

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AS DRAMATURGICAL MODEL: A STUDY OF THE USE OF DRAMA IN NIGERIAN CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

Humans are actors on the stage called earth. It was William Shakespeare, the quintessential dramatist, who asserted that the world is a stage and all the men and women are merely players who have their exits and their entrances. In some churches, drama is employed as a tool in evangelism, while in others, it is an avoidable distraction, relegated only for use by teachers who instruct Sunday school children. However, in spite of a dearth of widespread support for church drama, more churches seem to utilise theatre and drama in their worship. It is assumed that while hearers sometimes struggle to remember verbalised sermons, the same sermons might be remembered if they are dramatised with the embellishments that scenery, stage props, music, dance, lighting, costume and dialogue bring. This article reports on an investigation into the assumption that drama is one of the timeous tools used to proclaim the timeless truth of scripture. It draws on a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative methods for the study conducted in four churches in three Nigerian cities. Its historical perspective attempts to sketch major empirically grounded features of Christian worship as dramaturgical model. It further reveals the inseparable fusion of religion, theatre and drama. Findings from the study indicate that theatre and drama have become prominent in Christian worship in Nigeria in the last few years. It also suggests that theatricals and dramatics are possible reasons some churches experience numerical growth.

Keywords: church; christian worship; drama; numerical growth; religion; theatre

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning ... the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And ... God said, let there be light: and there was light. (Genesis 1: 1–3, The Holy Bible, King James Version)

Show me a better way to persuade people to come to Church and I'll be happy to try your method. But please don't ask me to preach to empty seats. Let's not waste our time quarrelling over methods. God has use for all of us. (Liardon 1996, 255)

Reverend Aimee Semple McPherson was a performer, and she knew her craft, incorporating theatrical tools to spread her message. (Fish 2009, 49)

The account of the Bible found in Genesis, quoted in the first epigraph above, commences like the typical opening of a play at the theatre. Darkness, silence, and expectation pervade the atmosphere as the creation drama unfolds in the book of Genesis. Undoubtedly, drama and theatre have been part of Christianity from the beginning. The founder of Foursquare Gospel Church, Reverend Aimee Semple McPherson, believes that the entire Bible is a sacred drama that was meant to be preached and illustrated dramatically and she practised her theory effectively. Fish (2009), quoted in the third epigraph above, reveals that McPherson was one of the most influential preachers in modern-day evangelism. He states: "strategically placed in the heart of Tinseltown, McPherson carefully crafted her own Hollywood image, rising to a stardom rivalling top names in show business through the twenties and thirties" (Fish 2009, 49). He further postulates that McPherson was a performer, and she knew her craft, incorporating theatrical tools to spread her message.

On McPherson's use of dramatics in Christian worship, Liardon (1996) reports that she was a preacher who believed denominational churches had lost their cutting edge with churches grown cold and formal, while the world's love for entertainment brought them encouragement, joy and laughter. On McPherson's preaching methods, Liardon (1996, 255) reports that certain ministers persecuted her, but she would respond to them publicly by saying: "show me a better way to persuade willing people to come to church and I'll be happy to try your method. But please don't ask me to preach to empty seats. Let's not waste our time quarrelling over methods. God has use for all of us". The Holy Bible itself seems to agree with McPherson as the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 12: 4 that "there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord". Wren (2000) notes that although stage presence is not one of the gifts the early Church fathers mentioned, using the logic of this scripture, many theatre-oriented Christians have stated that theatre has a place in religious life, right up there by the altar. In the case of McPherson's theatrics in Christian worship, Liardon (1996) reveals that her church was a very busy place. A prayer tower was manned for twenty-four hours, and a one-hundred-voice choir and a brass band of thirty-six people performed there. She reportedly purchased costumes, props, and scenery to present her

sermons in Hollywood fashion. Many people from Los Angeles were said to know that attending a service at her church was quite a major event.

