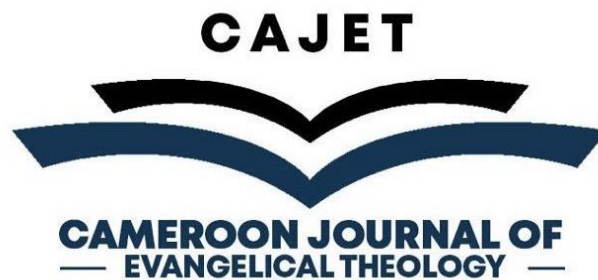


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Maximizing ICT Equipment of Postmodernism for Effective Congregational Singing in Nigerian Churches

Maximiser l'équipement en TIC du postmodernisme pour un chant congrégationnel efficace dans les églises Nigérianes

Samuel Olusegun Onimisi Auda, DMA.¹

Abstract

This paper advocates the need for the Church to take advantage of the technological devices of the postmodern era to promote and propagate the gospel of Christ. It argues for the use of these devices to promote good congregational singing either in corporate worship services or in private individual worship/spiritual experience, given that music is an effective tool to reach people. Being an integral part of any human culture, music also has the potential to unite communities. The writer approaches the work with a strong biblical foundation for effective congregational singing. The motivation for the study arose from the observation of strong human attachment to technological devices such as smartphones, iPads, Laptops, etc. In recent times, this attachment has considerably increased. Therefore, for the church, putting Christian hymns in these devices and promoting their use is a tactical approach to reaching people for Christ in this postmodern era.

Keywords: church, church music, congregational music, ICT equipment, postmodernism.

Résumé

Cet article souligne la nécessité pour l'église de tirer parti des outils technologiques de l'ère postmoderne pour promouvoir et propager l'évangile du Christ. Il plaide en faveur de l'utilisation de ces appareils pour promouvoir de bons chants congrégationnels, que ce soit lors des cultes collectifs ou dans le cadre d'un culte/expérience spirituel individuel privé, étant donné que la musique est un outil efficace pour atteindre les hommes. Étant partie intégrante de toute culture humaine, la musique a également le potentiel d'unir les communautés. L'auteur aborde ce travail en s'appuyant sur une base biblique solide pour un chant de congrégation efficace. La motivation sous-jacente à cette étude est née de l'observation du fort attachement des humains aux appareils technologiques tels que les smartphones, les iPads, les ordinateurs portables, etc. Ces derniers temps, cet attachement s'est considérablement accru. Par conséquent, pour l'église, l'insertion d'hymnes chrétiens dans ces appareils et la mise en avant de leur utilisation constituent une approche tactique pour atteindre les gens pour Christ dans cette ère postmoderne.

Mots-clés : église, musique d'église, musique de congrégation, équipement TIC, postmodernisme.

Introduction

The study and the use of hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs (which is the essence of congregational music) in the life of the Christian church is as old as the birth of the church itself. Jesus sang a hymn with the early disciples after they partook in the Lord's Supper (Mark

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14:26). Apostle Paul also encouraged Christians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs regularly according to Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. There is a strong need for the Christian hymnody to change with time. Christians cannot put new wine in an old wine skin. There is, therefore, a need for newness; the need to take the resources available and the characteristics of the time into consideration. The church as a member of a society cannot pretend not to be affected by the presence of postmodernism. However, irrespective of changes that occur in the society, the church must continue to function as a viable entity and carry out its ministry effectively. This paper looks into the need for the church to take advantage of the resources and equipment around her to effectively continue to study and use hymns in a more dynamic and creative way. In essence, congregational music consists of songs that are used in corporate Christian worship contexts, jointly sung by the entire congregation in time.

