

GLOSSOLALIA IN THE NIGERIAN GOSPEL MUSIC: AESTHETIC FEATURE OR ARCHETYPE OF A PENTECOSTAL IDENTITY?

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Abstract

The Nigerian gospel music industry has, over the years, become a veritable site of creativity, inventiveness and innovation. This is seen in the remarkable and artful incorporation by contemporary gospel singers, of hitherto forbidden cultural artifacts into their artistic compositions. In line with this, the tendency of incorporating glossolalia (speaking in tongues) in the lyrical text and performance of gospel songs is notable, particularly among popular Pentecostal musicians. This paper explores the structure and artistic values of this spiritual component (glossolalia) in selected pieces by Nigerian Pentecostal singers. It argues that, glossolalia in gospel music composition and performance is more an instrument of song spiritualization than it is an aesthetic feature. This is in line with the fact that the phenomenon primarily helps the artist to assert his Pentecostal identity. From an aesthetical view point, the practice of glossolalia contributes to the “barbarization” of gospel music composition and performance. The practice visibly has potential of distorting the message of songs given the fact that it is typically “esoteric-like”, sacred and secret in nature. Further, glossolalia is in general, largely unintelligible/ meaningless to the majority of audiences who humanly receive the song.

Keywords: Glossolalia, Gospel Music, Christian Identity, Pentecostalism, Music of the Devil.

1. Introduction

Gospel music is a very distinct genre in the contemporary Nigerian hip-hop industry. Its distinctness is viewed in its lyrical construction as well as in the relatively morally-sensitive instrumentation often adopted by its various makers. In effect, Christian music is distinct by virtue of its religious (spiritual) themes, orientation and purposes. In addition to this, gospel music is timeless; it pays tribute to God and contains powerful spiritual messages of worship, praise and evangelization (Frame 1998: 25-26; Hodges 2000:73; Ajiri 2013:1-2; Essoh and Endong 2014; Lewis 2000:76). Contrarily to secular music, it is more than an artistic expression and emotional experience as it is, in theory, directly inspired by God (Colossian 3:16) and as such, is perceived to be loaded with divine energy and dynamics to reach to the very depths of the listener’s soul and touch every aspects of his or her being (Schineller 2003). Based on this, it is always argued that the spiritual proprieties actually override – or are naturally supposed to override – the emotional/artistic proprieties in gospel music making. Lewis (1967:96) corroborates this assertion when he contends that:

We must beware of the naive idea that our music can “please” God as it would please a cultivated human hearer. That is like thinking, under the old Law, that He really needed the blood of bulls and goats. To which an answer came, “mine are the cattle upon a thousand hills,” and “if I am hungry, I will not tell thee.” If God (in that sense) wanted music, he would not tell us. For all our offerings, whether of music or martyrdom, are like the intrinsically worthless present of a child, which a father values indeed, but values only for the intention.

Conscious of the fact that spirituality is the most important attribute of genuine religious music making, early Christian music makers have mainly sought to fashion their artistic compositions in a solemn and sober mode, sometimes copying or performing retro-tune of very revered songs of the Christian hymnology. However, over the years, there has been a serious (r)evolution in the Nigerian Gospel music industry to the extent that the genre can today be viewed as a veritable site of astonishing ingenuity, creativity and innovation. A clear evidence of this (r)evolution and thought-provoking creativity is the progressive incorporation by contemporary gospel singers of cultural artifacts that in the past were derogatorily and pejoratively relegated to “sinful artistry”. It is for instance noticeable that there is a predominant use by a good number of gospel singers (especially Pentecostal singers) of rhythms hitherto considered as “the music of the devil” (Servant 2006:65). These more or less demonized rhythms include pure African traditional rhythms (including those often used for ancestral worship and rituals), modern “marginalized” or “stereotyped” rhythms such as ganstar rap, makossa, mapuka, R&B, rock and roll, hard rock, reggae and the like (Servant 2006, Amadi 2005). Another evidence of creativity in gospel music industry is also the incorporation of glossolalia in the lyrical text of gospel songs. This

