

CHRISTIAN DRAMA /THEATRE: IT'S DEVELOPMENT WITH REFERENCES TO NIGERIAN CHURCHES

Omole, Timothy Opeyemi

Dept. of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The awareness of Drama as a dynamic form of communication, and a powerful tool of evangelism is on the increase in Nigeria. Nevertheless, many Christians still hold prejudice against it; considering it as profanity. This study tracks the development of drama from the onset of Christianity in Nigeria, with the view to discover the relationship between drama and Christianity. Primary data were derived from first-hand information through the researcher's personal encounter as one, being a Nigerian Christian who pastors a church and works in theatre. These were supplemented with the secondary data from relevant published papers and books. The study discovers that Drama is not alien to Christianity. This discovery is expected to promote appreciation for Christian theatre arts, and inform a change of attitude, among those who are opposed to the use of Drama for God. The study concludes that Christian drama in Nigeria is already an established form of arts which could not be divorced from the Christian mission objective. Its relevance, however, will only be sustained when all Christians embrace it without further prejudice.

Key Words: Christian drama, Christianity, Colonisation, Drama, Nigeria, Transatlantic slave trade.

INTRODUCTION

The writer has been working in the theatre as a professional, prior to his conversion to Christianity. He thought that Drama, being a tool of, not just entertainment, but of communication, has a place in the Christian church. He continued to practise theatre as his career, while eagerly looking for opportunity to start drama in the church. Soon he realised that fellow Christians do not really trust him because, according to them, a genuine Christian doesn't do theatre; it is worldly. This reaction of the believers threw him, being a new Christian, into confusion. He began to feel guilty doing theatre. Eventually, he dropped theatre, having been convinced that it has no place in the Kingdom of God. (A wrong conviction, that is). For the next four or five years he avoided theatre like leprosy. His joy, however knew no bounds when, in 1983, he came in contact with Kunle Ogunde's 'The Word Productions Christian Theatre Ministry'. He promptly joined the group and remained a

member until he left for the Christ Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Ile Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, to be trained as a gospel minister.

Howbeit, the motivation he received through ‘The Word Productions Christian Theatre Ministry’ prompted him to organise his colleagues in the seminary to form a drama group. That was in 1985. That same year, he returned to the theatre, this time, a gospel theatre. He changed his registered name to Jesus Theatre Group and got it officially inaugurated, with a story on the ‘Death of Christ’ at Ojerinde Hall, Musin Lagos, Nigeria. Many Christian youths in Lagos came to join the group. Soon the youths in many churches began to invite Jesus Theatre Group to perform in their youth programs. He had a notion that believers will welcome him now that he is prepared to act for Christ. But it was not as easy as he thought. He found that many Christians, for various relative reasons, did not want to have anything to do with drama or theatre. The opposition to drama, nevertheless, persists among the contemporary Christians in Nigeria, in spite of the increased awareness of it as a very dynamic form of communication, and a powerful tool of evangelism. They still consider drama as a thing of the devil. This informs the reason for this study; aimed at establishing the umbilical ties of drama to Christian religion in Nigeria with the view to promote greater appreciation for Christian theatre arts, and inform a change of attitude, among those Christians in Nigeria, who are opposed to the use of Drama for God.

DEFINITION

An unending debate continues over what is Christian Drama or Theatre. Many Christians in Nigeria see the word theatre as too secular to describe Christian performances. Meanwhile, many use the words ‘theatre’ and ‘drama’ interchangeably. Both drama and theatre are words associated with performing arts and have a very similar meaning that is enough to confuse a lot of people (Olivia 2011). It is, therefore, necessary to highlight the differences between drama and theatre, to enable readers to make correct usage of these words. Drama is defined as “a composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or to tell a story usually involving conflicts and emotions through action and dialogue and typically designed for theatrical performance...a movie or television production”(www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/drama). Drama is a word of Greek origin. The Greek word for it is *Dran*, which means to do or perform. In other words, it means ‘action’ and referring to a performance on the stage in which actors act out the events and characters of a story. A

