

## **The Rejected Stone Now the Cornerstone: Cultural Elements in Musical Performances in Selected Pentecostal Churches in Lagos**

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of Christianity in Nigeria witnessed the prohibition of many traditional musical practices and instruments for worship. While many African-initiated churches embraced indigenous music and musical instruments for worship, some Pentecostal churches do not consider such musical practices suitable for Christian worship. Nevertheless, recent trends show that many Pentecostal churches, old and new, massively employ traditional music and instruments in their worship services. This study examines the various cultural elements that have been embraced in the musical performances of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. It discusses how these elements are shaping Pentecostal worship. Furthermore, it explains the significance of these indigenous musical practices for Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria. Data for the study were gathered through interviews and participant observation in The Redeemed Christian Church of God and Daystar Christian Centre. The study relies on the theory of cultural nationalism for its analytical engagement. Findings reveal that cultural elements such as traditional musical instruments, praise singing, song texts, dance, neo-traditional musical genres, audience participation and many others have redefined the liturgy of the churches under study.

***Keywords:*** *African music, RCCG, Nigerian Pentecostalism, Indigenous music, Daystar Christian Centre*

## **Introduction**

The growth of Christianity has been identified by many scholars (Ayegboyin & Ishola; 1997, Oshitelu; 2007, Abodunde; 2009 to mention a few) as one of the significant development in Nigeria since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is attested to by the proliferation of various denominations with all kinds of nomenclatures all over Nigeria. Abodunde (2009) categorised churches in Nigeria into six movements.

The missionary movement, African church movement, Prophetic/Healing movement, Pentecostal Movement, Evangelical Movement and Charismatic movement. However, this study employs the categorisation of Ayegboyin and Ukah (2002) in Loko (2011). They categorised the churches into four; namely, Mainline, Ethiopian, African Indigenous and Pentecostal Churches.

The mainline churches variously referred to as mainline, mission, traditional, orthodox, historic and established churches<sup>1</sup>. The churches are Catholic, Anglican, Qua Iboe, Salvation Army, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist Churches and others. The Ethiopian churches are precursors of African indigenous churches include; Native Baptist Church, United Native African Church, African church, Bethel and United Methodist Church (Eleja)<sup>2</sup>. The African indigenous churches also known as the Prophetic movement include Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim church, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and Celestial Church of Christ. The Pentecostalism is classical and indigenous groups. The classical groups are churches in Nigeria that have affiliation with foreign bodies such as Faith Tabernacle, Apostolic Faith, Foursquare Gospel and Assemblies of God. The indigenous groups are churches that are independent of foreign

control. They are self-propagating and self-financing and also have their leadership within the country. They include; Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church Living Faith World Outreach (Winners Chapel) and Daystar Christian Centre, to mention few. Pentecostalism according to Acts 2: 1-4 was as a result of the event that took place at the Upper room, when the disciples of Jesus Christ experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in tongues. The emergence of modern Pentecostal movement has been addressed by several scholars from two perspectives (Akpan; 2012, Abodunde; 2009 and Udok & Odunuga; 2016 to mention few). Firstly, it was traced to the revival that took place in Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906. Also, to the Bethel Bible College established by Charles Parhan in Topeka Kansa, a recognized figure in the evolution and spread of Pentecostalism. Although, Azusa street revival is usually considered as the birthplace of Pentecostalism. Fahy (1998) and Adejube (2020) listed the physical traits that are noticeable in Pentecostal churches as loud music, groaning, shouting, yelling in worship, jumping and dancing in the spirit.

The early missionaries that came to Nigeria introduced worship practices such as mode of dressing, music and speech which were foreign to the converts. Abodunde (2009) discussed how the introduction of Christianity in Nigeria by the missionaries led to the demonisation of all forms of cultural heritage. In responding to these foreign practices, many Christians left their churches to form new denominations that incorporated elements of traditional African worship and music. While other churches embraced some cultural elements of their environment, the Pentecostal churches remained adamant. In the recent times, all the traditional elements known to be rejected and abandoned by these Pentecostal churches are

now introduced into the church services, especially in their music.