Based on the Genesis account and the experience of McPherson, it can be said that drama and theatre are significant vehicles in transmitting Bible messages in Christian worship. The principal argument in this article is that a deliberate transformation, in this case theatrical transformation, of Christian worship is a possible element in expounding Bible messages, in getting people interested in church, as well as in retaining parishioners. Goffman's assertion that our lives are a series of performances appears to suggest a look at the concepts of status and role (1959). Macionis and Gerber (2011) posit that a status is like a part in a play, while a role serves as a script supplying dialogue and action for the characters. In a dramaturgical model, social interaction is analysed largely in terms of how people live their lives like actors, with dramaturgical analysis being the idea that people's day-to-day lives can be understood as resembling performers in action on a theatre stage. As societies transform or evolve, the daily lives of people seem to also change. Since the need to discover novel ways of doing Christian worship has increased because churches are interested in attracting new members while retaining old ones, an urgent re-evaluation of the way church services are conducted is therefore essential.

For many centuries, the "marriage" of drama and religion has attracted rigorous debates by the church, society and academics. Whereas, in some churches, the union of drama and religion is regarded as a welcome development, in some others, it is labelled ungodly. However, in spite of the various castigations that church drama has been through, it appears to have remained a necessary tool in evangelism among some church leaders, because, as Hillerbrand and Thrall (2004) observe, for several years churches have panicked over dwindling attendance and have sought new ways to lure congregants back. The use of dramatic embellishments in the teaching of the stories of the Bible, besides infusing clarity to Bible texts, is projected to bring sustainable growth in, as well as enthusiasm about, Christian worship. Therefore, with memberships shrinking in some denominations and others failing to attract and/or retain younger members, the need to discover creative ways of retaining members in churches today cannot be over-emphasised. Observations have been made that many good-intentioned and "spiritually-gifted" pastors are losing members to creative ones, and it is therefore important that enactments which make messages unforgettable at Christian worship be explored. Before that, it is important to look at some historical accounts in which drama and religion have complemented each other.

ATHENS, GREECE

First was a day in Athens in the spring of the year 442 B.C. The scene was the great outdoor temple of Dionysus. The cult of Dionysus was brought to Athens in the sixth century B.C. and the theatre was built as part of the temple precinct. The population of Athens was only 30 000 and more than 15 000 persons had gathered in this sacred

spot and time to honour the gods in a festival of drama, rhetoric, dance and music. All performances were important parts of the cult celebrations of Dionysus. Historians of drama and religion observe that many of these plays have survived, giving us a unique insight into their thinking. For example, in *The Essential Theatre*, Brockett et al. (2011) inform us that in addition to tragedy and satire plays, Athens developed a distinctive comic drama, making comedy an official part of the Dionysian festivals about fifty years later than tragedy. Although comedy was performed at the City of Dionysia along with tragedies, it eventually found its most sympathetic home at another Dionysian festival, the Lenaia, which was held during the winter, when few outsiders were present and at which playwrights were allowed to ridicule Athenian events more pointedly.

These play-festivals were mostly for enjoyment, worship, business, serious discussions and much more, at the climax of which was a contest among the poets to determine whose drama deserves the coveted award for excellence. Sophocles won this contest with his play *Antigone*, written around 442 B.C. The play tells the story of a courageous girl who chooses to be loyal to her religion rather than to obey the dictator who rules the city. Antigone, the heroine of the play, learns that her brothers are dead and that Polynices is unburied, with a royal edict against burying him. Undaunted, she asks Ismene to break the law with her by burying Polynices. When Ismene refuses, she, in defiance of the dictator, does it alone and is caught. Although no one is expected to disagree with the King, Antigone challenges King Creon's moral authority and he sentences her to death.

Sophocles' play entry into this festival and its eventual triumph brought new dimensions to play acting and production in ancient Greece. Similar dramatic contests at the temple of Dionysus in Athens followed this one and out of them came not only great tragedies and comedies, but also new spiritual insights into the deepest and most timeless struggles of the human soul. Moreover, there developed from here some of the greatest playwrights the world has ever known.

EMPIRE OF ROME

After the invasion of the Roman Empire by the Germanic tribes and after the incursion of the Arabs, Rome lost its dominance. While its legitimacy lasted for centuries longer and its cultural influence remains today, this Western Empire never had the strength to rise again. Schnusenberg (2010) notes that the era until about 750 A.D. was marked by political confusion and general anarchy but, at the same time, also by a dynamic process of transformation in cultural, social and political areas. The church stood in the midst of this process of transformation, playing important roles in cultural development through its liturgical expressions (Graham 2007).

