

## Music and Pentecostalism: The Nigerian Experience

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### Abstract

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Pentecostalism is a charismatic reformation movement which emerged among the protestant community in the early twentieth century by the radical revivalists in Los Angeles. This paper attempts to examine the work of Pentecostalism and its exerted influences on the musical practices in the churches in regards to techniques, mood, rhythm, harmony, text, melodies, form, and mode of presentation in church worship. It reviews the hallmarks of Pentecostalism by elucidating aptly on the etymology, history and background and beliefs of Pentecostal movement in the worldview and Nigeria in particular. Materials used in this work are mostly from religious and related music literatures. Using the historical research design, the study discovered that the movement has influenced the spiritual and musical perception of the people to a more contemporary style of praise and worship music rather than hymn singing alone. In light of the findings, the appraisal of the Pentecostal movement is recommended in order to maintain the age long tradition and philosophy of Pentecostalism.

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**Keywords:** Music, Pentecostalism, Music styles, Pentecostal movement

### Introduction

The word 'Pentecostalism' is derived from the noun word 'Pentecost' which is used in two different connotations: First, it is an event observed by the Jews as the feast of the week. Hence, in Judaism, it is the feast of the week (a prominent feast in the calendar of ancient Israel, celebrating the giving of the law on Sinai). Secondly, for Christians, it commemorates the day of descent of the Holy Spirit upon the early apostles as described in the book of Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-21. But for the purpose of this work, the focus is on the later which deals with the distinctive Christians movement with doctrinal priority on the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The global beginning of the Pentecostalism is often traced to the Azusa Street Revival which took place in Los Angeles in 1906. But according to history, groundwork for Pentecostalism started in 1900 through Bethel Bible College established by Charles Parham in Topeka Kansa. Charles Parham (4<sup>th</sup> June 1873-1929) was a prominent figure in the development and spread of Pentecostalism. He started bible school in quest for the New Testament evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The move was experienced with the proof of the in filling of the Holy Spirit whereby students started speaking in tongues. This however, are some considerations put by some Pentecostal groups that the movement started earlier and spread to Texas and California. Eventually, through this revival movement led by the leadership of William .J. Seymour the activity spread to other areas including Los Angeles where the great Azusa street revival commenced, which is considered to be the birthplace of the Pentecostal movement.

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The Azusa street revival was a great Pentecostal movement that drew people from all round the world for total experience and manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The meetings were inter-racial, with African Americans playing a major role in early Pentecostalism, despite segregation at that time.

During this time people started exhibiting new Pentecostal traits and so they uniquely form new Pentecostal groups. By 1914, all the Pentecostal groups decided to have a conference to agree on a uniform doctrine. The conference was addressed as 'The General Council of the Assemblies of God'. This marked the beginning of the Assemblies of God known today – the first and largest Pentecostal denomination in the world. Creech (1996) also confirms that, "today, the worldwide Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal denomination". Based on this view, it is opined that the Assemblies of God is the bedrock of Pentecostal movement all over the world. Akpan (2012) puts it that, 'the Assemblies of God is an outgrowth of the world-wide Pentecostal revival that broke out in 1901. Its official history began in ...1914.' He further stressed that, "though there were other organizations with similar visions of the revival of the power of God, the Assemblies of God undertook the leadership role in the American Movement that placed it in a strategic position historically." Though, over time, issues like, racial tension, doctrinal disputes and other factors emerged and cause the split into other Pentecostal denominations which are: Apostolic Faith, Church of God, International Pentecostal Holiness church, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel and many others.