practice – which, hastily, may be interpreted as an attempt at the redefinition of the esthetic values of gospel music – is peculiar among Pentecostal singers. This paper sets to explore the structure and the artistic and spiritual values of glossolalia in songs produced by Pentecostal gospel singers. It provides a conceptual framework of the phenomenon of glossolalia in the first place; discusses its role in the construction of a Pentecostal identity and hegemony in the second place and finally explores the use and (aesthetic and spiritual) values of glossolalia in popular gospel songs by Nigerians.

What is Glossolalia?

Glossolalia is a technical term used to refer to the religious/spiritual act of speaking in tongues. Samarin (1972:2) defines it as a “meaningless but phonologically structured human utterance believed by the speaker to be a real language but bearing no systematic resemblance to any natural language, living or dead”. Goodman (1972:8) associates the phenomenon of glossolalia with an extremely stimulated mental state. On this basis, he construes it as “an artifact of a hyper-aroused mental state” which, in Chomskyan terms, is expressed as “the surface structure of a nonlinguistic deep structure, that of the alter state of consciousness”. Though a number of early research works on the subject – notably the works of Motley (1981) – have attempted to demonstrate that some examples of glossolalia are, in a number of ways language-like, most linguists somehow generally relegate glossolalia to a form of “linguistic forgery” and a “façade of language” (Samarin 1972). In his study based on a corpus of over 28 examples of glossolalia, Dawn (1996) notes that the phenomenon is often characterized by a significant cluster of consonants and a high degree of paucity of non-native phonemes. Based on this, Dawn concludes that “this paucity will no doubt prove disappointing for readers hoping to find support for the idea of an other-than-human source for glossolalia”. Dawn’s observation is somewhat in tandem with Ditzel’s (2010) assertion that speaking in tongue has long ceased and that, what is often practiced among Pentecostal in guise of speaking in tongues is a mere deception and nonsense. He succinctly remarks that:

Since the Bible tells us that speaking in tongues was speaking in known languages and that this gift has ceased, I believe that what is today practiced as the gift of tongues is a deception. The “tongues” spoken are not known languages. They are simply nonsense. Similar phenomena of speaking in gibberish occur in the religious rites of non Christian religions. Such as Paganism, Shamanism, Spiritism, and Voodoo.

Linguists have studied glossolalia on a number of occasions. Their findings are quite revealing. One wrote that glossolalia is “only a façade of language” [...] They have found that speaking in tongues is a learned behavior, and that tongues-speaking congregations imitate the particular glossolalia style of their leaders, or will even take on the style of prominent visiting speakers.

Though this “negative and one-sided” conception of glossolalia is largely shared by linguists and “detractors” of this linguistic practice, most Pentecostals view speaking in tongues as types of utterances that could circumstantially be a real language and that are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. In line with this, Engelsma (2001) insightfully contends that the speaking in tongues is understood by Pentecostal “not as the ability to speak in foreign languages without formal, academic study, but as the ability to speak unknown, heavenly languages”. This thesis is often backed by a myriad of bible verses variously and sometimes concurrently interpreted.

The book of 1 Corinthians 13:1 identifies two categories of tongues that could possibly be practiced in a context of glossolalia notably “the tongues of men and the tongues of angels”. The tongues of men here will mean any existing human language, (living or dead), spoken by someone baptized in the Holy Spirit. Here, it is assumed that the speaker has never been tough such (a) language(s). An example of speaking in the tongues of men is seen in Acts 2:1-12 in which Jesus’ apostles and disciples spoke in the mother tongues of a multitude of people. The tongue of angels on the other hand will mean the language spoken by heavenly entities. The heavenly nature of the tongue of angel does not however mean that any strange and unstructured utterance may be counted as the tongue of angels.