Liturgical drama or religious drama, in its various Christian contexts, originated from the Mass itself, and it usually presents a relatively complex ritual that includes theatrical elements. It is widely assumed that it may stretch back to the second or third

century A.D., with the pattern of pre-reformation musical settings allowing the ordinary to be sung. On the other hand, Graham (2007) contends that although the Lutherans largely retained the pre-Reformation pattern, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer of 1549 altered it while the Reformed Churches continued with it. It is, however, agreed that most modern liturgies, even those of non-conformist and Reformed traditions, have reverted to the old order while using a variety of wordings. This modern convergence between independent traditions is said to have been strengthened both by the widespread adoption of the Revised Common Lectionary and the much more extensive use of laypeople in reading lessons and leading prayers. According to Graham (2007, 77), “these changes made it quite plausible to interpret the service of the Communion as it is conducted in a large number of congregations within the Latin Church not just as a liturgy at which the faithful are present and which they reverently observe, but as a dramatic enactment of the gospel in which all present participate in a variety of roles”.

The service begins with the gathering of the people with the celebrant leading them in penitential prayers and a quest for the state of mind and heart to hear the gospel proclamation in the right way. Thereafter, the first main act of the drama is ready to begin: the liturgy of the Word. An ordinary member of the congregation emerges from the crowd, as the Hebrew prophets did, to declare to the assembled company the word of God as it is found in the Old Testament. In response, the people, like the people of Israel, together sing (or recite) one of the ancient psalms characteristic of Israel’s worship. According to Graham (2007), the gradual hymn that follows allows for a change of pace. It is then the task of the preacher to expand on the readings of the day, especially the Gospel, so that the people properly understand what they have heard in this first act of the drama.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament, considered the second act of the drama, begins with the words “let us present our offerings to the Lord”. Graham (2007, 78) explains that “the offerings in question are not the monetary contributions that are often (though not always) collected at this point”. Rather, as he says, “they are the ordinary bread and wine that symbolise the basic foods required to sustain physical life. Two members of the congregation carry the bread and wine to the steps of the sanctuary, in the faithful hope the items would change into means of spiritual nourishment” (Graham 2007, 78). Christian tradition believes that religious drama stemmed out of liturgy at the end of the Middle Ages (mostly the 15th century) in the form of mystery plays.

KILKENNY, IRELAND

The third historical episode of dramatic significance is in Kilkenny, Ireland, in 1793, where drama was again featured as an integral element of religion. We must bear in mind that 2 200 years have passed since the “birth” of drama in ancient Greece and 700 years have passed since the medieval church in Europe, led by England, created the first mystery and miracle plays to dramatise God’s love for humans, as told in the Bible

stories from the Creation Day to the Judgement Day. Drama and religion historians, Fry and Fletcher (1992), reveal that although the Kilkenny Corpus Christi (Body of Christ) dramas held sway in Kilkenny, the people of Kilkenny knew little of the similar history of drama and religion in ancient Greece. According to these historians, Kilkenny's mixed secular and religious festivities included a major fair, two types of plays, and possibly a large procession (Fry and Fletcher 1992). Although Kilkenny's main drama was a passion play featuring the crucifixion and the resurrection, the secular celebrations of Corpus Christi (Body of Christ) declined rapidly following the abolition of the liturgical feast in 1546 (Fry and Fletcher 1992).

IBADAN, NIGERIA

The last example in this section is of a scene 2002 years after the Irish scenario. It is an observation made at the Global Harvest Church, Ibadan, Nigeria, between 1995 and 2000. The pastor of the church, Victor Adeyemi, was a passionate evangelist who had employed the skills of a theatre professional in the training of volunteer parishioners in the arts of theatre. The rationale behind this training was the need to "spice up" the worship experiences of members. The group then began preparation for a musical drama, while a series of word-of-mouth publicity of the upcoming event continued. On the day of the programme, attendance was unexpectedly huge. Contrary to the usual church setting, props were placed on the stage that evoked a mixed mood of surprise, excitement and anticipation for the audience. The choir, having participated in the rehearsals alongside the drama team, was robed in a specially designed outfit and positioned up-stage left. A barber's shop was positioned about down-stage left, while a boutique was placed next to it but closer to one of the entrances to the auditorium. Players were costumed and planted among regular parishioners who had no idea that the people they hitherto knew as parishioners were shortly going to be acting on stage. As the drama progressed, a couple of dialogues were introduced as cue for the choir, after which the pastor said a few words about commitment to God.