Adejube (2020) opined that one of the tools in attracting the faithful to a Pentecostal church is through music. This could be attributed to the musical practices of Pentecostal churches that are reflective of the cultural environment of their members. This study therefore examines the cultural elements that have been employed in the musical performances of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, using the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Daystar Christian Centre.

### **Methodology**

Data for this study was collected through ethnographic fieldwork, interviewing key personalities in the music ministry of the two churches. For the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Kunle Ajayi (Intercontinental Music Director), Mr. Ayodele Samuel (Music Director for RCCG, Covenant Sanctuary, Lagos Province 30), Mr. Akingbala Michael (Member, RCCG National Mass Choir), Deaconess Damelda (Music Director, RCCG, Peculiar People's Chapel Zone, Lagos Province 72), and Dcn Johnny (Choir Master, RCCG Potter's House) were interviewed. Also, for Daystar Christian Centre, Dr. Seyi Kenny (Music Director, Daystar Christian Centre) and Mr. Kujore Joseph were interviewed.

There were observations of their musical performances during church services, through the television, recorded audio and videos. Also, participant observation was employed being an active member of RCCG, Potter's House Parish, that annually celebrates a Festival of Cultural Praise, where all the ethnic groups in Nigeria represented in the church Praise God in their cultural ways.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to some parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Lagos and Daystar Christian Centre in Ikeja, Lagos. The study covered only the cultural elements that were employed in the musical performances of their worship services. Some cursory references are made generally on Pentecostal churches in Lagos. The Redeemed Christian Church of God represents the older Pentecostal churches while the Day Star represents the new Pentecostal churches. They both often employ African Traditional elements in their musical practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Cultural Nationalism. Loko (2011), explained that the theory was propounded by Johann Gottfried Von Herder, who applied it to his study of national identity, character and cultural traits among the federating states in Europe. The main thrust of this theory is that members of groups sharing a common history and societal culture have a fundamental and significant interest in their culture and sustaining it across generation. Cultural Nationalism is exhibited when people of different countries become increasingly aware of their national identity.

The theory of cultural nationalism has been applied to many studies on African musical traditions by scholars such as Euba (1986), in his study of music in Yoruba churches, noted that they employed basic traditional elements in church music by making use of occasional poetical forms, such as *Orikii* (praise poetry), and Yoruba chant modes similar in style to *Ijala*, *Ewi*, *Rara* and other popular types of traditional chants. He observed further the use of Yoruba musical instruments and the accompaniment of the music with dance movements. Omojola (1987) explored the theory of cultural nationalism in his study of

the works of modern Nigerian composers. He argued that the works of church composers like Mojola Agbebi, Emmanuel Sowande, Revd. J.J. Kuti and Ekundayo Philips, to mention just a few, were all motivated by the wind of cultural nationalism blowing across the country.

Ogli (2020), also adopted this theory for his study on folklore proverbs in indigenous Christian gospel songs. His study revealed that the artistes whose works were analyzed are known gospel music artistes within their societies. These artistes strongly identify with their culture through the use of their community language as their medium of expression, culturally situated imageries, proverbs and musical instruments associated with their culture.

In the context of this paper, Pentecostal churches in different parts of Nigeria, draw and derive their musical resources from three important elements; cultural, nationalistic and syncretic elements. Given all the aforementioned elements, in all of their musical traditions, and with particular reference to their music during worship services, there is an engaging relationship between the forces of change brought by the Europeans, those of retention present in indigenous African music and nationalistic tendencies in the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. While the impact of western music on the musical performances of these Pentecostal churches remained strong, African folk songs and African-derived performance practices have recently distinguished the music of these churches.

