



## From Sacred Sound to Social Statement: Advocating Ethical Paradigm Shift in Nigerian Gospel Music Composition

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### Abstract

Gospel music is a genre of Christian music rooted in biblical teachings and spiritual expressions, often characterized by its devotional lyrics, call and response style, and emotional intensity. While it is primarily intended for liturgical worship, gospel music also plays a significant role in Christian social concerns. However, in Nigeria, the often use of purely devotional text fused in secular beat in articulating socio events evoke a church like atmosphere which compels most Christians to incorporate secular music that is sometimes imbued with worldly connotations in order to conjure a fuller sense of social engagement and festivity. In response, artists like Mercy Chinwo and Moses Bliss etc have created more relatable compositions that slightly depart from earlier devotional traditions. Mercy Chinwo's music in particular, integrates rich socio-cultural qualities, making her a prominent figure in both Pentecostal liturgical worship and Christian social gatherings. However, her works remain largely praise-centered, thus leaving the thematic gap only partially addressed. However, a more pronounced paradigm shift emerges in the works of Moses Bliss, Esther Oreri, Gaise Baba, and others who intentionally broadened gospel music's scope to engage pressing societal concerns. This evolution challenges rigid boundaries between sacred worship and social advocacy, encouraging a recalibration in which gospel music becomes both spiritually edifying and socially responsive. Guided by Lived Religion and Integral Ecology frameworks, this study employs qualitative content analysis and digital ethnography to reveal how selected contemporary gospel compositions integrate social themes in their lyrics without compromising theological integrity. The study advocates for a reorientation of theological ethics and musical function one that addresses social concerns both in liturgical worship expression and in socially recognized events within the Nigerian Christian experience.

**Keywords:** Gospel Music Artiste, Socio-religiosity, Socio-advocacy, Paradigm Shift.

### INTRODUCTION

Gospel music occupies a unique and revered position within Christian worship and cultural expression. Rooted deeply in biblical teachings, gospel music is not only an artistic form but a spiritual practice that conveys messages of faith, hope, and redemption. It is often distinguished by devotional lyrics that focus on praising God with the use of call and response patterns that engages congregations in a strong emotional intensity fostering a communal worship experience. Historically, gospel music has served as a vehicle for liturgical worship, helping to nurture faith and unify believers. However, gospel music is not limited to worship alone; it also plays an influential role in addressing social issues within Christian communities (Adedeji, 2012). This dual function becomes particularly significant in contexts like Nigeria, where gospel music is increasingly become a platform for discussing societal concerns. Seeking to equally reflects the lived realities of its audience, blending spiritual devotion with cultural expressions and social narratives as explored by Nigerian pioneer gospel musicians (Shola, 2020). This trajectory brings to light a distinctive characteristic of Nigerian gospel music as a fusion of devotional themes with secular beats and rhythms. This blend is intended to articulate social events and communal experiences, bridging a solemn and too church-like atmosphere with the aim of proffering gospel music for both Christian worship and secular engagements. Regardless, in contemporary Nigeria, most Christians continued to employ secular music to evoke a sense of social responsiveness. This experience has been significantly shaped by