dramatic work is usually called a play (De Luca, Grillo, Pace, and Ranzoli, 1997, pp. 224-268) Theatre, on the other hand, is the personification of a drama on stage. It requires space, characters, and audience. It is a collective effort of many people, the cast and the crew that makes audience believe that whatever is happening on stage is real (Olivia, 2011). Drama becomes theatre only when it is performed on stage with actors performing the roles of the characters in the text. "Theatre therefore is the language of drama; Theatre is the form, drama is the content." (Osanyin, 1992).

The concerns of this paper is about the performing arts, both in form (theatre) and contents (drama) that has to do with Christians and Christianity in Nigeria. Christian drama, therefore, as conceived in this study, is a matter of both content and form. It is not only about enacting Christian ideals, but it is a genre of performing arts in which the cast, the crew, and the content are purely Christian. This form of theatre has been with us since the end of the transatlantic slave trade in the form of concerts. For the purpose of this paper, Drama and theatre will be used interchangeably.

ORIGIN OF THEATRE

There are many theories as to the origins of drama/theatre. The most widely accepted theory is that it evolved from religious rituals and festivals. This is true of the ancient Greece through competitions held as part of festivities celebrating the god Dionysus, and Rome, whose theatre, having encountered Greek was patterned after it (www.raitechuniversity.in). This is also true of the English drama which at its initial stage developed from religious rituals, commemorating the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It grew out of the liturgy of the church (www.unishivaji.ac.in distedu>sim2013). Similarly, traditional theatre in south west Nigeria originated from the performances of *egungun* (masquerades). This form was known as *Alarinjo* (itinerant professional theatre) among the Yoruba people. The masquerade form of theatre also existed among the Ibo people, in the eastern and southern Nigeria (Julius-Adeoye 2013). The *Alarinjo*, or the masquerade form of theatre has existed before colonial intervention (Banham, 2004, p. 140), whose theatre was initially, a transplantation of the English theatre on the Nigerian artistic scene. Theatre in Nigeria is thus not alien to religion.

ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

Origin of Christianity in Nigeria cannot be discussed without references to Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (1501-1867) and Colonisation of African continent, (Ugwu, 2011) Slave Trade brought who are later known as Nigerians into contact with Christianity, the religion of their masters, while Colonisation brought it to Nigeria. Nigeria was colonised by the British who first annexed some part of Nigeria as a colony in 1861 and later attached it to Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and other West African colonies, Furthermore, Lagos was annexed and consequently led to the establishment of a Southern protectorate in Nigeria(www.emmyboy.tripod.com), and between 1900 and 1906, virtually all the regions or ethnic nationalities of what later metamorphosed into Nigeria had come under British domination (Julius-Adeoye 2013, p. 21). And in 1914, the entire Niger-area (the Northern and Southern Protectorates) became Nigeria. Thus, the advent of colonialism brought with it Christianity (Odunaike, 2016, p. 64), being the religion of the colonial masters.

Long before the colonisation of Nigeria, King Ferdinand of Spain started Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in 1501. The Slave Trade saw many Nigerians taken captive by the Europeans and sold to the slave trading countries of America, Britain, and Portugal, etc. ironically, some Nigerian leaders, in collaboration with the Europeans also sold their people. For example in Lagos, King Kosoko was a Principal promoter of the slave trade, and Lagos, under him, had developed into a notorious slave market as at 1841 (Dike, 1957). Similarly, some in the city states of the Niger Delta, the Eastern region and the small tribes of the Plateau traded in human slavery with Europeans (www.emmyboy.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/Nigeria_files/). Consequently, many Nigerians got in contact with Christianity in their land of captivity. Meanwhile, Sir William Wilberforce, along with others, intensified campaign for the abolition of slave trade in the British Empire. The campaign became successful, as the British abolished slave trade in 1807. Slave trade, however, did not end in Nigeria until forty years later (Falola and Heaton, nd.), howbeit, by 1839, the first batch of immigrants, freed slaves and their children, who had acquired some form of Western education, had arrived Nigeria (Ogunbiyi, 1981, p. 17).