### **The emergence of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.**

The three main religions practiced in Nigeria are: Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. Christianity as one of the conspicuous religions in Nigeria was introduced by the missionaries in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Portuguese. Many missionaries spearheaded Christian activities in Nigeria. Among them was Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist mission at Badagry. Other missionaries in the country expanded the work of Christian activities in Nigeria to reach every part of the country. The churches that dominated the area at first were the early Christian denominations known as mainline or orthodox churches. It was the development of the missionary work that outgrowth and superseded the indigenous traditional religion of the people. With the continued apt growth of Christianity in Nigeria another dimension of Christian revival movement (Pentecostalism) sprang up in early 1960s whose firm belief is on the Holy Spirit's power for miracle and healing. The heart burning zeal revivalists surfaced with emphasis on the in-filling of the Holy Spirit and miracles and strict adherent to scriptural doctrines with key beliefs on certain issues. This phase of Christian movement called Pentecostalism spread so rapidly and affects every region in Nigeria.

Unlike other form of early Christian groups(mainline or orthodox churches), Pentecostalism stands to completely defend the accuracy of scriptures through the spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues as the necessity of reflecting the same kind of spiritual power and teachings as found in the early church of the Apostolic Age. Moreover, people tend to acknowledge their sins by accepting Christ as personal Lord and Savior. As earlier stated, this revival movement broke out across the board through Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles to other parts of the world. As the charismatic movement spread into many places, it found many converts into third world countries including Nigeria. Considering this fact and the line of history with the view that General Council of Assemblies of God was unanimously established to create uniformity among the Pentecostal churches in Los Angeles in 1904 from all races, it is therefore assumed that, the history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is affiliated to the history of Assemblies of God in Nigeria. Akpan (2012) states,

..... the rise of Pentecostalism between 1901 and 1906 known as the Pentecostal movement emerged from the holiness movement established by Charles Parham to teach the Pentecostal truth. . . William Seymour a black holiness preacher, student of Parham's bible school started revival meeting at Azusa street that lasted for three years. . . out of this revival, Pentecostalism spread throughout the world with Assemblies of God in the forefront. The Azusa street revival thus became the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement. (p.61,62)

The movement in its embryonic stage which covered the period between 1930-1940, were championed by foreign Pentecostal denominations such as Apostolic church, Assemblies of God and Foursquare Gospel churches in Nigeria. However, there are different opinions and school of thoughts concerning the antecedent of Pentecostal church in Nigeria. While virtually all Pentecostal denominations trace their origins to Azusa Street, an account of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is viewed and outlined as being first initiated in the country by the spirit filled groups known by the Yorubas as Aladura (praying people) such as Eternal Sacred order of Cherubim and Seraphim and The Celestial Church in the period between 1910 -25. Another opinion of some people is that the spread of Pentecostal movement from the Azusa street revival in Los Angeles to other countries of the world affected the move of Pentecostalism to other countries including Nigeria.

Akpan (2012) confirms the fact that, "the history of Assemblies of God in Nigeria can be traced to the arrival of Rev and Mrs Shirer in 1939, and Rev. and Mrs E. L. Philips in 1949, the first Missionaries of Assemblies of God in Nigeria." The movement even spread and influenced some of the mainline or orthodox churches between 1960s-1970s. Prior to this great revival urge, Dada (2004) had the opinion that, Neo – Pentecostalism found its way in Nigeria in the mid-sixties through the activities of some American faith healer and Televangelists like Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copland, John Avazin T.L. Osborn and others and they laid special emphasis on a direct and personal experience with God through the baptism of the holy spirit. The new movement was characterized by the manifestations of the Holy Spirit according to him, and this began to appear profusely through great conviction of sins and imminence coming and expectation of Christ's return. Most of such revival movements were manifested through the expansion work of Arc Bishop Benson Idahosa who established Church of God Mission in 1972 with a new influence in the 70s and 80s. Another revival church was Deeper life founded in 1975 by W.F. Kumuyi, others are Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel) founded by David Oyedepo founded 1986, The Redeemed Christian Church of God and many other independent church denominations founders.

The turn of the century witnessed the establishment of many individual churches with rapid assimilation of Pentecostal values and practices into church system, experiencing the acceptance of the alternative methods of dressing, music and mode of worship. These churches are on increase today, while some operate on economic grounds, some use other means to draw many people to their churches, and some operate under the unction of the holy spirit according to their call. In the light of this, it may not be doubtful to suggest that few Pentecostal churches are upholding to their founding ideology and not all the churches exhibiting the work of the Holy Spirit are truly led by the move of the vision. Many have however, fallen along the way.