### **The Rejected Stone Now the Cornerstone**

The biblical statement “The rejected stone now the Cornerstone” is found in different bible passages (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10-11, Luke 20: 17-18, Acts 4: , 1Peter 2:4-6 and Psalm 118:22-23). From the passages above, the statement is found in the gospels where

the parable of the vineyard is been discussed. Jesus clarified this statement to the Jewish leaders (the builders) that they rejected Him as the Messiah and He finally become to them a Cornerstone. Through His death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus became the Cornerstone of the Church. The Cornerstone is laid first at the head corner and governs all other corners. It is a huge stone placed first in a building; all other stones flow from it. Jesus is the Cornerstone that the Church is built on.

In the context of this study, “The rejected stone now the Cornerstone” aptly describes how traditional elements in Nigerian Christianity, especially in Pentecostal churches are changing. Missionaries brought Christianity to Nigeria, but the cultural activities of their converts, including chanting, dancing, praise chanting and the playing of traditional musical instruments were strongly opposed because they are perceived as connected to paganism. The missionaries only promoted European forms of worship, such as singing hymns, playing organ and worship in foreign languages like English (Ojo; 2006). As time went on, these same activities that were once disapproved of were adopted by almost all the Nigerian Pentecostal Churches, to create a unique and distinctive Nigerian brand of Christianity.

### **Brief on the Redeemed Christian Church of God & Daystar Christian Centre**

i. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

RCCG is a Pentecostal denomination that was founded by late Rev Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi in 1952. He started the church as a fellowship called Egbe Ogo-Oluwa at 9, Willoughby Street, Ebute Metta, Lagos. They continued to meet there until they were able to acquire some land nearby and relocated to the present site of the headquarters of the Church at 1-5, redemption way, Ebute metta,

lagos. The fellowship began with nine members.

After Pa Akindayomi's death in 1980, Pastor Enoch Adeboye was consecrated as the General overseer of the church in 1981. Adeboye was a former Mathematics and thermodynamics lecturer at the University of Lagos who joined the church in 1973. He became one of the interpreters translating Pa Akindayomi's sermons from Yoruba to English. He was ordained a pastor of the church in 1975.

The Church has grown rapidly in leaps and bounds since 1981, with over 14,000 churches and five million members in Nigeria in 2008. Today the RCCG has churches in more than 190 countries around the world.

The church is known for its Holy Ghost Service, an all-night service that takes place every first Friday of the month at the redemption Camp in Lagos, and live streamed to other parts of the world. The service is also held physically in other parts of the world including the United Kingdom, India and the United State.

#### ii. The Daystar Christian Centre

Daystar Christian Centre was founded through a divine instruction given to the Senior Pastor of the church in July 1994, instructing him to teach biblical success principles. Although, Pastor Sam and Pastor Nike Adeyemi seek the face of the Lord earlier in April, 1994.

In obedience to the instruction given by God, Pastor Sam started the teaching first on radio and then later discussed with a few people about the church arm of the vision. On 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1995, Daystar Christian Centre was inaugurated.

The vision is growing and lives are being impacted to the glory of God as the vision is to raise role models and empower people to discover, develop, release and maximize their potentials in God. The core values of the church are innovation, righteousness, excellence, accountability and love.

### **Cultural Nationalism in the Musical Performances of Pentecostal Churches**

There are inherent features in music used in traditional setting, whether religious or social, which have been adapted for use in one form or the other in Christian worship. Hence, some features of traditional Nigerian music will be identified by examining the general features of traditional music, to ascertain which aspects have been adapted for use in the musical performances of the two churches under study. These features include; instrumentation, praise singing, song text, dance performance, repetition, call and response, neo-traditional music, as well as congregation participation.