As shown above, glossolalia has been subject to profound controversy. Different definitions and conceptions of the phenomenon do exist today. It is however important to stress that the definitions given to the concept by linguists only construe the phenomenon as linguistic practice observed among particular Pentecostals and possibly backed by erroneous and subjective interpretations of the Holy Scriptures. Most of the definitions given by linguists seriously depart from the Bible’s conception of the act of speaking in tongues. Similarly, Pentecostals’ interpretation of “new languages” referred to in Mark 16:17 as non-human, and strange tongues that have never been spoken on earth is questionable (Ditzel 2010). All These facts signal that both linguists’ and Pentecostals’ conception of glossolalia may have nothing to do with what the Bible actually presents as speaking in tongues or what genuinely should be viewed as such. Speaking in tongues, as demonstrated in the Bible is speaking in a new and real language, a language which is humanly and/or divinely made intelligible. It is not speaking in a perceived (un)real and meaningless tongue, which has no resemblance to natural languages, as most linguists put it. Or speaking in “new” (that is inexistent or forged) languages as most Pentecostals believe it to be (Dizel 2010; Engelsma 2001). The virulent debate which has been raised over glossolalia is today dividing

even the different Pentecostal denominations. This situation has led to the coinages of various attributes to define different varieties of glossolalia. In line with this it is common to see such attributes as “genuine”/“true”, “false”/“deceptive” or “demonic”/“satanic” as well as terms such “mumble jumble” or “mumbo jumbo” used to refer to particular types of speaking in tongues.

2. Speaking in Tongues and the Formation of a Pentecostal Identity/ Hegemony

To most Pentecostals, speaking in tongues is a sign of divine visitation and a solid evidence that one has either received the Holy Spirit or is just manifesting one of the nine gifts of the Spirit. To some Pentecostals, the speaking in tongues is the initial sign of this divine visitation, meanwhile, to others, it is merely a manifestation of the gift of many tongues. Whatsoever the interpretation of this linguistic practice might be, speaking in tongues is indicative of one’s possession of both the power of God and the identity of an “elect” an “achiever” or “chosen”, that is, the identity of “a true Christian”. This conception is backed and re-enforced by biblical scriptures such as Romans 8:9 which states that “if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”. The conception is equally backed by a cohort of other scriptural references which define the Holy Spirit as “the seal of redemption”. Based on such interpretations, Pentecostals often see members of other churches – especially those of the historic ones – as lacking divine light and life (Offiong 2008). Frank Edwards, one of Nigerian most popular gospel singers expresses this idea about speakers in tongues in his song (in Nigerian pidgin) titled “*Na we be dis*” [Here we are]”. The refrain of the song goes:

Refrain in Nigerian pidgin

Na we be dis so
We be the ones way they no de fail
Na we be dis so
We be the ones wey de speak in tongues

Translation into English

Here we are
We are those who never fail
Here we are
We are those who speak in tongues

The speaking in tongues is therefore associated with the power of the Holy Spirit which, according to the Pentecostals, is a pre-requisite for effective perseverance on earth and ultimate salvation on the day of the rapture. It is following this fact that most Pentecostals strongly emphasize on the baptism in and with the Holy Spirit in their doctrinal discourses. In tandem with this, Mbe (2002:362) notes that:

Pentecostals believe strongly in the baptism in the Holy Spirit that occurred on the day of Pentecost among early disciples. They believe that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples that made them speak in tongues on the day of Pentecost was not only for that day and only to early disciples. It is a relevant and recurring phenomenon that can be experienced by every believer. Its experience is signified by speaking in tongues (glossolalia). However, they hold that glossolalia is not the individual’s final goal in his/her religious experience but rather a beginning of a new kind of Christian living that is empowered and graced by one of the nine gifts of the Spirit: discernment of error, power over satanic influences, healing and miracle-working abilities, wisdom etc.