Christianity without music, especially in corporate worship, is an inconceivable thought. The singing and study of congregational music has been part of the Christian faith as early as the birth of Christianity itself. Congregational music will continue to be part of the Christian faith till eternity. The book of Revelation 4 makes it clear that the activity that goes on in heaven is the worship of Yahweh and that will definitely be the duty of Christians when they get to heaven.² Congregational music-making is a vital and vibrant practice within Christian communities worldwide. It reflects, informs, and articulates convictions as well as concerns that are irreducibly local even as they flow along global networks. Congregational songs can unify communities of faith across geographical and cultural boundaries. However, they can also be used to mark divisions between Christians of different denominations, cultural backgrounds, and social classes, and to negotiate or articulate differences in relation to religious outsiders. Christians, therefore, cannot understand the meanings, uses, and influences of congregational music within Christianity without exploring both its local contexts and its trans-local, transnational, and global circulation.³

Background to the Study

The post-modern era is characterized by multiple changes. A dimension of these changes finds expression in the way things are done and carried out. Being an integral part of the society, the church is not exempted from these mutations. This age is one of computers, software, and use of various ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and mobile devices. Many things in the society have been affected by the coming of information technology (e.g. instant messaging, phone calls, social networking, etc.). As earlier mentioned, the church, as an integral part of society, cannot pretend not to recognize the impact of the computer age on her life and the way she carries out her activities.

According to Oladejo, in his write-up on “IT and Communication Technologies,” it is implied that the use of information and communication technological equipment such as computers, e-mail, fax, and video conferencing removes space and time barriers, opening up new possibilities for teaching-learning activities and any other form of communication.”⁴ In today’s world, there is a common use of flat screens and projectors to convey information to worshippers. In most churches, especially in the metropolis, during regular corporate worship services, flat screens and projectors are used for the projection of messages, announcements, and hymn texts/lyrics. With the introduction of electronic mobile communication equipment, meaningful worship could be experienced anywhere at any time at the fingertip of the user(s)

² Williams J. Reynolds. *Congregational Singing*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1975), 105-122.

³ “congregational music” (www.congregational singing.com) Accessed on 19 July, 2015

⁴ Olusayo B. Oladejo, “Information Technology and Theological Education,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, (Number 10, 2005): 47.

personally or cooperatively. The church, in this age of busyness, should promote the use of these equipment and technology given their portable nature to promote meaningful worship anywhere and anytime. This writer is convinced that the advent of smartphones, iPads, iPods, Laptops, and the internet can be instrumental in fostering the use and singing of congregational music beyond the four walls of the church building.

The above-mentioned mobile devices have the capacity to use software on which any audio-visual materials can be stored or recorded electronically and used anywhere and anytime. This is a great blessing for this post-modern generation. Worshipping God through meaningful and effective congregational music is no longer limited to the corporate church worship centers, but could be experienced anywhere weekly in a much better presentation and sound than what the music ministry of any local church could offer before. For example, some of the congregational music is recorded with a well-managed orchestral instrumental accompaniment and musical sound and acoustics (both vocal and instrumental) than what any music ministry of any church could offer in a live presentation. Most churches do not have good sound equipment/management let alone having orchestral equipment.

Definition of Terms

This section elucidates important concepts used in this paper. It defines the terms church music, church, congregation, music, congregational music, and postmodernism.

According to Donald Hustad, church music is a functional art created by human beings to serve the purpose of God, particularly in the expression of its worship (*leitourgia*, Gr.), fellowship (*koinonia*, Gr.), mission (*kerigma*, Gr.), Christian education (*didache*, Gr.), and pastoral care (*diakonia*, Gr.).⁵ The church (*ekklesia*, Gr.) is made of the called out ones – specially called out people of God from the world, although still living in the world, according to Jesus’ prayer in the gospel of John, chapter 17. A congregation is the gathering of believers in Christ who meet regularly for corporate Christian worship. “It is a group of people who are gathered together in a church to worship God.”⁶ Music refers to “sounds that are arranged in a way that is pleasant and exciting to listen to. People sing music or play it on instruments.”⁷ Congregational music is music that is used in the context of the congregation. It is more than just the singing of hymns but also involves the singing of psalms and spiritual songs (Col. 3:17; Eph. 5; 19).⁸ Postmodernism is the period that follows modernism. Modernism was characterized by the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities, followed by the end of World War I. Modernism also questioned the certainty of Enlightenment thinking, and many modernists rejected religious beliefs. According to John Hannah, postmodernism could be likened to the opening lines of the novel ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ written by Charles Dickens’ in 1937, a description of turbulent revolutionary times in France and England. Dickens holds that “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom; it was the age of darkness. It was the spring of hope; it was the winter of despair.”⁹