Even though, attempts were made to open Christian Missions in the Kingdoms of Benin and Warri, Nigeria between 1472 and 1621 by the kings of Portugal. Catholics and Protestants similarly attempted it in Borno and Hausa lands. Both attempts failed. There was no formal

institution of Christianity until it “came concurrently with alongside the resettlement of the freed slaves who were the first people to embrace the Christian faith in Yoruba land” (Julius-Adeoye, 2013, p.21). They pioneered the spreading and building of Christian missions on the West Coast of Africa, especially in Yoruba land, the Niger, and Cross River. One of such freed slaves was Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (Galadima and Turaki, 2001, p. 92). With the arrival of the freed slaves drama/theatre in the form of concerts came to Nigeria.

EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN DRAMA

STAGE ONE: PERIOD OF THE COLONIAL CHRISTIAN CONCERTS

Three distinct periods could be identified in the development of Christian Drama in Nigeria: First is the period of the colonial concerts; so called because the performers were Christians, and its contents, to a large extent, were influenced by Christianity which was garbed in western culture. This period began with the resettlement of the freed slaves who had embraced the Christian faith while in captivity. “This class of Nigerians imported the Western and European forms of the concert and the drama which were to constitute the basic framework of early modern Nigerian drama” (Julius-Adeoye, 2013, p.28).The contents of their concerts and drama were characterised by Christian religion. A concert is a performance by musicians or singers for an audience and usually does not involve theatrical staging (www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/concert).The drama at the period is in the form of ‘opera’, a dramatic composition set to music for singers, instrumentalists and dancers. “Prominently featured in these programmes were songs, vocal duets and quartets, religious plays and musicals, arrangements of English folk songs and excerpts from cantatas and oratorios, especially the music of Handel and Mendelssohn” (Omojola, 1995).The first concert programme was organised on the 24 October 1866 under the patronage of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, J. P. L. Davies, J. A. Otunba-Payne, Charles Foresythe, Robert Campbell and others. The success of the concert resulted in the formation of many concert parties by different people under different names (Ogunbiyi, 1981, p. 17). Similarly, the churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church used the power of theatre for a more effective communication(Ogunbiyi, 1981, p. 18).Consequently, with the colonial concerts, Nigerian traditional Alarinjo masquerade theatre group lost their popularity and dwindled (Shuaib, 2009, pp133-153).

Nevertheless, the period of the colonial concerts, in spite of its performance successes were not without crisis. This resulted from the colonial nature of the performances, as well as the attitude of the white missionaries, and their churches, obviously under the colonial masters, which the natives could no longer tolerate. For example, “the CMS, Wesleyans, Baptists, the Catholic Mission and the Methodist Missionary Society equated western civilisation with Christianity and morality with spirituality according to Christian tenets” (Banham, 2004, pp. 143-144). Furthermore, “The use of indigenous African musical instruments and songs in both the Church and in the mission established schools was forbidden (and) the white missionaries who were in charge of the churches, sometimes, publicly disgraced African Christian priests in their fold” (Julius-Adeoye and Omoruyi). Also, the missionaries mandated the Africans Christians to wear Western dress. The native people were not comfortable with these. They therefore, protested against the uncritical adoption of the European culture, values and codes, and advocated for the essence of indigenous modes of thought and conduct. In addition, there was the demand for the development of Yoruba literature in standard Yoruba orthography, the shedding of European garments in Lagos and the adoption of native costumes, among other things, by school teachers from various denominations in 1889 (Banham, 2004, p. 145). Within the Church itself, the failure of the white missionaries to accede to the African Christians’ agitation for missionary policies more sympathetic to African customs and beliefs led the natives to start their own faction of the churches. Between 1891 and 1920s many breakaway factions were founded as follows:

The United Native African Church, a breakaway faction of the African Church and the Methodist Church (UAM) was formed on August 14th, 1891. The United African Methodist Church was founded in 1917 while the African Church was founded in 1901 by a breakaway faction of St. Paul’s Church, Breadfruit, Lagos. The Aladura Church and the Cherubim and Seraphim which epitomize the Africanisation of Christianity in Nigeria were founded in the 1920s and it is in these missions that we find the earliest use of African music within the Christian Church (Omojola, 1995).