Reactions following these string of performances resulted in new people making commitments to become members of this church, while a few who were already members volunteered to become members of the theatre team. After this experience, the theatre team and the choir met regularly, especially on Saturdays, to rehearse for Sunday worship services. Members of the congregation were subsequently unable to tell what the team was going to come up with next. The pastor seemed pleased, especially that the dramatic enactments by the church's theatre troupe made his messages easier to get across.

At the instance of this development, attendance at the services of the Global Harvest Church, then domiciled in Wallan Hall of D. Rovans's Hotel on Ring Road Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria, gradually increased. About 150 new commitments to Christ were reportedly recorded after this play performance, which observers and members

alike adjudged as a first in the history of this church. Instances of the interplay of drama and religion such as these appear to have increased the curiosity of experts on whether drama could become a major tool in increasing church attendance.

THEATRE AND DRAMA IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The four accounts above reveal the historical relationship of theatre, drama and religion. They further reveal the possible impact of presenting Bible stories and doctrines through theatre. Throughout the history of Christianity, leaders of church congregations and members have employed varied methods in spreading Christianity to other people and other regions. These methods are called evangelism (Spurgeon 1977). The series of evangelism methods used over the years have yielded results, but as the times and the world have changed, with some churches beginning to suffer dwindling attendance in membership, there seems to be an urgent need to employ more creative ways of sharing the messages of the Bible.

Interestingly, theatre and drama have always been essential tools in conveying Bible messages in Christian worship across the world. Nelson and Cargil (1949) reveal that thousands of churches in America, England and Europe use drama as a vitalising force in their worship services. Many of these churches, they reveal further, are fairly equipped for it, while some even have skilled directors and experienced actors. A study of 276 churches in the city of Chicago indicates that 216 (about 80%) of them produced a total of 647 plays during the year of the study – averaging three plays for each church (Nelson and Cargil 1949). In many places, church drama is viewed as just something to keep the young people occupied. That could be true, but church drama has gone beyond this goal. Nelson and Cargil (1949) note that in the cited study the plays were produced in order to develop the spiritual and creative lives of the actors and the congregations, and if churches understood the essential role of drama in worship, they might recognise the necessity of giving it a religious setting. Today, most church dramas are presented on Sunday evenings, especially if the church committee feels that the morning services could be “compromised”.

INVESTIGATIONS

In order to investigate Christian worship as a dramaturgical model in Nigerian churches, a one-month study which involved four Pentecostal churches was conducted between the first and fourth weeks of November in 2013. Parishioners from participating churches in three Nigerian cities, namely, Ibadan, Ikeja and Ifo in Oyo, Lagos and Ogun states, respectively, were interviewed. Participating parishioners completed questionnaires at the various churches at the end of four different Sunday morning services. Sunday morning was chosen because the host pastors advised that the number of people in attendance on Sundays were more than those on mid-week gatherings. At the end of

each worship service, announcements requesting for volunteer participants were made by host pastors, after which the researchers gave verbal explanations and instructions about the aims of the study. Thereafter, questionnaires were handed to volunteer parishioners. The aim in the use of questionnaires was to investigate if parishioners had ever experienced theatre and drama in Christian worship and the possible effects such experiences have on their understanding of Bible lessons as well as their attendance at church services.

PARTICIPATING CHURCHES AND CITIES

The four churches that were chosen for this study were not frontline denominational establishments. The older traditional churches were not easily accessible at the period of study because of the length of time and process it takes to obtain approval from the several committees involved with annual church programming. Another obstacle was that frontline denominations were highly organised, with filled-up calendars of programmes for the duration of, sometimes, a whole year. It was therefore hard to add any new activity to their calendars in the course of the year. Moreover, in the event that a study has to be carried out in a branch of a large denomination, approval often had to be obtained from the mother church, which took time. To bypass these obstacles, the researchers consulted with leaders who were pioneers of their own churches, a number of whom were former members, and in some cases, disgruntled or unsatisfied associates, who broke away from frontline denominations. This set of pastors were willing to deal with issues of dwindling attendance from a variety of angles, including experimenting with play productions and programmes that were noted to be enticing. Below is the demographic distribution of participants in the selected churches.

