

TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF INDIGENOUS YORUBA SONGS USED IN WORSHIP IN THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD

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ABSTRACT

The use of figures of speech is quite prominent in indigenous music of the Yoruba culture. The same is true of indigenous Yoruba music in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The ability to use these figures of speech in composition for church worship is an index of the composers' competence in Yoruba language. This paper is aimed at interpreting the texts of some selected Yoruba songs used during worship in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. This is done with the purpose of identifying and describing various figures of speech in these selected songs. Among the figures of speech that are in frequent use are repetition, metaphor and personification. However, the paper discussed the various categories of indigenous Yoruba songs in the church.

INTRODUCTION

Euba (1988) opined that the Yoruba have through the ages consistently promoted religion through music and some of the best examples of Yoruba music are those connected with religion. In modern times, some of the exciting new types of Yoruba music are those used in the African churches, such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, the Christ Apostolic Church and the Redeemed Christian Church of God to mention but a few.

In an attempt to make Christianity more attractive to the indigenous populations, the new African churches have taken into consideration African culture and religious consciousness. They believe that the practice of Christianity in Nigeria should be reflective of the cultural environment in the country. Of particular importance in this regard is the employment of a musical liturgy that is rooted in traditional African practices while retaining important features of imported European liturgy.

What makes services in the Redeemed Christian Church of God more lively and inviting is the musical element accompanied by enthusiastic communal singing of songs and texts based on various themes, arranged to express the worshippers' feelings at different levels of human emotion.

Indigenous Yoruba music features prominently in the worship practices of the church and are derived from two main sources, viz:

- (i) Songs with melodies adapted from traditional sources.

(ii) New compositions and arrangement of songs.

The tonality of African music has been addressed by several scholars like Laoye (1966), Nketia (1975) and Euba (1977). Nketia (1975) noted that the most far-reaching influence on African music is exerted by the verbal text to which songs are set. African traditions deliberately treat songs as though they were speech utterance.

In the same vein, Laoye (1966) and Euba (1977) explained that the Yoruba language is tonal and musical in such a way that whenever the Yoruba words are not correlating with musical tones, the correct pronunciations of the words can no longer be retained and the meanings of the words are lost. To prove this, in earlier studies, attention has usually been paid to the intonation of texts. This is because it is believed that distortion of the intonation of the tones of words might create lots of problems for the listeners. Following this, the present study is an in-depth interpretation of the texts of selected indigenous Yoruba songs used in the worship by the Redeemed Christian Church of God, with particular reference to their lyrics and melodic contours.

Brief History of the Redeemed Christian Church

The Redeemed Christian Church of God, one of the largest and fastest growing Pentecostal churches in the contemporary world started in 1952 with just 12 members. At that time, it was known as the “Egbe Ogo Oluwa (The Glory of God’s Group) it was established by Rev. Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi. He was formerly a member of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church. He left the church in 1952, with twelve others with whom he started the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

The first Redeemed Christian Church of God was located at No. 9, Willoughby Street, Ebute-Metta. Soon, the house for worship became too small, congregation was less than 100, and this necessitated relocation to No.1, Cemetery Street, Ebute-Metta, now 1-5 Redemption way, which also serves as the Headquarters. According to the founder, the Lord required the church to make holiness its focus and teach the whole counsel as written in the Holy Bible.

The present name of the church was divinely revealed to the founder, Rev. Akindayomi with a clear mandate that the church should go to the end of the world to prepare the people for the Lord. Before Rev. Akindayomi died on Nov. 2, 1980 at the age of 75, God revealed that his successor would be “a man of books’ (well educated). Pastor E. A. Adeboye was consecrated as the new leader of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in January 1981.

Since 1981, an open explosion began with the number of parishes growing in leaps and bounds. At the last count, there were about 20,000 parishes of the church worldwide. One of the well-known programmes of the church is the Holy Ghost Service, an all night miracle service that holds on the first Friday of every month at the Redemption Camp at Km. 46, Lagos Ibadan Expressway. The average headcount of those who attend the service is in millions.

