

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF INDIGENOUS MUSIC IN

MULTI-ETHNIC WORSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Multi-racial congregation is becoming more common as the world becomes more of a global village. Likewise the use of indigenous music in worship is getting more common as churches aim at contextualizing their worship services. The purpose of this essay then, is to provide a theological framework for a meaningful use of indigenous music in multi-ethnic worship services so that all shall worship meaningfully.

In an attempt to achieve this goal, a field research was carried out on the challenges facing the use of indigenous music in worship. As sample, some multi-ethnic English-speaking Nigerian Baptist Convention Churches in Ogbomoso town were used. It was discovered that 63.5% of the research "sample population" were cut off in worship when song which has no meaning to them are sung. That is, worship does not actually take place when worshippers are introduced to a foreign musical language without express^{effort} to interpret the music. Other hinderances to the use of indigenous music in multi-ethnic worship were also discovered.

In a bid to surmount this problem, some biblical and practical principles in form of a theological framework based on field research findings and on an interpretation of first Corinthians fourteen verses twenty-six and thirty-three were made. It was discovered that for indigenous music to be meaningful in worship, it must be God-centred, be edifying and be presented in an orderly manner.

Among others, the essay recommends that for effective contextualization, the church should improve its use of indigenous music by engaging the services of Holy Spirit led ethnomusicologists. Above all worship leaders should select and promote the use of indigenous music which are theologically sound and spiritually edifying to all worshippers.

B. CONCLUSION

It was discovered from statistical analysis that the indigenous music of other tribes presents God in the same way as the indigenous music of the research sample population. This means that Africans think basically in the same way about God. Paul Schilling said that people often sing what they believe. Therefore, they should be helped to sing what they believe.¹

Secondly, it was also discovered that the problem of indigenous music in multi-ethnic worship is largely a language barrier issue than musical style difference. 90.48% of respondents were of the opinion that they are not always embarrassed when members of other tribes sing and dance jubilantly in worship as against 9.52%. They may not be able to participate reasonably, nevertheless, they are not disturbed in worship.

The problem of language barrier is so crucial that respondents claim they are always cut off in worship when they do not understand the language in which the music is sung. A total of 63.5% of the target population as against 36.5% fall into the category of non-worshippers when the music language is not clear to them. This percentage of non-worshippers notwithstanding, a total of 82.54% of respondents were still strongly in favour of the use of indigenous music

¹S. Paul Schilling, The Faith We Sing (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), Pp. 24-30.

in multi-ethnic worship lending support to the validity of this essay.

It was also discovered from the analysis that 41.27% of the target population preferred their music and language to be used in worship. This percentage claimed that they feel slighted, dejected and abused when their music and language is omitted in worship and other indigenous languages are used to render the music. This means that respondents are very conscious about the use of their language in worship and would not want to be left out especially if they are a minority tribe.² The issue is how can every worshipper who really wants to worship be encouraged to do so especially in a multi-ethnic worship with all its challenges? Below are some practical steps to take in a bid to surmount the challenges of indigenous music, so as to achieve a viable indigenous worship.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of indigenous music in multi-ethnic worship is a sensitive issue that needs to be handled with a lot of care and guidance from the Holy Spirit.³ The following

²Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," Missiology, 12, no. 3, July 1984, p. 288. When a tribe is deliberately left out in worship, it creates ethnic tendencies and or leads to ethnocentrism. Hiebert defines ethnocentrism as the act of prejudging other cultures using as the criteria for our judgements the standards of our culture rather than those of the Bible.

³Hustad, Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal, p. 70. Hustad says that "A church should be condemned only if it fails to consider worship and its corporate expression, seriously for worship of God is the highest calling and greatest privilege of Christian believers."

suggestions will be made to church leaders, worship leaders and the entire congregation as they put their hands together to improve upon the state of indigenous music in contemporary worship.

With regard to the problem of language barrier a common language of communication understood by all worshipping tribes should be used. This language of communication is a kind of vernacular⁴ that is understood by a cross-section of the congregation. This will facilitate the translation of indigenous music for the entire church no matter the tribes present. There is no reason why a particular language of a tribe should be used in a multi-ethnic worship as if it was more sacred than the others. This however, does not purport that a particular native tongue cannot be used as a language of liturgy if the Community of worship so deems it necessary. The community may also decide to change their decision as the church grows and develops new traits that warrant a change.

Secondly, for indigenous music to flourish in multi-ethnic worship, there is a serious need of training ethnomusicologists. These are a group of experts who specialize on carrying out research work on ethnic music. Ethnomusicology is a branch of musicology that borrows from anthropology. For indigenous music to make meaning in worship, the services of

⁴ Clifford Howell, "Vernacular," The Westminster Dictionary of Worship, 1972 ed., p. 365. Examples of vernacular is the case of Aramaic and Greek that were used in worship instead of Hebrew in Palestine. After some time, Latin came to replace Greek for the sake of making worship meaningful.