“Eventually, the concerts, as the main manifestation of colonial theatre in Nigeria, declined as they were unable to evolve an authentic Nigerian character” (Banham, 2004, p. 145). Thus the stage was set for native Christian drama period.

STAGE TWO: PERIOD OF NATIVE CHRISTIAN DRAMA 1860-1944

The cultural revival in the church, as it spread to the concert platform marked the beginning of native Christian drama in Nigeria. A major difference in this and the previous period is the context, in which the contents are set. During this period, concerts were done within the context of African culture. “The founding of independent African churches... afforded the members opportunity to freely blend Yoruba and European materialism entertainment. Most notable was their being accommodating to Yoruba culture and re-workings of traditional masquerade songs into church songs as a means of winning over converts from traditional religions” (Ogunbiyi, 1981, p. 18). They freely incorporated African songs, chants, dance and music, into the worship services of the churches (Banham, 2004, p. 146). Even though the Nigerian Christian churches used theatre to propagate its doctrines, and based church plays on stories taken from the Bible, they, unlike the missions churches, did not condemn the use of materials from masquerades and native cults. For example, in the eastern Nigeria, masquerades were used by the indigenous people to highlight the Christian feast of Christmas and Easter (Nzekwu, 1981, p. 135). And in the southern Nigeria, as a strategy to win converts from traditional religions, the church re-worked traditional masquerade songs into church songs (Julius-Adeoye, 2013, p.32). Similarly, some of the African churches consciously infused materials from the Ogboni cult (Gbilekaa, 1997). That was the beginning of a drift backwards to the pre-colonial era of the *Alarinjo* (masquerade) theatre. Other missions, however, found this to be non-compatible with Christianity. They view masquerades as occultism, and therefore would not consider it appropriate to use it or its material for Christian purposes.

As at 1902 the breakaway churches had fully utilised theatre, not only for evangelistic uses, but also for education, entertainment and other social purposes. Eventually, the church promoted drama both in the class of the European’s literary form, and the African native operas, with or without evangelical contents. An example of drama with secular content was D. A. Oyedele’s “*King Elejigbo and Prince Abeje of Kontagora*” which was allegedly the first Nigerian play (following the European convention). It was performed by Egbe Ife drama group, but was jointly sponsored by Bethel African Church and the St Jude’s Church Ebute Metta (Lagos Nigeria) (National Open University of Nigeria, NOUN, 2009, p. 129). Other form of productions which enjoyed Christian patronage at this period was the ‘Native Air Opera’, which, at the initial stage was of evangelical content. Examples of these are Chief

Hubert Ogunde's *Garden of Eden*, and '*The Throne of God*' commissioned in Lagos by the Cherubim and Seraphim Society in aid of the church building fund (in 1944) (Clerk, 1979, pp.4,5), Kola Ogunmola's *Joseph and his Brethren* in 1952, in one of the school rooms at Ikere Ekiti, and Duro Ladipo's *Yoruba Easter Cantata based on the crucifixion of Christ* produced for a church in 1960 (Ogunbiyi, 1981, p. 321-323) and his other plays such as '*Olori*' and '*Kobidi*' inspired respectively by the story of Samson and Delilah and that of David and Goliath (Edebiri, 1983, p. 144).