Table 1: Respondents

Participating Churches	Members	Gender Distribution		Number of Respondents
		Female	Male	
Triumphant Assembly	200	Female, 25	Male, 15	40
Pentecost House	200	Female, 30	Male, 10	40
Paradise Christian Centre	200	Female, 23	Male, 17	40
Global Harvest Church	300	Female, 30	Male, 10	40
Total	900	108	52	160

As shown in the table above, there were 40 participants from each participating church. At the Triumphant Assembly in Ibadan, Oyo state, with 200 registered members, female respondents were 25, while male respondents were 15. At Pentecost House, also in Ibadan with 200 registered members, female respondents were 30, while

male respondents were 10. At Paradise Christian Centre in Ifo, Ogun state, with 200 registered members, female respondents were 23, while male respondents were 17. At Global Harvest Church in Ikeja, Lagos state, with 300 registered members, female respondents were 30, while male respondents were 10. The total number of respondents was 160. The questionnaire featured 18 questions which included the length of the participant's church membership; reason for attraction to the particular church; reason for remaining in the church; the part of worship the respondent looks forward to during service; whether the respondent likes church drama; and how frequently the respondent has witnessed drama in that church. Other questions required respondents to answer if drama makes Bible messages better understood and how frequently preachers used analogies to explain messages. The responses presented in the subsequent sections have been anonymised to protect the identity of the respondents.

RESPONSES FROM PARISHIONERS

Responses from respondents reveal that parishioners seem to appreciate sermons more if theatrics are employed to present sermons. It is suggested that sermons which are creatively passed on to parishioners would attract worshippers more than sermons that lack theatre and drama. We present the findings from the responses of parishioners in three strands below.

Preference for Theatre and Drama

Our study found that parishioners were excited about churches where theatrics are employed to explain biblical messages. This suggests that parishioners who attend churches more possibly like drama.

Actually, me I like the drama aspect of the preaching when the pastor is talking. I see the picture. People will see the picture. Everybody will see the idea in the message. I will lways come again to this church. Although not for the drama alone, but I will always come.

Respondent 24
(from Pentecost House, Ibadan)

From the reaction by Respondent 24 above, we deduce that the inclusion of skits as part of church life can bring more excitement to Christian gatherings.

Drama as Tools in Remembering Sermons

It was gathered that theatre and drama help parishioners to remember Bible messages. Respondents were asked which type of sermon makes them remember sermons better. Various responses suggest that although parishioners enjoy hearing sermons, they would like to see these sermons performed since they help in remembering sermons. Writings

of The Holy Bible admonish Christians to be doers of the word, and not hearers only. According to the King James Version of The Holy Bible,

if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1: 23).

This passage from scripture implies that those who hear sermons are expected to do something about what they hear. Regarding the use of drama as a tool in Christian worship to assist in remembering sermons, a respondent said the following:

Although people in church must always know that they are in church, I can categorically say that the type of style that pastors use sometimes is good. It helps me to always not forget the lessons.

Respondent 26
(from Triumphant Assembly, Ibadan)

The response of another respondent on remembering sermons with the aid of dramatics shows the pragmatic value of dramatics in Christian worship:

Even me, whenever I am sleepy in church, it is only action that will take the sleep away, especially at all-night prayer meetings [Respondent laughs]. Ah! People can sleep a lot. But it will become interesting if some dramatic spices are used by the preacher. In fact, it will make you to remember messages even better. That is my experience in this church and even my former church.

Respondent 43
(from Global Harvest Church, Ikeja)

To be able to do what is heard, the hearer must remember what is spoken. Since drama helps the audience to remember what is spoken, as testified by the respondents quoted above, it is logical to conclude that the doing would be possible if theatre and drama are utilised in the sharing of Bible messages.

Appreciation of Dramatic Sermons

Results from respondents show that sermons that are creatively passed on to parishioners attract worshippers more than sermons that are not dramatic. For example, when asked if dramatic sermons are appreciated, a respondent was quick to respond:

Of course who will not appreciate it if there is a lot of fun in church and yet the core message is not compromised. Look, the world is getting boring already. A little harmless dramatics will not spoil things. However, some people could be apprehensive of its outcome, unnecessarily.