### **Music in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches**

Music and religion are inseparable, be it traditional, Christianity or Islamic. It plays a vital role in the relationship between man and God. For Christians, music forms one of the fundamental elements in church liturgy and it plays an integral part in worship service. However, music has a propelling effect of inspiring ones soul to God, but it all depends on the kind and style of music performed. In the early years of missionary work in Nigeria, music in liturgical service was developed and centered with such features as hymn singing, chant and anthem with no application of indigenous musical accompaniment.

Considering the missionaries influence, the early churches which were established by then, adopted the European style of music and mode of worship disregarding other religious methods and practice. Hence, music in the church circle was pattern after the European interest - anthems, chant and hymn singing with exclusion of indigenous musical instruments.

Vidal (2012) has it that the musical form of the early church consisted of Gregorian chants and hymns in the Catholic church while in the Protestant churches Anglican chants such as those contained in the old chant book, new cathedral Psalter and Irish chant book featured prominently in the order of the divine services and that these chants and canticle were used in the singing of psalms. In about six decades ago, this religious sect (Pentecostalism) emerged, as an offshoot of Christianity in search of revival and personal relationship with Christ. It heralded and witnessed the adaptation of new musical genre of emotional expression by lifting up of hands prostrating and other exciting and emotional gestures in form of worship to God. Also in Nigeria, the introduction of African idioms through the use of native airs and the use of indigenous African musical instrument came up. Many Nigerian composers according to Vidal (2012) emphasized less on religious dogma of the early missionary work and composed in Nigerian indigenous language where the musical contents are based on models of indigenous forms accompanied with indigenous instruments. The solemn expression marked and conveyed by strict seriousness during church services are replaced by new contemporary styles of worship.

The Contemporary Christian music being one of the musical genres that developed out of the Pentecostal movement expresses more on the modern style of music than the hymns and chants. Its typical usage is based on pop, rock or praise and worship styles, arranged with the lyrics of the themes to include - message of salvation, faith and encouragement, spirit renewal, praise and worship. Pentecostalism had a great influence on the style of Christian music administered in churches, its music have gone a long way to performing gospel pop and rock music in some churches.

While this has raised sensitive issues among churches, some churches totally discourage it; and simply find the concept of Christian pop/rock music to be an unusual phenomenon, since rock music has originally been associated with themes as sexual promiscuity, rebellion, drugs and other topics considered unethical to the teaching of Christ. However, many studies on church growth have shown that, churches which have grown in size do so after changing the style of music. For instance, James Emery White, a consultant for preaching and worship within the Southern Baptist Convention in USA, made a statement about how many churches that changed styles to using more contemporary Christian music, appeared to have a quicker growth.

As this special form of Christianity started to proliferate, a new form of music also emerged as well, which now become so prevalent in churches. The setting of music to match the contemporary society varies from church to church. Even in some orthodox churches music styles are organized in contemporary form of music to meet the needs of the current society. The disparities between the orthodox and the charismatic churches may include: complexities of instrumentations such as pop, rock, jazz and reggae rhythms, singing of high praise without sheet, charismatic display of singers among other features.

From the information gathered however, the use of organ music for hymn singing in Pentecostal churches is not completely eradicated, but has been revisited. Ogunyemi (2013) observed that, the coming of organ either pipe or electronic have raised the demand of hymn singing of good music in parts, descant singing from sheets and orchestration have been revisited.

From his excerpt of 2013 yuletide celebration, he states that in the last few months, Pentecostal churches like the Redeemed Christian Church (RCCG) City of David, Victoria Island, Lagos, RCCG Olive Tree, New Covenant Church, Apapa and few other Pentecostal churches have installed at least one organ in their churches, the reason for the development is the desire to sing hymns, this they believe to best achieve on the organ than the keyboard.