The pioneer actors and composers of 'Native Air Opera', under the patronage of the church, at this period include A. B. David, E. A. Dawodu, Ajibola Layeni, A.A. Olufeye and G.T. Onimole. Native Air Opera that could be christened a 'Christian Theatre' at the period gradually moved from the religious to the secular, and evolved into full-blown drama (later known as the Yoruba travelling theatre) (NOUN, p. 130), which was pioneered by Chief Hubert Ogunde, and popularised by him. "Hubert Ogunde secularized it by blending Church songs with jazz in his plays and by presenting it under his own auspices and no longer under the patronage of the Church and religious organisations; He then set it on a new course of commercial professionalism" (Edebiri, 1983, p. 144). Thus the Christian drama became dormant until 1982 when David Kunle Ogunde reintroduced it.

STAGE THREE: PERIOD OF REFORMATION

Before now, the independent churches take drama as a major aspect of their religious activities. "Like the European churches, they explored drama for the purpose of evangelisation; they enacted Biblical stories to strengthen the faith of their members, or win new souls for Christ and raise funds" (Edebiri, 1983, p. 144). Drama both in the class of the European's literary form, and the African native operas were used for the same purpose. But with the secularisation tendencies, Christian drama became informal; domiciled in the church, and was left in the hands of volunteers who organised it casually during Christmas and Easter festive periods, while the secular theatre continues to develop and breaks new frontiers in all media.

However, about 37 years later, a successful attempt to resuscitate Christian drama in Nigeria, was made by David Kunle Ogunde who first launched 'Operation Gospel on the Screen' in 1982, and founded 'The Word Productions Christian Theatre Ministry' in 1983. Kunle

Ogunde is a son of the late Chief Hubert Ogunde, the acclaimed doyen of the Nigerian Theatre, who is credited with the secularisation of the Nigerian theatre. He was involved in the theatre arts with his father since aged 16, and eventually founded and managed his own “Kunle Ogunde Theatre” successfully until he became born again in 1979, and later got called by God to preach the gospel through drama. Consequently, he founded ‘The Word Productions Christian Theatre Ministry’ which was the first independent Christian drama group in Nigeria (<http://www.globalfilma.info/html/about.php>). David Kunle Ogunde wrote several plays which the group performed in many places, including National Arts Theatre in Lagos, and in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Initial members of ‘The Word Productions’ productions included Dr. Goke, Hart, Sola Merriman, Timothy Omole (the researcher), Michael Durodola Reuben, Kayode Babalola, and many others. Notable plays by the group include ‘A time to live: A time to die’, ‘King of the fools’, ‘Tears from the fellowship’, and ‘The crucial hour’. The Word Productions was a catalyst for renewed interest in Christian drama, and consequently inspired many other groups to be formed. Similar groups that were formed in the first 8 years of the resuscitation of Christian drama in Nigeria include Mount Zion Faith Ministry (MZFM) by Mike Bamiloye in 1985, Jesus Theatre by Timothy Omole in 1989, and Christian Theatre Studio by Foluke Ogunleye in 1990. Since then, many more have followed suit.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Today, Christian drama has been recognised as a distinct genre of arts, and relevant tool for Christian education, entertainment and evangelism. Most denominations have established official drama groups and engage them in the life and missions of the church. Hence, many youths across denominations are now involved in drama. Aside church based drama groups; there are many independent drama ministries across the country.

Basically, Christian Drama has developed along with the Nigerian secular theatre in many aspects. One of such aspect is in the effective use of Television platform in addition to live performances. The initiative was first taken by Kunle Ogunde, whose “Operation Gospel on Screen” was instituted for same purpose in 1982. (Ogunde, 1982) However, actual breakthrough of Christian drama unto the Television platform was through MZFM, which in 1990, produced *Agbara Nla* (Great Power), a serialized television dramas, aired on a number of Television stations in the south west Nigeria. Since then, many other drama ministries

have aired their plays on various Nigerian television channels. The phenomenon received a boost with the increase in the number of television stations in Nigeria. Dove television, a Christian channel, owned by the redeemed Christian church of God was founded in 1990 (Julius-Adeoye and Omoruyi). Furthermore, there are slots earmarked for the propagation of Christianity on many channels which provide opportunities for drama evangelism. Notwithstanding, a dark side still exists in the broadcasting of Christian movies on most channels, particularly public, or non-religious television stations in Nigeria. They only air Christian films in the middle of the nights. This indicates that the Christian movies are not yet considered commercially viable enough to attract corporate sponsorship to help sustain the stations. However, it is a plus for Christian drama in Nigeria that it has developed to that stage.