#### **i. Instrumentation**

In order to worship God better in the traditional way that the people were familiar with before their conversion, many of the traditional musical instruments that were described by the early missionaries as being demonic and paganistic in nature were now introduced into the musical performance of the churches under study. The most common traditional musical instruments employed by the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Day Star Christian Centre are membranophone (musical instruments that produce sounds through the vibrating stretched membrane) and idiophonic (self-sounding instruments) musical instruments. The parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (LP 30 and LP 72) interviewed in this study make use of *Gangan* (talking drum) in all

their musical performances. Some parishes also make use of *Omele* (a set of three small drums).

At the national headquarters of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Ebute Metta, the choir usually use the *Gangan*, *Omele*, *Akuba* (a set of highly tuned mini-conga like drums), *Sakara* (shallow drum with a circular body made with baked clay). Day Star Christian Centre in Ikeja, employed all the above-mentioned traditional drums in its worship services. In fact, what attracted the researcher to this church is the way traditional elements are employed in the musical practices of the church, especially during their special services such as the annual carol service and *Alujo* (Danceable) praise.

The Chordophonic musical instruments commonly found in the musical performances of the two churches are *Sekere* (rattles), *Agogo* (metal gong), and *Apepe* (wooden clapper). Many musicologists such as Euba (1960), Nketia (1974), Omibiyi (1977), Vidal (1988), Samuel (2010), have researched into various aspects of traditional musical instruments of Africa. They were all to establish the fact that vegetation determines instrumental distribution which is responsible for regional styles of music in Africa. The two churches employ traditional musical instruments that are commonly found in their environment where the churches are situated.



Daystar Christian Centre Traditional Instrumentalists



RCCG. LP72 Traditional Drummers

## ii. Praise Singing

Praise singing is an integral part of African musical tradition and culture, especially in Yoruba land where these churches are situated. This praise singing is usually rendered in both secular and religious festivals, it is called Oriki Kiki in Yorubaland. Agordoh (1994) explained that the tradition of praise singing came from the worship of Orisa, chanted during weekly worship and festival by the Egungun, Ifa and Ogun devotees. It was then carried to Kings, Chiefs and individuals whose genealogies and achievements are rendered to make them proud. Oye (1998) also noted that this form of praise singing (oriki) was adopted in the 1950s by popular musicians especially Juju and Highlife musicians as a way of extorting money from the people. This practice is still in use till date, whereby popular musicians sing praise of their fans in order to extort from them. In the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Day Star Christian Centre, during praise and worship session, usually a lead singer who is a member of the choir chants the attribute names of God, oftentimes there is a background singing by other choir members. Also during special service, like in the Redeemed Christian Church of God where many parishes do have cultural praise, the choir eulogises the holy names of God in different languages especially in the three major languages of Nigeria (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo). It is mostly in Yoruba language, which may be attributed to the environment where the churches are situated. Many times, during the praise singing, the churches engaged a more fascinating and exciting form of worship with singingclapping, dancing and stamping of the feet.



Eulogising the attribute Names of God

## iii. Music and Dance

Omojola (2006) emphasised that there is an enduring relationship between African music and dance. Music and dance in Nigeria are almost conceived as an inseparable artistic twin in performances. He further explained that in all communities in Nigeria, drummers, singers and dancers interact to enact a multimedia network of artistic relationships, with element like costume, scenery and make-up enhancing their spectacle. In Yoruba traditions, instrumentalists and dancers are constantly engaged in a dialogue session in which dancers respond to the symbolic and rhythmic gestures provided by the drummer.



Dance Accompaniment During Special Rendition at LP72

In the musical activities of the two churches, dance plays a vital role. Apart from worship songs, almost all the music are performed along with dance, especially during praise session. In the course of the interview, Mr. Akingbala, a chorister in RCCG said that it is one of the ways to show appreciation to God the Almighty, expressing their inner feelings through dance. Usually, the congregation engaged in improvised dance which oftentimes are not uniformed. However, the context in which music is performed determines if there is need for dance to go along with the music.