Pentecostals who speak in tongues consider themselves constitutive members of a special, sacred and superior community whose identity and unity is aggressively promoted to outsiders, that is to those not gifted (with the Holy Ghost) to exercise the speaking in tongues or those with different religious convictions (Mbe 2002:362; Anderson 2001). They see themselves as “real born again” Christians and arguably feel spiritually “superior” to other Christians that are non-baptized in/with the Holy Ghost or who do not simply believe in this doctrine. In accordance with 1 Corinthians 2:14, they view the Holy Spirit (and by extension the speaking in tongues) as a mark of differentiation to sort the “natural man” (the non-baptized) from the “spiritual man” (the speaker). The first is perceived as one who does not receive the things (mysteries) of God and considers them foolishness, while the latter is superior as he “has the mind of Christ”. In tandem with this observation, Offiong (2005:106) notes that Pentecostals in Nigeria have developed the culture of relegating historic churches (Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and the like) to dead religious enterprises which, regrettably, are in the pursuit of mere religiosity and which visibly lack effective and impactful spirituality.

3. Speaking in Tongues as a Communication Context

Pentecostals conceive the speaking in tongues as a divinely-enabled communication context. In effect the practice is Holy Spirit-assisted and is thus, genuinely not human-made. God, in a way, gives the born again Christian the utterance to use a new tongue and communicate directly to/for the Almighty in a clear and concise manner. This communication takes place most often during specific spiritual activities such as prayer, worship and prophecy among others. Speaking in tongues as a communication context could be examined in two principal ways:

- (i) God acting as the sender of a spiritual message through the speaker who functions as a more or less passive medium (God-to-man scenario), and

- (ii) The speaker acting as a sender which is miraculously empowered/assisted by the Holy Spirit and God functioning as the receiver (man-to-God context).

The first context is typically observed in the occurrence of prophecy or discernment of spirit. In such a situation, God channels His message to his people or to a specific target receiver through the speaker (the one who speaks in tongues). In this scenario, the (marginal) gift of interpretation of tongues is always indispensable as the speaking in tongues is imperatively to be accompanied with the exact interpretation of the utterance, for the target audience(s) to make meaning out of the prophetic experience. The interpretation of the message can simultaneously be done by the very speaker (prophesying actor/prophet) – if he has the gift of interpretation of tongues – or by an assisting speaker who is endowed with such a gift. In the absence of the involvement of anyone with such a gift, the speaking in tongues is, in principle, to be proscribed. 1 Corinthians 14:2-4 and 26-28 furnishes some explanations on the issue thus:

For he that speaks in an unknown language speaks not unto men, but unto God: for no man understands him; howbeit in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But the man that prophesies speaks unto men to edification, exhortation and comfort. He that speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies the church [an audience] [...] How is then, brethren? When you come together, if every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speaks in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there is none, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

The second scenario (ii) is mainly observed in the context of prayer. In such a situation, the speaker, being mentally aroused, just nurses “inexpressible” desires which are translated by the Holy Spirit into an utterance which, in genuine cases of speaking in tongues, is a clear cut language. Romans 8:26-27 illustrates such a scenario when it states that:

The Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

As shown in the two scenarios described above, speaking in tongue is, in genuine cases, divinely made, provoked and controlled. It is a phenomenon which occurs at an instant appointed by God and is not forged by man. However, as has been observed by sociologists, linguists and anthropologists, some Pentecostals have adopted the culture of provoking and shaping their speaking in tongues. This implies appointing an instant for the speaking in tongues and even imitating the particular glossolalia style of their leaders or spiritual role models, in various and often inappropriate contexts (Ditzel 2010, Toukea 2001; Dawn 1996, Goodman 1972, Samarin 1972, Mortley 1981). Pastor Chris, (founder of Christ Embassy, Nigeria) in Nairaland Forum (2011) somehow embraces this conception of glossolalia as he contends that:

There're those who believe you can only speak in tongues when you've attained a certain “spiritual high” or ecstasy. [...] We don't have to wait for any “spiritual high” or for the Spirit to take over our lips before we start praying in the spirit. The Spirit's part is to give us utterance or the ability to speak in other tongues (Acts 2:4), which He has already done. Without that ability, we would be trying to form and force those words out of our mouths, which will fail. [...] You can speak in tongues anytime; even now! You don't have to try and force the utterance. The Holy Spirit in you inspires those heavenly words in your spirit, which you're to speak forth in other tongues. So it's up to you to open your mouth in faith and speak in tongues whenever you choose!