Indigenous Yoruba Songs in R.C.C.G.

The root of indigenous Yoruba songs in the Redeemed Christian Church of God could be traced to when the founder of the Church Rev. Josiah Akindayomi left Cherubim and Seraphim Church in 1952. He formed a group which is now known as the Redeemed

Christian Church of God. Most of the members who attended the prayer meetings were members of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church that were used to singing indigenous Yoruba songs. The indigenous music has always been an important part of worship in the church as it constitutes one of the elements of attraction of new converts to the church. The liveliness that this music brings to church worship had become irresistible in all the parishes. Many of the indigenous Yoruba songs in the church derived their melodies and rhythms from Yoruba culture while some have European influences both in melody and harmony. Many employ a style which is midway between singing and speaking (speech song or chant) a style found in the praise and worship session.

Indigenous Yoruba songs in the Redeemed Christian Church of God is categorized into three namely: Native Airs, Anthem and Choruses.

- i. **Native Air:** Ofofu (2001) described Native Airs as “songs with indigenous flavouring which encourages maximum participation of the congregation. They are usually songs composed by pioneers of indigenous Yoruba music in the church in contrast to hymns.”
- ii. **Anthems:** These are indigenous songs rendered specially by the choir during church service of any type to illustrate and reinforce the scriptural message for the day.
- iii. **Choruses:** These are short indigenous Yoruba songs of praise and adoration aimed at the revival of congregation through participatory action.

Some of the indigenous Yoruba music in the Redeemed Christian Church of God are Yoruba tunes to which Christian texts have been written while some are songs with newly composed texts and melodies. The practice of adapting existing melodies to sacred texts is known as contrafactum. It is vocal composition in which the original text is replaced by a new one, particularly secular text by sacred text, or vice versa (Apel, 1969:203).

In the same vein, Omojola (2001) opined that adaptation of Yoruba tunes to Christian texts, is a device which helps to consolidate the Christian faith of new converts who, before their conversion to Christianity, have sung the same songs during traditional Yoruba religious activities and relished the idea that they could still sing the same set of songs within the context of their new faith. Songs with newly composed texts and melodies are composed by contemporary musicians in the church, using African elements such as praise, poetry, proverbs, rhythms and accompanied by a combination of both African and western musical instruments.

Sometimes, poetical form of singing, such as *Oriki* (praise poetry) is used. Most of the songs are in the standard dialect of Yoruba; many a time other dialects such as Ekiti and Ijesha are employed.

Textual Interpretation of Selected Songs

There is no doubt that there exist clear indications on the differing role of song texts in religious composition. Adedeji (2001), while discussing the purpose of text in musical composition, observed that the purpose of Nigerian gospel music is ecclesiastical, the content

is mainly gospel and didactic. Boyer (1979) also noted that the texts of the songs are based on the Trinity; they speak of blessings, sorrow, woes and lamentations.

Song texts exist as essential medium for meaningful worship of God in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. In writing texts for songs used in the church, various themes have been explored by composers based on things happening in the church, society, faith in God, moral values, personal experience in life and so forth. Adedeji (2001) also noted theological subjects, such as praise and worship, prayer and spiritual solution to problems and other socio-political themes.

The texts in this collection are especially arranged to express worshippers' feelings at different levels of human emotions. Selected songs for interpretation shall be examined under the following themes: Adoration and Thanksgiving.

- (1). *Olori Kokoro Baba fi fun mi*
Kokoro to nsi lekun ire
Gbogbo ona toti ti mo mi
Ba mi si won, k'ogo re yo laye mi.

Translation

Father, give me the Master Key
The key that unlocks the door to goodness,
All the doors shut against me
Unlock them, and let your Glory rise in my life.

“The Master Key” is a metaphor (comparison between two things). The composer compares God's showers of blessings to a key. Since God can bless one at anytime and in any manner He wishes; the act is comparable to what could be accomplished with a Master Key which is believed can open any door. When God blesses anyone, it is as if a Master Key has been used to open the door “of goodness” in this respect.

