



EXAMINING THE CONTEXTUALIZATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF GOSPEL MUSIC AMONG CHRISTIANS IN OGUN STATE

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Abstract

The study examines the contextualization and cultural identity of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises of all Music Students from Music department in Federal College of Education Abeokuta, Ogun State. A random sampling technique was used to select 100 respondents as sample for the study. Instrument for data collection was a 6 item questionnaires on four point scale. The instrument was subjected to a test-retest reliability using teachers outside the population. The data collected were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of confidence. The study revealed that worship in an African milieu is imperative for the Yoruba Christians in order to experience holistic and fulfilling worship. If the ritual experience does not support the attainment of this goal, then yearning for indigenized Christian worship would be unfulfilled. Therefore, it is concluded that the process of contextualization and cultural identity cannot be ignored if the message of the Gospel music is to be a part of life of the people. It is highly recommended that the church should conceptualizes the Gospel without compromise and the church should be able to speak to the cultures of all the people represented

Keyword: Contextualization, Cultural Identity, Gospel Music, Christian, Ogun State

Introduction

Gospel music is a genre of Christian music. The creation, performance, significance, and even the definition of gospel music vary according to culture and social context. Gospel music is composed and performed for many purposes, including aesthetic pleasure, religious or ceremonial purposes, and as an entertainment product for the marketplace (Jackson, 2010). Gospel music usually has dominant vocals (often with strong use of harmony) with Christian lyrics. Gospel music can be traced to the early 17th century. Hymns and sacred songs were often repeated in a call and response fashion. Most churches relied on hand clapping and foot stomping as rhythmic accompaniment. Most of the singing was done a cappella. The first published use of the term "gospel song" probably appeared in 1874(Jackson, 2010).

Contextualization is putting language items into a meaningful and real context rather than being treated as isolated items of language for language manipulation practice only. Contextualizing language tries to give real communicative value to the language that learners meet. The context can help learners remember the language and recall it at a later date. Learners can use natural learning strategies to help them understand contextualized language, such as guessing meaning from context.

Cultural identity is the identity of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity or upbringing (Mandelbaum, 2000). Contextualization is necessary because it is the process whereby the gospel can be communicated to a culture. Whiteman (2000) said that "Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture". Contextualization of the gospel among Christians has become a basic and generally accepted principle in modern missions. Yet, it is a challenge to define the meaning, limits, and application of the term "contextualization", as it relates to missions of the Christians. A simple uniform definition of the concept still eludes Evangelicals, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists and other Christian denominations. While most missions and missionaries seek to apply the contextualization theory, the term is so amorphous that there is still no single, widely accepted definition thereof (Kärkkäinen 2000).



Contextualization through music and worship means that the church is attempting to communicate the Gospel in the way that they are leading the music and the congregation in times of worship in such a way that those of another culture may also relate. As the body of Christ is doing this collectively in corporate worship, they are able to engage in more meaningful worship to God because they are having a greater view of who God is as the Savior of the whole world. Whiteman (2000) also said “Encounters with Christians from other cultural contexts expand our understanding of God, for no longer are we satisfied with our own limited perception and experience...” Contextualization, therefore, forces us to have a wider loyalty that corresponds to an enlarged and more adequate view of God as the God of all persons, male and female, and as a God who especially hears the cry of the poor. God can no longer simply be the god of myself, my family, my community, my nation; such a god is ultimately an idol or false god, one made according to my narrow and limited image and perspective (Arti, 2012).

The study has thus far revealed the importance of engaging in contextualization; however, it is necessary to go another step further to explore critical contextualization. Critical contextualization goes beyond simple contextualization or uncritical contextualization as Paul G. Hiebert (2011) defines contextualization as Non-contextualization, Uncritical contextualization and critical contextualization. Critical contextualization holds to a strong basis of Scripture within cultural analysis to ensure as much as possible that the gospel is being understood and that there is no room for syncretism. It does this by making sure that contextualized practices are biblically based, the Holy Spirit is recognized in the lives of believers, the church acts as a hermeneutical community, the community is continuing conversations with evangelical theologians, and contextualization is an ongoing process that the church is engaging in (McIntosh and Alan 2012).

Hiebert presents several steps for critical contextualization that are beneficial to multicultural ministry in the church when dealing with diverse cultures and backgrounds engaging in contextualized Christian worship. He shows that the first step is to study the local culture; he states: “Here the local church leaders and the missionary lead the congregation in uncritically gathering and analyzing the traditional beliefs and customs associated with some question at hand (Newby, 2015).” The second step is to study the Scriptures regarding the question. Third, the people will critically respond by evaluating the question against their biblical understanding in order to decide if something can still be used for Christian worship or not. Finally, the culture will be able to develop new contextualized practices based on Biblical truth (Davis and Nikki, 2015).