The tendency of provoking and shaping the speaking in tongues to the liking of the speaker is often observed in the composition and performance of gospel music by some popular Nigerian artists. This multiform and complex experience will be illustrated in subsequent section of this paper.

4. Glossolalia in the Nigerian Gospel Music: Spiritual Act or Ante-Christ?

The practice of glossolalia has veritably blossomed in the contemporary Nigerian gospel music industry. A remarkably high number of Pentecostal artists artfully spice up their musical compositions and performances with it, sometimes copying famous American gospel singers who excel in the genre (“tongue-spiced” gospel music”). Notable among these artists are Evangelist Sonny Okosun, Desanya, Kenny Kore, Mario Ole, Nathaniel Bassey, Sinash, and Frank Edwards among others. Though very popular in contemporary times, the incorporation of glossolalia in gospel music is not very new. Early popular gospel singers such as The Voice of the Cross adopted the practice as a device for music spiritualization and beautification. The Voice of the Cross has particularly distinguished itself in the remodeling and performance of popular pieces of the Christian hymnology. In singing them, the group sometimes punctuated the hymns with speaking in tongues. This speaking in tongues helped redefine the selected hymns, making them to sound somehow different from the

original version. This technique of music composition and performance is equally adopted by contemporary gospel singers notably Evangelist Sonny Okosun who is notable for his captivating medleys constituted of popular songs of the Christian hymnology and spiced up with regular insertions of glossolalia.

Contemporary artists generally use glossolalia in a more prolific, original and inventive way than their counterparts of the 80s and 90s. Artists such as Frank Edwards have, for instance, devised captivating rap styles in glossolalia. These rap styles consist in the fusion of well memorized or prepared text with apparently improvised speaking in tongues. His song titled “Holy Ghost dey here” [The Holy Spirit is Here] vividly illustrates this style. The song is a veritable festival of speaking in tongues as both the title and over 80% of the tune’s time is dedicated to “demonstrative” glossolalia. The song features numerous back-up singers who extemporarily speak in tongues in a rap mode, painting the scene of a “staged” effusion of the Holy Spirit. A similar review can be made of the artistic (musical) works of Sinash (a female Nigerian gospel singer). Sinash’s musical compositions are characterized by her captivating intros in speaking in tongues, and in a rap and beat (R&B) mode.

Glossolalia in the Nigerian gospel music can be analyzed from many perspectives. In this paper we will consider the aesthetic-communicative and the spiritual perspectives. In effect, gospel singing is – in theory – considered as a highly spiritual act. As St Thomas Aquinas has once remarked, singing religious songs and psalms is considered as praying two times and as an opportunity for the singers to artfully “channel their faith into their vocals” (Ajiri 2013:1). In tandem with this, most Nigerian Pentecostal gospel singers have often sought to mobilize both their lyrical text and the melody of their songs, not just as mere entertainment tools, but as veritable weapons of impactful ministering. Ajiri (2013:3-4) further explains that:

One thing all great gospel singers have in common is their ability to uplift an audience by projecting their faith and emotions through their voice. They feel great love and joy; and they can make others feel it too [...] As gospel singers, they do not sing to entertain, but to minister to God, their audience and their selves.