#### **iv. Repetition**

Agu (1999) opined that repetition is one of the basic structured features of African music. According to Samuel (2009), repetition is the restating of a musical idea, either directly or with slight modifications. This idea could either be rhythmic or melodic. One of the vital compositional devices which RCCG and Day Star music ministry use in many of their musical performances is repetition. The melodies for praise and worship are always short and repetitive, making use of variations in order to lengthen the song. Example of such song is:

#### **v. Call and Response Anthiphony**

Faseun (2005), acknowledged that traditional African music is largely antiphonal whereby a leader commences an antecedent to which a larger chorus responds. The two types of call and response antiphony were found to be present in the musical performances of the two churches. According to Ekwueme (1976), call and response occurs when antecedent by the soloist is repeated by the larger group. The phrase “Oba ni o, Oba ni o, Oba ni (He’s king) is repeated or echoed immediately by the chorus. One of the styles of singing in Pentecostal churches is such that sometimes an identified song leader whose

voice is always louder than that of the other singers and congregation, it is the leader that sings the leading phrase which is repeated exactly by the choir. The second type of call and response anthiphony is the one in which the lead singers asks question to which other members of the choir and congregation responds. Many times in this type of call and response, the leader and chorus make use of varying texts at different points.

Example:

Call:           Eni Oluwa se lore da, ko nowo soke

Response:     O se mi o o o, o se mi o

#### **vi. Yoruba Neo-Traditional Music**

Akin Euba (1988), described Neo-traditional music as the type that were created entirely from traditional elements, re-inherited and performed within new social and musical contexts. These types of music do not have any stylistic affinity with western music but have Islamic influences and are associated with Yoruba Muslims. Example of such music are Sakara, Apala, Waka and Fuji. Church leaders and music ministers in many of the Pentecostal churches in Western Nigeria began to invite gospel musicians who adapted these neo-traditional music into their musical performances. The emergence of this genre of music can also be traced to some higher institutions in South Western part of Nigeria, where the campus fellowships invite different gospel musicians to perform during their special programmes, especially those that can pull out crowds. This gradually crept into almost all the Pentecostal churches in Western Nigeria.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God and Day Star Christian Centre are not left behind. The two churches are at the forefront of

performing these genres of music not only during special programmes but even at thanksgiving services. According to the Music Director of Day Star Christian Centre, Dr. Sheyi Kenny, the church usually organises a special praise service tagged “Alujo Praise”. Different kinds of Yoruba popular songs such as Waka, Fuji and Sewele are performed. Mr. Ayodele who is also the Music Director of RCCG, Lagos Province 30, during an interview said it is only on special services his choir performs Fuji and Apala. Being a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, I also observed that at National programmes at the Redemption City, there is always musical renditions of neo-traditional music, especially by African Praise Team. In 2019, RCCG, Potter’s House in Akesan Lagos organised a special outdoor praise evening where a Fuji Gospel Musician was invited to perform as the only guest artiste (Okiki Jesu). It was a talk of the community because all passerby even from other religions stopped and participated in the Praise programme. The programme made the church to be popular in the community.

The employment of these neo-traditional music especially Fuji, Waka and Sewele during worship services in the two churches has brought a tremendous change to the growth of the churches. As this has led to the influx of new members into the church. During an interview with Okiki Jesu the Fuji Gospel Musician, he said Pastor Sam Adeyemi who is the founder and Senior pastor of Day Star encourages the musical performances of the genres because he realised that the congregation is always joyful as a way of showing their acceptance of the genre.

#### **vii. Congregation Participation**

Omojola (2006), noted that musical performance in Africa are often typified by a spectacle in which virtually everyone in the

arena of performance participates. Audience participation is prevalent in Africa music. The audience is not separated from the artiste. This means there is no strict demarcation between them.