The concept “contextualization” is an important aspect in mission to and evangelization of Gospels, as it is based on presuppositions as to how people should be reached by means of the gospel and how their experience should be related to faith in Christ. What are the views on contextualization and what are the implications of the various views of gospel evangelism? Are there acceptable ways of contextualizing the gospel in reaching Christians? This article endeavors to address these questions from a biblical point of view in several steps. Such a response will avoid the extremes of cultural prejudice, on the one hand, and syncretism, on the other. This process includes scrutinizing general Christian and Evangelical approaches to Christian evangelism, investigating the anthropological sources of most theories of contextualization, conducting a well-balanced and hermeneutically sound study of the Word of God, engaging in responsible theological dialogue with the proponents of various methodologies, and establishing some fundamental biblical principles for the contextualization of the gospel among Christian.

The concept of contextualizing gospel music has continually received attention throughout the history of the Church. From the nineteenth century onwards, there have been complaints within Christendom that the gospel needed to be propagated in the culture and language of the recipients. Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) canvassed for a mission strategy in which the target indigenous peoples’ needs would be met without prejudice to their cultural backgrounds. In the same vein, Henry Venn (1796-1873), argued that the autonomy of a Church was contingent on the degree of its three ‘self’s’; namely: self-government, self-propagation and self-supporting.⁴ In other words, he was of the opinion that an autonomous Church must be organized and operated within the political, social and economic contexts of the worshippers. In spite of the above assertion of Anderson, Venn and others, the concept of a Euro-American form of gospel music or worship still persists among the Churches in Nigeria. Hence this study, which is an attempt to examine the possibilities for creating contextualized worship in the churches in Nigerian (Adeyanju, 2009).

Christian teaching understands worship as the life-blood of the Church. Worship embraces the whole life of the human being because it is humankind’s response to the Omniscient and the Omnipotent God. That is probably one of the reasons why the Church has been making frantic efforts to reform worship from time to time in order to make it meaningful and spiritual for each generation’s worshippers. Garrett affirmed that ‘the Faith and Order Commission of



the World Council of Churches has the study of worship and trends towards its revision as one of its chief concerns' (Adogame et al, 2008). Today, Christians - particularly ministers and laypersons who want to know how the worship of their congregation can be improved - always yearn for the ways to do so. Consequently, this research make an attempt to provide contextual gospel music within the congregation of the Ogun State Churches.

When talking about gospel music and cultural identity, many people have the misconception that music is a universal language, in that it speaks the same way for all people. However, music is unique and there are many genres of music around the globe and has many uses and forms (Gerardo, 2012). Those musical forms are also meaningful to the societies where they originate. (Martin, 2004) says that music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them. Culture influences music as the members of the culture are creating it, they are including aspects of the culture into their music, as Alan (2004) writes: Music is the product of man and has structure, but its structure cannot have an existence of its own divorced from the behavior, which produces it. In order to understand why a music structure exists as it does, we must also understand how and why the behavior which produces it is as it is, and how and why the concepts which underlie that behavior are ordered in such a way as to produce the particularly desired form of organized sound(Alan, 2004).

Likewise, the use and function of certain music genres are also shaped by the culture where they originate. This means that when approaching a musical genre it is important to know how the genre is used within the context of the culture and how it functions or why is it used. Merriam discusses these issues of use and function and writes: "In studying music, the investigator is forced to move through the total culture in search of music relationships, and in a very real sense he finds that music reflects the culture of which it is a part."Alan (2004)says these are important issues for churches seeking to engage in multicultural worship and the contextualization of music and worship. Understanding how music transmits cultural values and is a direct representation of the culture that it is a part of means that music and worship ministries should take on the role of ethnomusicologists so as to understand the ways that certain songs relate to the cultures represented within their worshipping assemblies.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the research was to examine the contextualization and cultural identity of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State. The specific objectives are to;

- i. Examine the importance of contextualization and cultural identity of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State.
- ii. Examine the relationship between cultural identities of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State.

Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant influence of contextualization and cultural identity on gospel music among Christian in Ogun State.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between cultural identities of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises of all Music Students from Music department in Federal College of Education Abeokuta, Ogun State. A random sampling technique was used to select 100 respondents as the sample for the study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was developed in closed-ended of Yes or No. The instrument was moderated by an expert in the field of educational management and psychology who affirmed its validity. Reliability indexes of 0.8 and 0.85 were established for the two parts of the instrument through a test-retest method at an interval of 3 weeks. The data collected were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of confidence.

Results

H₀₁: There is no significant important of contextualization and cultural identity on gospel music among Christian in Ogun State.

Table1. Summary of the significant importance of contextualization and cultural identity on gospel music

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r-Cal	p-Value	Decision



Contextualization and cultural identity	100	10.03	2.356	.542	.000	Reject
Gospel music	100	15.13	4.564			

The result in Table1 shows the influence of contextualization and cultural identity on gospel music among Christian in Ogun State were positively related, $r(158) = .542, p = .000$. This indicates that there is significant importance of contextualization and cultural identity on gospel music among Christian in Ogun State because the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore H_{o1} which states that there is no significant important of contextualization and cultural identity on gospel music among Christian in Ogun State is rejected.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between cultural identity of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State.

Table2. Summary of the significant relationship between cultural identity of gospel music among

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r-Cal	p-Value	Decision
Cultural Identity	100	9.94	2.540	.387	.000	Reject
Gospel Music	100	10.83	4.804			

The result in table 2, shows the significant relationship between cultural identity of gospel music were positively related, $r(158) = 0.387, p = .000$. This indicates that there is significant relationship between cultural identities of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State, because the p-value is less than .05 level of significance. Therefore, H_{o2} which states that there is no significant relationship between cultural identities of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from Table1 indicates that there is significant important of contextualization and cultural identity in gospel music among Christian in Ogun State because the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance. This finding is in line with that of Martin, (2004) which says that music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides the means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them. Culture influences music as the members of the culture are creating it, they are including aspects of the culture into their music, as Alan (2004) writes: Music is the product of man and has structure, but its structure cannot have an existence of its own divorced from the behaviour which produces it. In order to understand why a music structure exists as it does, we must also understand how and why the behaviour which produces it is as it is, and how and why the concepts which underlie that behaviour are ordered in such a way as to produce the particularly desired form of organized sound.

The result in table 2, shows the significant relationship between cultural identity of gospel music was positively related, $r(158) = 0.387, p = .000$. This indicates that there is significant relationship between cultural identity of gospel music among Christian in Ogun State because the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance. This finding is in line with that of Black (2000) which says that contextualization is necessary because it is the process that the gospel can be communicated to a culture. Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. Similar studies with Kärkkäinen (2000) that contextualization of the gospel among Christians has become a basic and generally accepted principle in modern missions. Yet, it is a challenge to define the meaning, limits, and application of the term “contextualization”, as it relates to missions to the Christians. A simple, uniform definition of the concept still eludes Evangelicals, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists and other Christian denominations. While most missions and missionaries seek to apply the contextualization theory, the term is so amorphous that there is still no single, widely accepted definition thereof.

Conclusions



Worship in an African milieu is imperative for the Yoruba Christians in order to experience holistic and fulfilling worship. If the ritual experience does not support the attainment of this goal, then the yearning for indigenized Christian worship would be unfulfilled. Therefore, it is concluded that the process of contextualization and cultural identity cannot be ignored if the message of the Gospel music is to be a part of the life of a people.

Recommendations

- i. In light of the above conclusions, this study recommends that the church should conceptualize the Gospel as a whole without compromise. In conceptualizing the church should be able to speak to the cultures of all the people represented. The Gospel should speak to the recipient culture and answer basic questions the people are asking. It will also help if the people in the recipient culture would read the Scripture with a hermeneutic in which the Gospel and culture become mutually engaged in a dialogue whose purpose is to place the church under the lordship of Jesus Christ in its historical situation. This could mean receiving the Gospel in a way that is understood according to the words, cultural forms and symbols of this community.
- ii. It is recommended that the church rises up to a point of reading and interpreting the Scriptures for themselves. Meanwhile, while it has not been emphasized in the past, it should be emphasized that expatriate missionaries ought to learn the recipient culture. However, because the culture of any people is reflected in their language, the preachers of the Gospel ought to learn the language of the recipient culture. An expatriate missionary could go to language school before engaging in intercultural communication of the Gospel.
- iii. It is also recommended that the expatriate missionary ministers to both spirit and body and meets the needs of the people in the community whether the needs be physical, spiritual, and emotional. This should be done in a way that is relevant to the particular culture.

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