The ardent desire to channel faith through voice and to minister in an “original” or creative manner has motivated a number of Nigerian Pentecostal gospel singers to “ironically” resort to such devices as archetypal sounds and glossolalia. These techniques of music enrichment are, in surface, immensely religious. They give a highly religious color to the artistic composition or performance and successfully help the singer to project his faith and Pentecostal identity. Speaking in tongue in the performance of music may be aligned with the religious idea of having “a psalm by the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 14:26) or praying/singing by the Spirit. It goes without saying that a liberal Pentecostal audience will likely or naturally identify with such a singer. However, to most conservative Pentecostals, the speaking in tongues is a sacred and secret communication which is to be confined to assemblies and specific divinely appointed forums (Majekobaje 2013, Toukea 2005 & 2007; Anderson 2001 & 2000). Manifesting it in a mass communication context – as in music composition and performance – may just point to a kind of “religious revolution” which, relatively, may be aimed at demystifying the practice of glossolalia and advocate its “staging” in any circumstance. This “religious revolution” is aided by the proliferation of new and more “democratic” doctrines that tend to teach Pentecostals to think in a more and more liberal manner about the speaking in tongues.

5. Singing in Tongues and the Aesthetics of Gospel Music

Music in general accords a great importance to aesthetics. Inherited from idealist philosophy, aesthetics is often captured by captions such as “art for art’s sake” and is associated with the ‘refined’ appreciation of beauty in the arts. O’Sullivan et al (1983:4-5) somewhat stress the idealist character of the concept when they note that aesthetics elaborates principles of taste as been transcendent, that is “going beyond any one period, culture or medium, and going beyond any one person’s subjective response”. O’Sullivan et al (1983:5) further explains that: “the object of study for aesthetics is the art-object itself taken out of its historical, cultural and means-of-production context. It is studied in relation to other art objects and in relation to the already-established discourse of aesthetics, with the purpose of isolating those textual proprieties which can be said to render it beauty”. Applied to the assessment of gospel music, one may consider aesthetic features as those textual and non-verbal proprieties which can be said to render music good or beautiful. As Schineller (2003) puts it, “music should not be seen as a decorative extra, an optional interlude. Rather, it is important [to note that] music unveils a dimension of meaning and feeling, a communication of ideas and intuitions which words alone cannot yield”.

Though spiritual singing seems not primordially concerned with entertainment, aesthetics (beauty and good taste) has a cardinal place in gospel singing. Lewis’s (2000:75) insightfully contends that it is a mark of spiritual bareness when a gospel singer performs just to fulfill a duty (that is singing just to offer a sacrifice to God) rather than “satisfying an appetite” that is to showing a degree of aesthetic prowess. In the same line of argument, Hodges (2000:73) views aesthetics as a facilitation tool for communicating the greatness, goodness and truth of God in gospel singing. He notes that:

Our worship in this world (one part of our cultural activity) needs to include the beauty of God as well as the truth and the goodness of God. It is beauty that makes truth edible. It is

beauty that makes goodness attractive. In our decisions about worship, we need to put into practice a good understanding of beauty. Realize that the music we choose is first and foremost to be the best we can offer, not merely what the surrounding culture will bear. The liturgy should be in a language the unbeliever can understand, but should also offer something he cannot find anywhere else in his world: order, fittingness, mature sensibilities, and beauty.

The principles of aesthetics are greatly flawed in songs which are spiced up with glossolalia. This is seen in the fact that glossolalia somehow distorts the principal message contained in the song as it facilitates the inception of expression that are “strange”, meaningless and incomprehensible to the average – if not the majority – of the audience. Majekobaje (2013) corroborates this view in his critical review of glossolalia in gospel music.

[Glossolalia in gospel music making] does not add to the lyrics of the song, but it sure does add to the ‘christianness’ of the song. [...] But another thing of concern with this theme of ‘tongues’ in gospel songs lyrics, is that, sometimes, it may just be too much. Knowing that the audience can only connect through the lyrics of a song, I think some artists may just have done too much. Not everyone who patronizes, or better put, loves gospel music are a fan of a ‘tongue-spiced’ music, although that does change much, still I think it should be put into consideration.