Thus, the tradition of using organ for hymn singing by the early church missionary is reconsidered again by some Pentecostal churches, without being left alone to the orthodox churches with their conventional practice of hymns and chant. These churches (mainline churches) were regarded as the promoters of organ music in the country as laid down by their progenitors (the early missionaries). But the concept of musical activities in churches have changed drastically.

### **Musical Trends in Pentecostal Churches**

The Pentecostal movement has become the unconventional traits of religious beliefs and practices which have come to stay. Its characteristics features show that it is a prevalent religious sect in Nigeria which is built on spiritual engagements. However, the move has consumed the conventional musical practices in the churches to the extent that most mainline churches do no longer lay emphasis or cherish the solemnity of church music as given by the early missionaries. These Pentecostal churches are known for a distinctive style of singing choruses which is referred to as praise and worship. This is often done spontaneously with handclapping, singing, shouting, dancing, speaking in tongues and prophesying. Praise worship being one of the exuberant characteristic activities of the Pentecostal churches, has from its inception realized its performance as spiritual electric current with emotional switch that can ignite power.

While Pentecostal congregations do sing and worship corporately, individual worshippers can also show an expression of their love and devotion to God as their hearts and spirit of God move them. It is common for Pentecostal churches to include a full musical orchestra or band that musically motivate the entire congregation to worship God with emotional act. Another aspect of Pentecostal worship is through dancing. Pentecostals believe that both old and new testaments included examples of dance as worship. This is why in recent years, an increasing number of Pentecostal churches have developed more formalized dance ministries. These dancers choreograph their dances with the church's worship music.

### **Christian Music**

The ingrained religious psyche of man requires changes to align with developed age. The prevalence of music videos as a marketing tool is influential in bringing numerous new brand of musical styles to churches such as gospel jazz (syncopated and rhythmic character are the distinctive features of gospel jazz) and other musical styles to so many regions of the world. This has enriched Christian churches with diverse styles of music. The general expression of music performed and associated with Christian faith, beliefs, and view during the church services or any Christian function is often described as Christian music.

There are various Christian music genres such as gospel music, Christian contemporary, praise and worship music Christian Rap and Christian Rock as well as Christian songs. According to Daramola (2008), Christian music is a generic term which encompasses all types of music consumed in the Christendom whether by the church, para-church or non-church organizations. They are some common Christian musical genres used in Pentecostal churches which are borrowed from the popular styles of Afro-American.

With the conception that African American took the lead in the great Azusa street revival in 1904 at Los Angeles with other people from all walks of life –inter racial, is an indication that their musical influence affected the movement. From the inception, it considered that the knowledge of Afro-American music, black American are associated with complex rhythm, call and response, improvisation, rock and blues elements which they adapt to Christian lyrics and later led to the development of Christian music with such musical styles as Christian pop, rock, punk and gospel music. All these musical genres found their way into Pentecostal worship. Vidal (2008) states:

*...the last two decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of new age of musicians...who looked out for cross cultural influence from outside shores of Africa for new forms of musical expression, both religious and secular. These new age musicians became belligerent imitators of such western and American stereotypes as Pentecostal gospel music with cynical attitude towards Africanism.(p.1)*

This revival movement of the Pentecostal church employed the style of popular singers and song leaders, the popularity of this revival singers and the openness of churches to this type of music led to the adoption of gospel music in many Pentecostal churches. These has contributed to various Christian music styles and later on provided an outlet for the creative work of many indigenous song writers and composers.

### **Gospel music**

The general notion is that, Gospel music has its stylistic origin from Christian hymns and Negro Spirituals from the first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century in United State. The gospel music came out of mass revival movement, which describe a new style of church music that are easy to grasp and more easily to sing than the traditional church hymns. It also came from the African American religious experience that has its roots in the black oral tradition of Negro spiritual and work songs which includes the African elements of call and response fashion with repetitions. . Typical musical instruments that are used include: piano, organ, guitar, drums bass guitar, tambourines and vocals. Adedeji (2006) describes that, the first antecedent of gospel music in Nigeria, was the music used by the indigenous Pentecostal churches on evangelistic parades between 1930 and 1960s.