⁵ Donald P. Hustad. *JubilateII: Church Music in Worship and Renewal*. (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing, 1999), 22.

⁶ A.S. Hornby, “Congregation,” in *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, New 8th Edition, 305.

⁷ *Ibid*, “Music,” 973.

⁸ Samuel Auda. *Musical Instruments in Congregational Singing*, (Ibadan: Heavens way Publishers, 2010), 3.

⁹ John Hannah, “The Place of Theology in the PostModern World,” in *Theology: Why Bother? Reformation and Revival Journal-* (A Quarterly for Church Leadership), Vol. 11, No.1, 2002): 1-13.

The Effect of Postmodernism on Church Music

The church and postmodernism can be said to be two opposites that cannot meet if one looks at the characteristics of each. Postmodernism tends to lead towards things that are non-spiritual, physical, and scientific while the church is a spiritual and holy entity. The challenge for Christian is to develop the ability to balance the two realities. The church today must make sure that it takes advantage of postmodernism and utilizes its blessings, maximizing these blessings to defeat its woes, especially in the area of church music and congregational music. Some suggest that the tension between the church and postmodernism will subside as the church makes peace with post-modernistic changes. Others argue that humans are entering a dark and glacial age, that will culminate in the destruction of civilization. Comfortable or not, at least two things can be argued from all of this. First, this is a time of rapid and often disconcerting cultural and social change; this contrasts with the world of our grandparents. Second, no amount of wishful thinking will make the negative features of the postmodern world, or even the 'modern world, vanish like a bad dream. The church will live to flourish in this era as it has in every other because its origins and powers are not of this world, but from heaven.¹⁰ As Hannah correctly observes, church music in its uniqueness as an element of the church, a sacred institution, can and should remain undefiled in its interaction with postmodernism, and in any era whatsoever. The church is the light of the world and darkness cannot comprehend or overcome it. The church should be able to keep its holy nature irrespective of the time and season it finds itself.¹¹

Millard Erickson argues that "postmodernism is both a popular and intellectual movement, a sociological characteristic of much contemporary western society and a sophisticated way of thinking."¹² Therefore, the church must be careful not to allow postmodernism to have a negative impact on her. Jesus in His prayer for the church in the Gospel according to John 17: 15 and 16 emphasizes that although His followers live in the world, they are not of the world as He was not also of the world.

Congregational Singing and Postmodernism

For the effectiveness of the church in its ministry in this postmodern age, the church cannot afford to continue to do things as in the old. The emphasis of this writer is how the church could take advantage of computerized/ICT equipment to strongly promote the use and the singing of congregational music in this era. This age seems to be a very busy age. The writer believes that through computerized electronic mobile devices like smartphones, the church can reach out more effectively to this busy generation than was the case in the age of paper and the sole use of the four-walls of church buildings. The church should, therefore, not think that it can effectively reach this age through its traditional, old way of doing things, although the truth she proclaims remains undiluted whichever means is used and in whatever era.

Alice Parker, quoting John Calvin, notes that congregational "singing has a great strength and power to move and to set our hearts on fire in order that we may call upon God and praise Him with more vehement and more ardent zeal."¹³ Good congregational singing is not a result of having a good congregation, but good singing "forges good congregation."¹⁴ The most important form of church music in the evangelical church is congregational singing

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Gospel of St. John Chapter 1 vs. 5" *The Holy Bible* (KJV).