Respondent 44
(from Paradise Christian Centre)

Today, as we approach the post-21st century, the church is once again embracing the use of drama in Christian worship. According to Magorrian (2001, 3), “things have changed:

in fact, one can argue that we are experiencing a true renaissance of these art forms in the Church". He, however, adds that though drama is being embraced, most churches lack the initiative to launch, in a serious way, a drama ministry. While most church leaders cannot conceive the notion of no music in the church, they think of drama as merely a nice add-on. The urgent need to retain parishioners has, however, made some pastors seek creative ways of worship. This has yielded positive results as the findings of this study reveal that parishioners appreciate dramatic sermons more than non-dramatic ones. Although pastors are careful not to step over the boundaries of what is acceptable creativity in churches, the need for balance appears urgent. Magorrian (2001, 3) agrees that "for both church and theatre there is a delicate balancing act". He believes that "if we want to welcome all sectors into Church services, it must never be at the risk of alienating those people we already have: attracting and retaining audiences may require the development of innovative ways of being theatre or church". This innovation has been beneficial for the selected Nigerian churches where it has been instrumental in attracting and retaining parishioners who are drawn in by dramatic sermons.

Responses from Pastors

In order to add depth to the findings, in-depth interviews were also carried out with pastors of participating churches. Responses from the pastors reveal the positive attitudes of church leaders to the use of drama in Christian worship. Below are the questions as well as responses of the selected pastors.

Question 1: What is your impression about the use of drama in Christian worship?

Well, I initially had mixed feelings. But after a while and a number of productions, I relaxed. Look, this thing [drama] helps the people to understand in few moments messages that would have taken forever to pass across. I guess I was just initially blinded by traditions. (Rev. VA, Global Harvest Church, Lagos)

Drama is good. I also was acting when I was young. I feel it is welcome as long as the performers always remember they are in church. They must do things [performances] which are decent (Rev. GA, Triumphant Assembly, Ibadan).

See, I am a theatre person. Honestly, there is really nothing wrong about drama in church. If music and musicians are allowed in churches, dramatists should also be allowed. It is just a gift as much as music is. We only need to be more open minded. (Rev. TA, Paradise Christian Centre, Lagos)

Well, I have been particularly interested in drama in church, but the costs of productions can hinder these plans. You know what I mean. (Rev. WA, Pentecost House Ibadan)

These responses about the use of drama in Christian worship indicate that most of the pastors agree to its utilisation, while others are of the opinion that churches should be cautious of possible excesses that could come with introducing creativity to Christian

worship. Rev. TA, for example, argues that as long as musicians are supported in churches, dramatists ought to be supported also. Rev. WA is only concerned about the cost implications of introducing dramatic sermons into Christian worship, not the value of the dramatics itself.

Question 2: Do you use dramatic illustrations to convey your messages to your congregation and if so, how often?

Of course I do use illustrations. It is hard to get some things [messages] across without them. (Rev. GA, Triumphant Assembly, Ibadan)

Illustrations are good in their proper places. One is careful, though. You do not want your audience to wander away in their minds. Some illustrations may be distracting. (Rev. TA, Paradise Christian Centre, Lagos)

I use them [illustrations], but not always. (Rev. VA, Global Harvest Church, Lagos)

I don't. Except of course if I feel my hearers do not understand what I am trying to say. (Rev. SJ, Paradise Christian Centre, Lagos).

The pastors' responses reveal that although most of them agree that dramatic sermons are helpful, others are of the opinion that a distracting method of preaching is still distracting at its very best. One of them expresses concern for the concentration of parishioners when drama is employed in Christian worship. According to Rev. TA, preachers do not want their audience to wander away in their minds. She is of the opinion that some illustrations may be distracting. Should distraction then be kept at minimal level, the use of dramatic illustrations should be embraced and encouraged in church sermons.

Question 3: What do you think of the idea of church-based theatre/drama group?

Not a bad idea as long as it will not take the people away from the things that are more important. (Rev. TA, Paradise Christian Centre, Lagos)

It is a great idea but who would fund it? Productions need big funding, you know. (Rev. FA, Global Harvest Church, Lagos)

Why not? In fact we used to have one here but the leader moved to another state and it has been difficult to restart it. We need to restart it. (Rev. WA, Pentecost House, Ibadan).

All the pastors quoted above agree that a resident drama group may be useful in church gatherings. Rev. PO from Paradise Christian Centre, however, cautioned against a dramatic group that may bring dishonour rather than honour to the church. His response was as follows:

It depends on a lot of things. But, why not? But they must remember they are a church group. We had a group once but they were doing some weird stuff right here in the church. This is a sacred place. (Rev. PO, Paradise Christian Centre, Lagos)

According to him, dramatists need to always remember that they are in church and treat church gatherings as sacred. Only then would their service to the church be valuable.