Another source of Nigerian gospel music was the non-liturgical music of Nigerian indigenous churches; among such were Anglican, African and other independent church founders. They function in church social function and events while another was Christian music performed by missionary school bands during the colonial era. Gospel music as a genre of Christian music was composed and performed for many purposes ranging from entertainment, aesthetic and ceremonial purposes but with Christian texts. However, it varies according to culture and social context. From an African perspective, gospel music may be defined as a type of Christian music that preaches the “good news” of Jesus Christ and made popular by public performances, the electronic media and information technology such as radio, television the recording world and the internet (Adedeji 2004).

It is quite obvious that the creation, performance and significance of gospel music depend much on societal ideology, yet the stylistic features of gospel music is based on call and response fashion, hand clapping and rhythmic accompaniment of instruments. Most Nigerian Pentecostal churches use this style of music both in liturgical and non-liturgical purposes like retreats, revival, and any Christian social event like marriage/weddings and burials. According to Adedeji (2004) Nigerian gospel music is the variant of gospel music as conceived and practiced in Nigeria just as we have American and European music but differs on cultural context.

The general characteristic use in gospel music is the dominant vocal lines with instrumental accompaniments-piano, electric guitar, bass guitar, drums. In contrast to hymns, the gospel music is often more of syncopated rhythm with a refrain, tuneful and easy to grasp and with rudimentary harmonies. These styles are drawn from the popular music styles of rhythm, compositional and performance techniques and lighter mood of presentation. All these are peculiar music features found in Pentecostal song's ministration.

### **Contemporary Christian music**

Contemporary worship style is an off-shoot influence of Pentecostalism, with congregations singing choruses and praise music even raising their hands in adoration. Contemporary Christian music often refers to as inspirational music is a genre of modern popular music in which the text is based on matters about Christian faith. It was formed after the great revival movement to express themselves more in a contemporary style of music than the hymns and gospel music. Its origin is traced back to Christian music pop music and rock music. Instruments used are: vocals, bass guitar, drums, keyboards, synthesizer, guitar and piano.

The genre became known as contemporary Christian music as a result of the movement revival in the 1970s and 80s and was originally called Jesus music in USA. About that time many people professed to believe in Jesus and were convinced of the bareness of the lifestyle based on drugs, free sex and radical politics. The movement started by playing instruments and singing songs about peace and love as replacement by the love of God. The theme behind the songs and their lyrics included praise and worship, faith, encouragement and prayers. Most times, the theme of the song focuses on redemption, devotion, reconciliation, and revival of spirit. The lyrics and messages conveyed are aimed to evangelize and to worship God. It was also to strengthen the faith of believers.

### **Christian rock**

Christian rock has its derivative style and origin from rock music, Jesus music and Christian music. Its cultural origin dates back to late 1960s in United States. The typical instruments are vocals, guitar, drums keyboards organ and bass guitar. Christian rock was viewed unfavorable for Christian service because of the fundamental elements of impassioned vocals, loud guitar riffs, and jarring and hypnotic rhythms adapted from the early rock music. Moreover, was seen as a threat and overtly sexual in nature. The music of Elvis Presley-"peace in the valley" regarded as a gospel song in American society was controversial because of his suggestive stage antics and dancing.

Moreover, his music was claimed as "rebellious," by many people, because the new music seemed rebellious in its loudness, pounding beat, and sexual directness; and the image of youthful rebellion was also projected by Elvis Presley, who reigned as "king" of rock and roll." (Kamien 2011 p.509) Many Christians were initially alienated to rock music but, Larry Norman often described as the father of Christian rock challenged the view by some conservative Christians that rock music was anti-Christian. The musical genre that was once question among Christians in the America is now considered as most important recruitment tool for acquiring larger congregation. McLean (1998) using numerous quotes from theologians goes on to offer contemporary Christian music as the reason for the falling popularity of more traditional churches, he states that "old guard churches of late 1990s were experiencing a rapid decline in membership and were under threat of disbandment within the next decade, the trend that has been going on since the 1980s"

