



MOYA CHRONICLES

A PUBLICATION OF MISSIO AFRICANUS



Picture: Soweto Gospel Choir

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRO-GOSPEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF MUSIC

Okuchukwu Akpe

I grew up in a conservative Pentecostal church in Nigeria with a strong emphasis on being born again, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and holiness. The church considered some activities secular or related to mainstream life; thus, they were heathen and often not allowed in worship. The implication was that many teenagers and youths felt left out of fellowship. Consequently, they left for other churches that could accommodate them and the ways they love to worship while still adhering to a standard of holiness. There are still churches like my childhood congregation, which are losing young people to what they describe as the “New Generation” churches.

The rigidity of such churches as my childhood congregation is often apparent in their attitude towards church music, which only enhances Gospel communication. Specific genres of music, especially from the younger generation, are either not *churchy* enough or unedifying. Historically, in these churches, Carol, Mass, chant, and hymns are more receptive than pop, hip-hop, R&B, and others. As a relatively new genre of music, Afro-Gospel is also disputable. Critics have argued that it does not fit into the mould of traditional Church music. Could this reservation be because of the indoctrination that nothing of African origin, including culture and worship, is good?

In the last few years, a trend has been gaining ground: the uprising of young, unconventional Nigerian Christian creatives like Gaise Baba, Gil Joe, Limoblaze, Marizu, Angeloh, Anendlessocan, Nkay, Frank Edwards, Ada Ehi, and others. These artistes are riding on the new wave of Afro-beats to make church music. Their songs reflect a combination of sound biblical lyrics, multilingualism, and a hybrid of African sounds, to reach and unify their ethnically diverse and numerous audiences. The music also seeks to break the seeming language barriers that ethnically or regionally popular genres face.

Commanding a massive following from Christian Millennials and Gen-Z in the continent and the diaspora, the new kinds of church music hope to infiltrate cultures. They exhume God’s love, freedom, and the new life in Christ with excellence, pure artistry, and the Gospel. The songs suggest the unconventional idea of being God’s favourite babies and foster kids to their audience. This image gives credence to their stance and goal of reaching the farthest of the earth for Jesus. In light of the above, this article reflects on the implications of Afro-Gospel to Christian theology of music. It equally hopes to enlighten African church leaders on managing the surge of talented and anointed creatives in their congregations.

First, in Afro-Gospel, African Christians can comfortably connect with their Africanness and authentically express themselves in worship. African Christianity is still grappling with its identity. It is proactively seeking to decolonise itself from overwhelming western orientations yet, seeking to be faithful to the unnegotiable teachings of the Scripture. Therefore, exploring rich African cultural resources expressive in dance, clap, laughter, and other gestures in alignment with sound biblical practice and truths is essential to church music in this era. The African church must leverage and permit the integration of healthy and appropriate African cultural assets to bolster its theology of worship and music to extend its evangelistic reach to the world.

Second, Afro-Gospel incorporates orthodox tradition and biblical lyrics in expressing worship, thus preserving the traditional heritage and presenting the Gospel unadulterated. This amalgamation derives from the Afro-Gospel's recognition of worship as a necessary tool for acknowledging the supremacy of the Divine and the human soul's yearning for His source—God, the Divine. In essence, Afro-Gospel music reinvigorates church music. Through its fresh theological images, lyrical forms, and sounds, it reiterates the orthodox beliefs that are often more concerned with sustaining a yearning for God and drawing nearer to Him. This characteristic of Afro-Gospel helps to articulate and address the innermost desire of the human mind (to connect with its creator) in worship. The worshippers can then better enjoy worship as they are able to express themselves in languages that are meaningful to their minds and consistent with the Scripture. Therefore, support for Afro-Gospel music is essential, and proper education in that regard is beneficial to the church.

Third, the younger generation connects better with sounds and other aesthetic enhancements in the church. These features appeal to them and must not be demonised in any way but further considered. Afro-Gospel music accommodates most of the aesthetic qualities that the orthodox genre overlooks. It is also fitting as a replacement for the popular Afro-Pop songs promoting unguarded

freedom and promiscuity in society. If unedifying kinds of music with their obscene contents will not continue to lure the young people away from God, then a matching alternative is Afro-Gospel music. They carry the Gospel messages of the believer's new identity in Christ, freedom from sin, genuine love for one another, and God's good nature. They also remind us of God's expectation from His children: to be true ambassadors of Christ on the earth, even in entertainment.

In conclusion, to sustain this wave of the African church's expansion and evangelistic impact, African church leaders must embrace the rise of Afro-Gospel. They must see it as a blessing that helps to attract and retain the focus and allegiance of the younger generation to the church. Indeed, the music genre provides a means and tool for these youths to serve God with their talents in the company of other saints. The African church leaders and the older generation will preserve the church's future by supporting Afro-Gospel music. They can provide the younger generation with proper tutelage and discipleship to keep them within the balance of the scriptures in their beliefs expressed in their music, art, language, and appearance. By implication, materialism (Luke 12:15), vainglory (Luke 14:7-11, Galatians 5:26, Philippians 2:3), and selfish ambition (Matthew 23:11) will sparsely inform their songs. The younger generation will also be better guided in distinguishing between reaching the world for God and seeking validations from the world they are trying to win over. Drawing this line is essential so they can remain true vessels of honour in God's hands for evangelising the world.



Okuchukwu Akpe is a Bachelor's student of Missiology at ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja with budding interests in African Christianity & Cross-Cultural Mission.

SUBSCRIBING IS EASY

WhatsApp '**SUBSCRIBE**'

to **+44 7566 826690**

and we will add you to our lists. You can also access previous episodes on our website:

<https://missioafricanus.com/category/moya-chronicles/>

The Emergence of Afro-Gospel and Its Implications for Christian Theology of Music