Question 4: Churches today invest greatly in the music of the church. In your opinion, should drama receive the same financial attention?

Why not? But then, come to think of it, music in the church has come to stay while drama in the church would have to prove worthy of such investment. (Rev. VA, Global Harvest Church, Lagos)

The answer is very simple in my opinion. Today, there are several people who claim that they can sing, and they prove it. At least even if it is in a mass choir. But it is not the same with drama. For drama, most people will say that they are shy. (Rev FO, Triumphant Assembly, Ibadan)

See, I can authoritatively tell you that it could be frustrating trying to convince committees that money should be spent on drama. I understand because I am a theatre person as well as a preacher. But not so for many people. Most people feel it would be a waste to invest in drama. (Rev. TA, Paradise Christian Centre, Lagos)

If there is money and if the finance committee or whoever is in charge of funds believe in the project. But it will be a bit hard for drama to gain even half the popularity which music has amongst churchgoers. (Rev. WA, Pentecost House, Ibadan)

While Rev. VA supports funding for drama groups in church, he still feels that “drama in the church would have to prove worthy of such investment”, meaning that drama has to prove its value to the church where the value of music is already taken as a given. Rev. FO’s opinion is that whereas churches are replete with good singers, the same cannot be said about talents for drama among parishioners. Rev. WA thinks that drama in church will not gain as much acceptance when it comes to funding because it is not as popular as music. Similarly, Rev. TA thinks parishioners might feel it would be a waste to invest in drama in church. These different responses suggest the simultaneous acceptance of drama as important in church service and reluctance to invest in it. Such tension embodies the complexity of adopting a dramaturgical model in Christian worship in Nigerian churches.

CONCLUSION

Over the past twenty years, as retaining members in many Nigerian churches has become a major concern, the various creative methods employed by church leaders have also become a subject of important discourse to both the church hierarchy and the Christian community. Advocates of transformation in how Christian worship is conducted are of the opinion that the use of dramatic embellishments in the teaching of the stories of the Bible should infuse enthusiasm and sustainable growth into Christian worship. As some Nigerian preachers become proactive in the use of drama in evangelism to make Christian worship more interesting, much of it is still on the level of mediocrity. This

could be because of poor play selection, lack of discipline among directors and players, poor equipment, unprofessional understanding of dramatic arts, disagreements among church committees about funding drama projects, and divisions among leadership over the role of drama in the church.

These factors notwithstanding, results from this study reveal that parishioners and pastors are aware of the benefits which theatre and drama bring to Christian worship if they are encouraged by church leadership, and that the use of theatre and drama in the church today to accentuate Bible teachings is an area of Christian worship that pastors should continuously incorporate into their services. Findings obtained reveal that the use of theatre and drama to accentuate Bible teachings benefit parishioners who are better able to remember these teachings. The pastors interviewed in this study seem to agree with Childers' submission that the gospel of Jesus Christ can be performed, just like actors do of the texts in their performances. Childers (1998) submits that preachers can enable their listeners better by "helping" them to hear and also perform the gospel.

Thus, rather than castigate drama, churches should employ the use of theatre and drama in Christian worship more, as they may be able to infuse into the church that vibrancy which church life seems to lack. Unlike other public places such as bars, restaurants and shopping malls, most church buildings are observed to be without vibrancy. Vibrancy may include a simple structural alteration of church venues to suit theatrical activities and performances. To attract young audiences, live theatre needs to be a central feature of Christian worship, because today's churches are competing with trendy bars, restaurants, cinemas and pubs, not to mention the numerous premier-league soccer clubs whose stadia are sometimes described euphemistically as the cathedrals of the 21st century. Although this article does not assume that soccer stadia are in competition with Christian worship venues, it does posit the view that churches can learn some lessons from these other public places.

The vibrancy available in public places such as stadia, cinemas and shopping centres may present itself as an avenue for the church to showcase the creative work of nature. Stressing the relationship of God, creativity and Christian worship, Magorrian (2001, 3) submits that drama is an expression of God-given creativity and may have a place of honour in the life of faith. Although the respondents in this study brought a variety of theological and denominational perspectives to the subject, they are united in their wish for drama and theatre performances to be essential media of bringing the Bible to life in churches.

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