His view is that, the Christian rock came as a match to replace the free lifestyle of the rock and roll by introducing passionate vocals and drum kits, using electric guitar and sharing the message of hope with people in the churches who wanted more than traditional hymns and those outside the church that do not know Jesus. The trend of this musical effect has influenced the musical culture of most Nigerian Pentecostal churches; the Christian rock band has explicitly use religious imagery in their lyrics with rock elements to build the spiritual content of their music. Accompanying such music is the street outreach evangelism and church functions like revival meeting, convention, crusade.

### **Musical Structures and Elements**

**Lyrics/ Texts:** The lyric and the musical features of most Pentecostal songs are characterized by emphasis on the Holy Spirit and personal relationship with God. Lyrically, words showing the intimate relationship with God are often used (the words You and I ). Sometimes, slangs are used ( I wanna thank you Lord ) Most times, physical response follows the lyrics, expressing and demonstrating accordingly to the lyrics of the music, all these are accompanied with the use of drums and popular rhythms. The rhythmic pattern is achieved by syncopation mostly in the short leading section to chorus.

### **Melodies**

The melodic line of the music is easy to pick with a mid-vocal range, sometimes with antiphonal style. Another common structure include strophic and verse – chorus forms, where the musical accompaniment remains the same for each stanza of the lyrics. A repeated lyric and melody becomes the most memorable part of the song.

### **Harmony**

During charismatic services, members of the congregation may harmonize freely during worship songs and perhaps sing in tongues with free harmonizing form without any harmonic rules or guide. There is a free flow of parts movement as desired by individual inserting any additional parts, that is applicable to contemporary songs without music score, whereas, singing in parts from score sheets in form of hymn singing and classical music are still maintained in some Pentecostal churches..

### **Form**

The main forms employed by the most Pentecostal churches are strophic form and call and response form. They have a lead singer accompanied by a lead guitarist and keyboard players. While other instruments like drums, bass guitar, trumpet, saxophone and others add colors. Some go beyond to perform rock, jazz, punk and other secular rhythms in the church with the use of amplified instruments and synthesizer.

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of Pentecostal church came with the inspiring music in the church to fuel emotion and also to trigger and demonstrate artistic excellence in order to heighten ones mood and spirit to God. Since then, it has become a global phenomenon with its alarming growing rate all over the world including Nigeria.



The movement with its principles and ideology on the work of the Holy Spirit has prompted the development of different musical styles, such as gospel music, Christian pop, gospel rock, and Christian punk especially among youths. The philosophy of using various styles of music and musical instruments in worshipping God has played an influential role in shaping contemporary worship trends. The musical development so far practiced in Pentecostal churches is the hybrid of foreign and indigenous musical structures which include the combination of some musical styles and elements from both cultures. These include- rhythm, scale, tempo, melodic line, meter, texts and musical instruments.

The ideology of some few Pentecostal churches in the strive to bring the message across through songs to the congregation, sometimes become carried away by self – ego, thus forfeiting the vision of the early Pentecostal movement. The philosophy of the movement is to defend completely the accuracy of scriptures as the necessity of accepting Christ as personal Lord and savior. The philosophy behind the music adapted into the service of congregational singing and worship is to be transformed as Christian music with spiritual relevance. That is to say, while church musicians are adapting the secular styles through innovation and development to meet the Christian needs, the reflection of the holiness as the necessary requirement of Pentecostalism should be maintained.

It is not bad that Christians develop various styles of music during worship that best edifies the soul but such music should consider redirecting the mind towards the inerrancy of the scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal experience is to grant power of the Holy Spirit for Christians' service as encountered by the early Pentecostals. The unconventionally intense and emotionally structured music with changes in form, tempo, melody and instrumentation is to promote and empower the doctrinal beliefs of the movement but not to destroy its vision.

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