Another demonstration of the growth of Christian drama alongside the popular Nigerian Theatre, noticeable in the contemporary times is the progressive move from live performances to the film platform. As at the period of the resuscitation of Christian drama in 1982, most major popular Yoruba travelling theatre groups had ventured into filmmaking in the 35mm and 16mm cinema format. Accordingly, Kunle Ogunde too, decided to explore the film outlet for Nigerian Christian drama by inaugurating ‘Pan African Film Missionary Alliance (PANAFILMA)’. With it, he was determined to give Nigeria the first gospel film. This was between 1986 and 1988. His arrangement with the famed pilgrim progress film producer, an American based Christian screenwriter; Ken Anderson for the production of the film was inadvertently unsuccessful. He was to later upgrade PANAFILMA to GLOBALFILMA: ‘Global Film Missionary Alliance, with which he successfully produced “snare”, a movie that featured, among many others, Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, of Deeper Christian Life Church (thesnaremovie.com/production-team), with the sole aim of educating and challenging people to take bible prophecy more seriously in the light of the contemporary political and economy situations of the world.

Obviously, it is in the aspect of film making that Christian drama in Nigeria has made its most visible presence. Before now, the hash economy of the country had forced the popular Yoruba travelling theatre groups to abandon the 35mm and 16mm cinema format and resorted to producing in reversed stock, and later, beginning from 1984, they adopted the format of video cassette (VHS) (Julius-Adeoye 2013, p. 26), which was not only cheaper, but

also easier in terms of technical demands and processing. The Nigerian Christian dramatists waste no time in embracing the video film format to propagate the gospel. Similarly, in 1990, MZFM video-recorded two of their stage plays; *The Unprofitable Servant* and *The Beginning of the End* which they distributed widely. Thus the pace in Christian video film productions was set (Domkap, 2010, p. 29). In Lagos, Jesus Theatre Ministry did her first film, *A Death of Love* on VHS in 1993. Expectedly, many other groups have embraced the method of film making. Sadly however, many of the video films made by some Christian drama groups never got released because they were poorly made. This made obvious the need for training. Meeting the need for training is another noticeable development of Christian drama in the contemporary period. Christian drama and film schools are as many as drama groups are in Nigeria. The largest number of drama ministries claimed to provide training for their members and would be drama ministers. Majority of the schools have no theatre, film or drama-relevant curriculum. They have poor, inadequate or no facilities to adequately train dramatists or film makers. Moreover, their faculty members are in most cases people, who though are Christians, are not trained in any of the performing arts. This development is worrisome. Consequently, most films made by many Nigerian Christian drama ministries are not presentable in terms of quality, hence they could not be broadcasted on any Television Stations, and neither could they be profitably distributed. Nevertheless, there are a good number of drama schools, which over the years have grown creditably in faculty, facility and curriculum.

The formation of associations to unite all drama ministers in Nigeria represents another aspect of the development of Christian drama. Several attempts were made prior to 1996 to form one body that will accommodate all drama ministers. But rather than having one formidable body, there were many. They include 'Evangelical Film and Dramatists Association of Nigeria' (EFDAN), 'Gospel Dramatists Association of Nigeria' (GODAN), 'National Association of Christian Drama Artistes' (NACDA), and 'Kwara State Association of Drama Ministers'. None of these associations could boast of its membership spread across Nigeria. However, Mike Bamiloye, who enjoyed the goodwill of most Nigerian drama ministers, who attends his annual conferences, consequent upon the obvious successes of his MZFM, used the opportunity to mobilise for a body that will co-ordinate the corporate affairs of drama ministers, and promote drama ministry in Nigeria. Thus, in 1996, all the previously formed associations merged to form 'All Nigeria Conference of Evangelical Drama