¹² Millard Erickson, "The Truth or Consequences-The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism." *Reformation and Revival Journal*-(Vol. 11, No.1, 2001): 170-171.

¹³ Alice Parker, *Melodious Accord*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 16.

¹⁴ Ibid, 12.

because this is when every member of the congregation actively participates in singing together at the same time, possibly with dancing, especially in an African context. This is the only means whereby every individual in the congregation contributes and participates in the service of worship.¹⁵ Good congregational singing should be spirit-filled and full of understanding. During congregational singing, Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 14:15 that “I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with understanding also.” By these words, Paul establishes that singing is both a spiritual and mental experience. According to William J. Reynolds, citing Louis F. Benson, “congregational song (or music)” is a “‘spiritual gift,’ which each Christian brings to the sanctuary and contributes to a common song of spiritual fellowship.”¹⁶

As earlier mentioned, congregational music or singing is more than just hymn singing as it involves the singing of praise and worship choruses otherwise called ‘chorus medley.’¹⁷ In two epistles of Paul (Eph. 5:19 & Col. 3:16 respectively), Christians are encouraged to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Each is of a unique genre. The *psalms* are the songs that are extracted from the biblical psalms, some of which may be chant-like in form, directly quoted from the Bible, or paraphrased. A very good example of this is found in the *Baptist Hymn Book with Music* produced by the *London Psalms and Hymn Trust*, number 4 Southampton Row, W.C.I. in Great Britain. There are hymns from the beginning of the hymn book, but we have psalms that have been put to music from pages 873-931. These hymns are literal texts from the King James Version of the Bible, they are not paraphrased lyrics.¹⁸

Hymns are scriptural Christian texts put to music, mostly paraphrased, not exact texts like the Psalms. They are highly poetic in nature. Hymns cannot be successfully written without the knowledge of poetry and literature and the use of figures of speech, mood, and rhyming. Hymns are strophic and stanzaic (every hymn is written with stanzas, and each stanza is sung with the same tune attached. An example of hymns and hymnals are the Baptist Hymnals with varying editions (1956, 1975, 1991, 2008, and 2010). These editions are extant in Baptist churches worldwide to date. Each new edition is a development and improvement on the preceding edition. The improvement may be in the discovery of a theological error that needs to be corrected or just an improvement in the text interpretation quality. Sometimes, it may be the addition of some new popular worship songs that are lacking in the preceding edition. The improvement may also occur for a musical reason. For example, a change of key for the hymn “Holy, holy, holy” in the key of E Major, number 1 in the Baptist Hymnal 1956 edition was changed to key D Major in the 1991 edition, which is a tone lower to the original key for the comfort of the congregation. The issue of key is very important in writing songs for a congregation, even for professional singers. Singing may be strained when a person sings in a key that is too high for his or her voice. In addition, singing in a key that is too high can cause health problems and destroy vocal cord.¹⁹

Spiritual songs are songs that are spontaneous in nature. They are usually shorter than hymns and psalms. Spiritual songs are commonly called *praise-worship choruses* or just simply choruses in some context. Some contexts prefer to refer to spiritual songs as *medley of choruses or songs* (because some prefer to use songs in place of choruses, and depending on the category of list of songs that are used per time, it could be called a *medley of thanksgiving songs*, a *medley of warfare songs*, etc.).

The term for ‘praise-worship’ or choruses is highly controversial. Even in the Yoruba worship context, the popular name is *orin idaraya*, which literally means ‘a warming-up song’ or songs just to exercise the body. Some have rejected this name due to its mundane overtones

¹⁵ Ruth Nininger. *Growing a Musical Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1947), 105.

¹⁶ William J. Reynolds, *Congregational Singing*, 1-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁸ *The Baptist Hymn Book with Music*, (London: Novello and Company Limited, 1964), 873-931.

