of the Lord and free heirs of Christ's salvation” (P. 90). The words of such hymns and Choruses as this, minister grace to the people and remind them of the need to live in one accord. This has gone a long way in fostering unity and oneness of purpose among people of different tribes and Orientations.

b) Adds Life to Worship

Before now, religious worships were not as interesting as they are today. People were barely allowed to clap, dance, sing or do such praises that satisfies their spiritual thirst. This made the service so stereotyped and lacking in life. The coming of Christian music especially as regards choruses changed this narrative. Now people can sing, dance, make melody, play instruments and do a whole lot of things in the worship of God. In our African context, this change or influence of music was greatly done by the Western Culture. Alloy (2003) for example maintains that the traditional ways of worship has been greatly changed and modernized with the coming of Westernization. In some Orthodox Churches of Old, the clapping of hands was not even allowed during worship but as time went on, our worship changed by the influence of music. Our local drums which were tagged 'devilish' by some could now be used to worship God. The coming of the English Man's band has also dominated many areas, but the important thing is that the coming of their musical instruments and their usage in worship added to the beauty of the religious worship of Christians. Sibani (2018) aptly noted that “This traditional drum makes the music of the people very significant and meaningful” (P. 67). Music has indeed added life to worship and this is why many worshippers today look for such Churches where they would be free to express their love for God in music. This is also one of the reasons why Churches today spend a good amount of money trying to ensure that they meet up to standard and that the music life of the Church is alive as was rightly pointed out in the introduction.

c) An Expression of Religious Experience

For Uche and Agunwa (2011), the religious commitment of people is a form of religious expression following religious experience in life. They went further to explain that it could refer to the various ways adherents of religion are actively involved in worship. From the above, we can see that the religious experience of people is shown in their acts of worship, and of course, music is an important component of worship. The point here is that individuals do not have a better way to appreciate and express their experiences in their walk with God rather than in worship, which has to do with music. In many music lyrics, we see people telling of their walk with God and expressing their deep and sincere hearts of worship towards the same God. This expression could also be a type of prayer. People use music as prayers to God also, expressing laments, pleas and expectations in most cases.

One of the most interesting aspects of this is that music lines serve as strength and encouragement in the most challenging times for Christians. Many at their worst moments may not find succor in any verse of scripture but may find rest in musical lyrics which appeals to them. Most religious experiences are indeed found in the lines of music composed by people who passed through such experiences.

d) Provides for Recreation

Seeing this subheading, one will of course ask how and where the relationship lies between music and recreation. Obiefuna (2018) talking about the evangelical/Pentecostal group in his work on the proliferation of Churches observed that "many Christians respond to the appeals and attend these rallies because they find in them answers to their thirst for scripture reading, for singing and dancing, emotional satisfaction and their need for concrete and clear answers". (P. 80). With the above, we can say that many adherents of Christianity who attend worship in most cases do not only go for the word or to receive healings. Many of the worshippers also attend because of the music, this is so they can dance and feel relieved in their bodies. When such music as choruses are going on in Christian gatherings or worship, it affords the people the opportunity to dance unto their God and this is a great source of recreation activity. People who do not have the time or opportunity to do the usual exercise seize this as a great opportunity.

Apart from the dancing, Churches and groups or organizations in recent times organize music concerts and shows, where you find people from all works of life gathering to listen to good music and feel refreshed by the music ministrations. Recently in December 2019, the House on the Rock Church organized one of such programs which they tagged 'The Experience' and this program recorded millions of people coming together just for music. The people who also operate instruments like the drums, cymbals and many others do a lot of physical and mental exercise that they would not have been involved in or experienced if not for music in worship. The introduction of music in worship has therefore done a lot of good in providing an opportunity for people to recreate.

e) Mobilization and Empowerment for Youths

This is another impact that is felt well among the youth, and the youths are of course the future of the Church. Obiefuna (2018) carefully pointed out that the Church in Nigeria needs to look at how seriously she is taking her youths as part of the evangelical process of the Church. Music has done a lot of good to the various Churches in mobilizing their youths. This is because many of the youths may not find interest in sermons or the reading of scriptures but once the music is involved, you can find them in their numbers actively involved. Not only about music has being a mobilization tool for youth, but it also done more good in empowering these youths. Today because of music many youths have been able to learn how to operate one instrument or the other.

Without the place of music, this would not have been possible. These instruments that they learnt have turned out to be putting food on the tables of many youths; many have gone international doing this music and are earning good money. Music is a strong discipline in our universities and colleges and is being taught for learning. If not for music, many of these youths will not be much useful to the Church and maybe there would not have been a better avenue to mobilize them. Our Choirs and band today in most places of worship are occupied by 80 to 90 per cent of youths. If not for music, perhaps many of these youths will not be involved in religious activities and may hardly be gathered. Chine (2017), explained that music has endowed in the youths' great talents and these talents have announced them before kings and princes, not mere men. In her words, "David's talent announced him. Let us call a young lad who is gifted with songs and harps so that when the evil Spirit tormented our master, King Saul, he would play him the harps" (pp. 24-25). The point is that the recent flow of music has taken youths to places that ordinarily they will not be allowed to enter. This is a great plus and impact on Christendom at large.

Conclusion:

The sound and messages of good music release directly impact listeners in powerful ways. From the article, we find that this statement is true about Christianity as a religion. Music has impacted both the young and old in tremendous ways and has even contributed to cultural revivals, making people aware of how their rich cultures of dance, songs and instruments can be in the worship of God. One of the greatest impacts again is the emotional balance it brings. People often do not find better relief than that which music affords them. Music has the potential to change a mood, shift an atmosphere, and encourage different behaviour. In short, music has cultural, moral and emotional influence in society and upon religion. Can we imagine Christianity without music? This could be the case of what is called 'improper fraction'. Music is not however without its negative impacts as we find some musical lyrics with unhealthy words and some others, especially in music videos that encourage drug abuse, abusiveness and many other wholesome vices. Though we find such trends more in secular music, however, we may be bold to say that music has brought more positive impacts than the negative around and within us.

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