Members participating in the performance at RCCG, LP30

Musical performances in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria entail dancing and a sort of responsorial congregational performances. The interview carried out in the two churches revealed that members are not restricted from responding to the choir performances. Unlike the early practice of singing hymns without drumming accompaniment, the congregation respond with singing and dancing to the rhythm produced by the instrumentalists and songs by the choir. Deaconess Damelda said in her parish (Peculiar People’s Chapel), almost in all their services, especially during praise and worship, offering and thanksgiving sessions, the choristers and the instrumentalists perform, while members of the congregation respond in dancing. This is a common feature of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.

#### **viii Song Text**

Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, often use the medium of English language for communication even in their song texts. The song texts covers the entire Christian doctrine. Loko (2011) observed that song texts are considered as one of the best means of educating the Christian worshippers. She further explained that it is the more reason why it is very important that song texts should be appropriate enough to express the spiritual experience of the worshippers. Deducing from the above statements, musical idiom and language during worship services should be something the congregation can understand in order to improve the quality and extent of meaningful participation which is the African way of life. The texts of songs to be performed in any worship service of the churches in this study depicts the kind of service. Several times Pastor E.A. Adeboye (The General Overseer of R.C.C.G) had commented on this severally during Holy Ghost Service at the Redemption Camp. He said song texts should reflect the theme of the service, that revival songs should not be performed during thanksgiving session and also in the language the average congregation would understand. The song texts express the congregation feelings at different levels of human emotion. Their song texts often bother on thanksgiving, praise, faith and prayer.

Despite these churches performed in different Nigerian languages, the choir still sing more of Yoruba songs and the congregation do participate fully in the service.

### **The Significance of Traditional Musical Practices in Pentecostal Churches in Lagos**

As a result of cultural contact, which was caused by the contact between Nigerian culture and the European culture of the early Pentecostalism, the Pentecostal churches in Lagos have integrated some aspects of traditional musical culture to Christian musical practice through traditional musical

instruments, praise singing, music and dance, neo-traditional musical genres, congregation participation and song texts. All these play significant roles in the growth of Pentecostal churches, especially in Lagos.

From the interview and participation observation, the employment of traditional musical practices in worship services of the RCCG and Day Star have brought a good number of new members who are actually used to their cultural practices. For example, in Potter's House Parish of RCCG, there are few elderly women who don't understand English but joined the church because of the musical practices that embraces traditional musical practice, especially during thanksgiving. Often times the church makes arrangement for Yoruba interpreter to interpret the message for the women.

One of the respondents, Deaconess Damelda, said when songs are performed in any of the Nigerian languages, especially in Yoruba, that there's always full participation by the congregation, they all want to show sense of belonging in the musical performance, revealing their acceptance of the musical genre that is been performed at the moment.

Also, the employment of these traditional musical elements according to Pastor Kunle Ajayi makes the musical messages very clear, applicable and homely for every member of the church during any worship service. This is because the songs relate with the cultural knowledge of the congregation. Just as Ogli (2020) emphasized on the use of African proverbs by indigenous gospel artistes in modern times, so also is the engagement of traditional musical elements that help to project African philosophies through the choir musical performances in the churches discussed in this study. Dr. Sheyi Kenny mentioned the various Yoruba philosophies that are embedded in Day Star Christian Centre's musical performances; eulogizing

and figure of speech like proverbial sayings and so on. This act enables the congregation to really feel at home during the musical renditions because the songs are rooted and reflective of their cultural environment.

### **Conclusion**

It is no gainsaying that the employment of traditional musical elements in worship services of the Pentecostal churches in Lagos have continued to increase as spiritual and music ministers are seeking for more innovative ways of improving on their musical practices in order to attract more members to their churches and also to retain the old members.

The level of congregation participation during musical performances with the exploration of both traditional and western musical practices have created a space for personal and corporate expression of feelings and emotions towards God. However, caution must be taken to guide against excesses, in terms of the quality of the kinds of music performed; there is need for the assessment of the melody, the song texts, the instrumental accompaniments and the context in which the songs are performed. Putting in mind the resultant effects of such songs in the lives of members.

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