Ministers’ (ANCEDRAM).The membership is open to all Christians who are involved in drama and allied ministries and it has been officially inaugurated in all the states of the federation including Federal Capital Territory (www.ancedram.org).Meanwhile, in a fashion that is similar to the proliferation of drama and film schools, many, after the formation of ANCEDRAM, have formed similar associations. National Association of Christian Drama Ministers(NACDRAM) which claimed to be a great tool to connect with drama ministers and filmmakers around the country and world was formed in 2014 in Lagos State (www.nacdrum.wordpress.com); Global Association of Christian Artistes(GACA) which prides itself, as a “body of dramatists and musicians” was formed in 2016 in Ogun State (www.gaca.org), and ‘Lagos Association of Gospel Film and Drama Ministries’ (LAGFIDRAM) founded in 2016 is basically for the drama ministers in Lagos State. There are others which are denominational. They include ‘Nigerian Baptist Drama Association’ (NIBDRA), and ‘All Christ Apostolic Church Drama Ministers’ (ACACEDRAM) which was founded in 2006.

An annual festival of Gospel Films is perhaps the most celebrated demonstration of the development of Christian Drama in Nigerian. Beginning from 2009, The Gospel Film Festival (GOFEST), an annual event for the drama ministers and gospel film makers to gather to share experiences, build capacities, discover new trend and as well enlighten themselves to meet the global standard of film making has been held in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. The features of the festival has always includes movie review, lectures, and presentation of awards for excellent works of the members.

Christian drama in Nigeria has come a long way to be where it is today. Comparatively, the modern Christian drama period exhibits some characteristics of the theatre of both the colonial theatre period and the period of ‘cultural renaissance and nationalism’. There are sectors of the modern Christian dramatists whose productions, like in the colonial theatre period, exhibit the European tradition. Their works appeal mostly to the elite Christians in the urban settings. On the other hands, there are those whose works blends the African culture with the European culture. There works reflects authentic Nigerian character and consequently, appeal to all classes of people. However, care must be taken to avoid drifting towards cultic tendencies as it were in the native theatre period. The extreme to which the blending was taken in that period, in which traditional masquerade songs and materials from

the Ogboni cult were indiscriminately adapted was the precursors to the eventual secularisation of the theatre. As much as the modern Christian drama desires to be contextualised and acculturated in order to authentically reach out to Nigerians, it must strive to maintain balance. It is then that a truly Nigerian Christian drama will manifest and sustain its connection to the Christian religion.

CONCLUSION

Christian drama in Nigeria started with the return of the freed slaves, who brought with them, Christianity and concert (music, dance, and drama) in 1839. And for about 106 years (1839-1945), it maintained its connection with the Christian church. Therefore, Theatre or drama, whichever term we choose to call it, in the Nigerian context, is not alien to Christianity. It has developed through three distinct stages. It was at first a colonial concert with the coloration of western culture. And following the renaissance of African culture, and nationalistic consciousness, it became a native Christian drama, in which Christian ideals were contextualised within the African culture, with the use of indigenous songs, chants, dance and music. However, the practitioners took the contextualisation to the extreme, consequent upon which theatre drifted into secularism and eventually became compatible with the African traditional Alarinjo theatre. And truly in the tradition of *alarinjo*, (Itinerant Performer) it became known as a 'Travelling Theatre'. Thus, Christian drama became informal; domiciled in the church, and reserved for Christmas and Easter festive periods.