¹⁹ Baptist Hymnal, 1956 & 1991 editions respectively.

and its inappropriateness for spiritual worship. Some feel the best name is *orin emi*, (Yoruba language of south southwestern part of Nigeria) which literally means “spiritual songs”. Originally, praise-worship came as part of the charismatic renewal movement, which started somewhere in Azusa Street, USA, about 110 years ago. *Praise-worship* is one of the musical elements of the charismatic renewal movement. The literal charismatic meaning is *praise* (fast worship songs), while *worship* means (slow worship songs). Although some critics have serious problems with the name, some say it should be ‘praise in worship’ and some think the name should be changed entirely because praise is not the only thing we do in worship.²⁰ In a congregational corporate worship context, the singing is done by the entire congregation. This unsegregated, ungraded, unorganized body of people is made up of “some eager, reluctant singers and some non-singers [who] are the target group to involve, persuade, and motivate in the singing experience.”²¹ The experience with a congregation is different from a trained choir. Congregational singing is like a neighborhood football game, where anybody can participate regardless of age, sex, height, weight, etc., unlike choir singing, where some level of professionalism and training is required.²²

According to Mary Klages, Associate Professor in the English Department of the University of Colorado, postmodernism is a complicated term (or set of ideas) that only emerged as an area of academic study in the mid-1980s. It is hard to define because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, *music*, film, literature, sociology, *communication*, fashion, and *technology* (these three words are italicized due to their relevance to this article). The term is hard to locate temporarily or historically because it is not clear exactly when postmodernism began. Perhaps, the earliest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to emerge. But while postmodernism seems very much like modernism in some ways, it also differs in many others. Modernism, for example, tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history. Postmodernism, in contrast, does not lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates it.²³ Also, as Isaias Catorce opines, “while *modern* methods of thinking and understanding are through verbal and analytical (such as reading, writing, intelligence, analysis, clarity, explanation, logic, and linear thinking), *postmodernism* is characterized as more symbolic and visual.”²⁴ The church should take good advantage of these characteristics.

Conclusion

The writer sought to encourage the church in Nigeria irrespective of denominational differences to embrace ICT equipment of postmodernism for effective congregational singing in Nigerian churches without delay. He is convinced that, in this matter, the Nigerian church is waking up late. In general, there are few individuals and churches that are already enjoying this blessing of maximizing congregational music in the postmodern era with the use of mobile technological devices. However, the church needs to rise up to its responsibilities. According to Paul Jones, organist and music Director of the historic *Tenth Presbyterian Church*, Philadelphia, in this post-modern, post-Christian age, it should come as surprise that worship and worship music in evangelical churches follow the path of contemporary culture. Under

²⁰ Larry Eskridge, “Story Behind The ‘Praise and Worship’ Revolution, (ChristianHistory.net) posted 10/29/2008, 01:47 PM. Accessed 28/07/2015, 03:46 PM.

²¹ William J. Reynolds, 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ Mary Klages, “Postmodernism,” www.bdavetian.com/postmodernism.html, accessed 19 July, 2015, at 03:10PM.

²⁴ Isaias Catorce “Postmodernism and Its Influences in the Church.” ([file:///Users/ICT/OFFICE/Desktop/church music/Postmodernism](file:///Users/ICT/OFFICE/Desktop/church%20music/Postmodernism))

closer examination, it is observable that today's value system, musical and otherwise, reflect society's primary philosophy (pragmatism), the object of attention (ourselves), and occupation (our own amusement).²⁵ However, in spite of the challenges of postmodernism and its seemingly unchristian attributes and characteristics, the writer believes with John Hannah that "the church will live and flourish in this era as it has in every other because its origins and power are not of this world but from heaven."²⁶ The church that Jesus builds is not weak. However, she needs to adapt to the realities of the postmodernism to enhance the effectiveness of her witness of Christ in this era.

²⁵ Paul S. Jones, "Church Music in a Postmodern World" www.reformation-today.org (accessed 27 July, 2015 at 2:05PM)

²⁶ John Hannah, "The Place of Theology in the PostModern World," in *Theology: Why Bother? Reformation and Revival Journal*, 13.

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