As explained above, there are imperatives of interpretation when speaking in tongues is performed in a mass communication context as it is expected that interpretation will definitely enable effective communication. However, Nigerian gospel singers seldom, nay never interpret what they say in their songs in the language of the Spirit. And according to 1 Corinthians 14:11 those who produce such incomprehensible and strange utterances run the risk of being viewed by profanes as “barbarians” (people considered as wild and uncivilized). Based on this observation, glossolalia may be viewed as kind of “barbarization” of gospel music composition and performance. In the same line of argument, Ditzel (2010) refers to glossolalia as “nonsense”, pointing that it could only be a feature of worship that should be utterly rejected. He notes that:

It [glossolalia] must be admitted to be a delusion or deception, and it cannot be considered to be harmless. It is absolutely not wrong to test the spirits, and, in fact, we are commanded to do so (1 John 4:1) and the implication is that we are to reject what is not from God. If today's speaking in tongues is not from God, and I believe that both biblical and non-biblical evidence shows that it is not, then it must be rejected. Those who ignore this do so at the peril of opening themselves up to even greater deception.

Glossolalia in music composition and performance may be viewed as “esoteric” by a non-Pentecostal or someone who is from a concurrent religious conviction (who does not believe in the doctrine of glossolalia). This is so especially as a number of studies by linguists have demonstrated that same utterances are produced in religious rites pejoratively considered satanic as voodoo and spiriticism (Samarin 1972, Ditzel 2010, Toukea 2005 & 2007). However, a conciliating view will consider the practice as one of the new and diverse expressions of Christian music and worship. As Frame (1998: 25-26) insightfully observes, in gospel music – just as in any other areas – we must seek to love one another and honor the diversity of the body to protect its unity. It is clear that “diversity presents problems of musical communication. But we can now see that the problem is at least in part a problem of love”. Glossolalia in worship should be interpreted or accepted as a kind of culture which though negatively perceived should be given the right to exist. Lewis (1998:26) censures the habit of demonizing new and alien forms of musical and spiritual expressions (as glossolalia music type) when he remarks that:

When sophisticated members of the church insist that worship employ only the most sophisticated music of their own culture, what has happened to their love for those who are poorly educated or of a different cultural stream? Or, from the opposite side of our musical wars: when advocates of contemporaneity want to set the traditions of the church completely aside and replace them with something largely meaningless to the older generation, are they acting in love? Are they honoring their spiritual fathers and mothers?

Glossolalia in gospel music making is therefore a controversial phenomenon which has come, visibly to stay and somehow characterize contemporary Pentecostal music industry in Nigeria. Despite the mixed reviews made about the practice, Gospel music lovers (audiences) and critics are relatively compelled to view it as a new “music culture”. However, as strongly argued in this paper, the phenomenon negatively impacts on the aesthetics and communicative properties of gospel songs.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the Nigerian gospel music industry has, over the years, become a veritable site of creativity, inventiveness and innovation. This is seen in the artful incorporation by contemporary gospel singers, of hitherto forbidden cultural artifacts into their artistic compositions. These hitherto forbidden artifacts include the use of such pejorative rhythms such as ganstar rap, R&B, makossa and the like, often labeled “the

music of the devil". In line with this, the tendency of incorporating glossolalia (speaking in tongues) in the lyrical compositions of gospel songs is notable, particularly among popular Pentecostal musicians.

This paper explores the structure and artistic values of this spiritual component in selected pieces by Nigerian Pentecostal singers. It argued that, from an aesthetic view point, glossolalia is more an instrument of the barbarization of gospel music composition and performance. From a mass communication perspective, the practice of glossolalia has the potential of distorting the message of songs, given the fact that it is typically "esoteric", sacred and secret. Further, glossolalia is in general, largely unintelligible/ meaningless to the majority of audiences who humanly receive the song and as such, its inception in the lyrical text over-complexifies and seriously distorts the message. The overall message is therefore partially readable by the average receiver and somewhat alienating for non-Pentecostal or "uninitiated" receivers, that is outsiders.

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