The conversion of Kunle Ogunde in 1979 and his eventual call into the Christian arts ministry by God, in 1982 resuscitated Christian drama in Nigeria. He started it with the establishment of 'The Word Production Theatre Ministry'; and a boost to it came through the activities of Mike Bamiloye's MZFM which began in 1985. Since then, Christian drama in Nigeria has continued to assert its presence and manifest as an established form of arts which could not be divorced from the Christian mission objectives. These phenomena however, will only be sustained when all Christians embrace Christian drama without prejudice.

REFERENCES

- Adelugba, D. Obafemi, O. & Adeyemi, S. (2004). Anglophone West Africa (Nigeria). In Banham, M. (Ed.). *A History of Theatre in Africa*. Retrieved from www.cambridge.org/9780521808132
- Clark, E. (1979). *Hubert Ogunde: The making of Nigerian Theatre* (Oxford University Press) p. 4, 5.
- De Luca, B. Grillo, U. Pace, P. Ranzoli, S. (1997). Literature and Beyond. *Loescher Editore*, Vol. I. pp. 224-268) Retrieved from www.mgtundoedu.altervista.org/what_is_drama.htm
- Dike, K. O. (1957). *Origin of the Niger Mission 1841-1891* Retrieved from anglicanhhistory.org/Africa/ng/dike_origin
- Domkap, E. (2010). Communication Technology: The Paradigm of Christian Video Evangelism in Nigeria. *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, Vol.10 No.2. (The Society of Nigeria Theatre Artistes). P29
- Edebiri, U. (1983). Drama as Popular Culture in Africa. *Journal of African Studies*, 12(2). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5n55b5vw>
- Falola, T. & Matthew, M. H. (2008). *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press Retrieved from www.cambridge.org/9780521681575
- Galadima, B. Y. & Turaki, Y. (2001). Christianity in Nigeria. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20.1 2001 P92
- Gbilekaa, S. E. (1997). *Radical Theatre in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications.
- <http://www.ancedram.org>
- http://www.emmyboy.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/Nigeria_files/
- <http://www.globalfilma.info/html/about.php>
- <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/drama>
- <http://www.thesnaremovie.com/production-team>
- <http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/concert>
- Julius-Adeoye, R. J. (2013). *The drama of Ahmed Yerima: studies in Nigerian theatre*. Leiden (University dissertation). Leiden University Repository. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20858>
- Julius-Adeoye, R. J. & Omoruyi, E. A. (2016). Theatre Performances, Pentecostal Christianity and Faith Based Universities in Nigeria. Retrieved from

www.jhss-khazar.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Theatre-Performances-Pentecostal-Christianity-And-Faith-Based-Universities-In-Nigeria

- Odunaike, D. A. (2016). Performers' Rights and Evolution of Performance in Nigeria. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization* Vol.53, 2016 61. Retrieved from www.iiste.org
- Ogunbiyi, Y. (1981). Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Lagos: Nigeria magazine)
- Ogunde, K. (1982). *Operation Gospel on Screen*. (A publicity tract)
- Olivia, (2011). Difference between Drama and Theatre. Retrieved from www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-drama-and-vs-theatre/
- Omojola, B. (1995). Nigerian Art Music. Retrieved from <http://books.openedition.org/ifra/609?lang=en>
- Onuora N. (1981). "Masquerade", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Lagos: Nigeria magazine, 1981), 135
- Osanyin, B. (1992). *Classroom lecture notes*. Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Lagos, Lagos
- Shivaji University. (2015). *Understanding Drama B. A. Part-III*. Kolhapur Centre for Distance Education. Retrieved from www.unishivaji.ac.in>distedu>sim2013
- Shuaib, O. (2009). Costume and Make-up as Indispensable Arts in Theatre Practice: A Historical Survey. *Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 2(1), pp133-pp153
- Ugwu, I. (2011). *Literary Theatre reception in Nigeria during the period 1948 TO 2010: A historical perspective*. (A Ph.D. thesis). School Of Post Graduate Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- Understanding Drama, (n. d.). Rai Technology University Campus, Bangalore – 561204. Retrieved from www.raitechuniversity.in