- (2). *O ye kaadupe, O ye kaadupe*
Ara nsan, ategun nfe
Iji nja ko gbe wa lo
Oye kaadupe

Translation

Let's be thankful, let's be grateful
The thunder rumbles, the wind blows
The storm rages, ...
We should be thankful.

O ye kaadupe, O ye kaadupe is a repetition used to emphasize the importance of such thanks. The lines that follow make it clear that the repetition is worth the while, considering the storm of adversities which rages unabated, leaving the singer unscathed. Little wonder,

parallel phrases *ara nsan, ategun nfe, iji nja* are placed side by side. Such parallelism gives force to the need for gratitude.

- (3) *Oluwa, Eyin l'atobiju*
Aribiti, Arabata, Eyin l'atobiju
Aribiti, Arabata, Eyin l'atobiju Oluwa

Translation

Lord, you're the Greatest
You're indescribably great
You're indescribably great, Oh Lord

Aribiti, Arabata a pun (play on words)

The meaningless words *aribiti, arabata* are used in an attempt to create a picture of indescribable nature of the Majestic God. Hence, there is a play on words, or rather on certain sounds in the syllable, of the two words *aribiti, arabata*, resulting in a change of tone, adding to the beauty of the musicality of the stanza.

- (4) *Eyin ni Baba to to Baba*
E yin ni Baba to ju Baba lo

Translation

You're the Father who is really a Father
You're the Father greater than any father.

The figure of speech employed in this song is repetition (saying the same thing again and again). The composer is expressing the distinctive, unparallel role of God as not just a father like other fathers, but as **THE FATHER**, the Ultimate One.

- (5) *Emi o mo*
Emi o mo
O gang an o gang an
Ibi ti nba ti mo pe mi wa

Translation

I do not know
I do not really know

Exactly where to begin expressing my gratitude.

Repetition is used in this song; indicating how overwhelmed the composer is by the showers of God's blessings. The composer in effect is saying "he is short of words" with respect to describing how he feels about God's goodness.

- (6) *Ola l'e wo 'laso*
Ogo l'aso ileke
Iyin l'egn lesin
Awamaridi le l'Edumare

Translation

You're clothed with Honour
Your outer garment is Glory
You ride on praise as on a horse
The Almighty is unfathomable

"Ola... laso
Ogo laso ileke
Iyin Lesin"

This is metaphor. Clothes cover the human body and beautify it. God's glory, honour and praise beautify God and set Him on high even as clothes do to the body of the wearer. The horse is a traditional means of transportation. But when a king rides on a horse, he flaunts his wealth and glory. In the same vein, when we praise God, it is as if God rides on a horse. Such praises flaunt God's wealth, glory and honour and heralds them.

- (7). *Meloo ni maa ro ninu ore ti Baba se*
Meloo ni maaso ninu ore ti Jesus se
Ore re ma po oju yanrin okun lo
Meloo ni maaro, afi kinsa ma dupe
Ore re ma po oju yanrin okun lo
Meloo ni maaro afi ki nsama dupe

Translation

The father's goodness is beyond what I can recount
Jesus goodness is beyond what I can recount
Your goodness is more abundant than the sound of the sea
How do I recount it; except to give thanks

Meloo...
Meloo

This repetition emphasizes how awed the composer, when he contemplates the breath of God's goodness.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that there exists numerous indigenous Yoruba music in the Redeemed Christian Church of God employing the use of figures of speech. Though a few

song texts have been selected in this study, a number of figures of speech have been identified. Prominent among the identified figures of speech are Repetition, Metaphor, Pun and Parallelism-is Repetition, a figure of speech used primarily for emphasis. The study has made clear how an analysis can shed light on a practice.

It is hoped that this paper will stimulate scholars to redouble their efforts at serious studies of more textual interpretation of indigenous songs in church worship.

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