the works of many gospel music artistes such as Frank Edward, Moses Bliss, and Mercy Chinwo etc. Notably, Mercy Chinwo stands out for her rich integration of socio-cultural elements in her music. Her songs constantly express themes of praise and adoration, assurance and testimony often portraying divine intervention following periods of battles. Her ability to convey praise and adoration using local languages, traditional attire, and cultural motifs reflects her distinct gospel music style. This approach allows her music to resonate with a wide range of Christian audiences. However, while her music powerfully captures spiritual narratives, it tends to focus less on horizontal themes; those that directly engage with everyday social concerns such as for Christian wedding sports, graduations, and other Christian engagements. This absence highlights a theological tension about what qualifies as gospel music and where its boundaries lie. However, Mercy Chinwo's unique blend of traditional and contemporary styles creates a widely accessible and emotionally compelling sound that continues to spark conversations among many Christians about the line between sacred and secular music. Be that as it may, as Nigeria faces increasing socio-economic challenges and environmental crises, a shift has emerged in the gospel music landscape. Gospel music artists in the likes of Esther Oreri, Moses Bliss, and Gaise Baba etc are reimagining gospel music context, incorporating explicit social themes into their music. Their works moves gospel music beyond conventional church settings, positioning it as a tool for wider social engagement and advocacy. This shift seeks to expand the gospel's reach into all areas of life, reflecting both divine (vertical) and human (horizontal) dimensions of faith. However, this transition continues to stir debate around the perceived tension between spiritual authenticity and cultural relevance within the gospel music industry. This study seeks to explore the ethical implications of these developments and what they might mean for the future of gospel music. By critically examining this evolution, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing conversations by suggesting ways in which gospel musicians can uphold the sacred essence of their art while effectively addressing pressing social issues in contemporary Nigeria. Therefore, a better understanding of this can be gained by exploring the historical and theological foundations of gospel music.

### **Historical Perception and Theological Foundations of Gospel Music**

The roots of gospel music trace back to the spiritual songs by enslaved Africans in the United States whom during church services would combine African musical traditions with Christian themes that was introduced through slave Christianity. The performance practice often employed emotional intensity, call and response patterns, and improvisational style, serving both as expression of faith, a means of resistance and community bonding (Gates, 1992). In this light, contemporary gospel music often blend traditional hymns with modern musical styles, emphasizing personal worship and social messages. The genre's adaptability has allowed it to remain relevance across generations, serving both as a form of worship and a cultural expression (Gates, 2004). Therefore, gospel music is not merely a musical genre but a vital expression of African American identity, resilience and faith. It has historically provided a voice for social justice, spiritual uplift, and community cohesion. Its growing influence was verified in the socio-economic and political history of Zimbabwe, inducing the history of Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2007 to be incomplete without acknowledging the critical role played by gospel musicians. Historically, during this period, particularly under neo-liberal economic reforms driven by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Zimbabwe experienced worsening socio-economic conditions. In response, gospel music transformed from a purely spiritual genre into a vital sociopolitical tool. When Gospel musicians began to use their platforms to critique government policies and spoke to the hardships faced by ordinary citizens. Thus, Gospel music emerged as a powerful voice for the people, reflecting and resisting the realities of a struggling nation (Gwekwerere, 2019). Furthermore, gospel music had also been commercialized, as seen in events where audiences are charged for attendance. For instance, near Boone, North Carolina, each of the fans paid twelve dollars to attend a gospel music concert which is a clear indication of its commodification (Goff, 1998). This reflects a shift from purely spiritual gatherings to monetized

performances that cater to both religious and entertainment markets. Its influence extends beyond religious settings, impacting mainstream music, film and popular culture. Moreover, gospel music has played a role in shaping American musical identity, influencing jazz, blues, soul, and pop. Its emphasis on vocal expression, improvisation, and emotional authenticity continues to inspire artists worldwide (Darden, 1999). However, tracing its influence in the Nigerian gospel musical experience, it is discovered that Gospel music in Nigeria has a history as long as that of the church itself. It began with traditional gospel hymns performed by church choirs during worship services and Christian gatherings. Over time, it evolved, when Pioneers like Reverend Josiah J. Ransome-Kuti, in the 1890s began blending choral music with the Yoruba language and its distinct melodies (Aniye, 2023). Thereafter, in the 1930s, Ikoli Harcourt-Whyte became the first to create gospel music in the Igbo language, gaining significant popularity. The antecedent in the 1970s and 1980s that led to American country gospel artiste like Jim Reeves and Johnny Cash influence gave a redirection of Nigerian gospel music. From the 1980s onward, the genre underwent major transformation, led by figures such as pop artist Kris Okotie, platinum-selling Sunny Okosun, and Panam Percy Paul. In the 1990s, a new wave of gospel artiste emerged, including AsuAniye, Kingsley Ike, Sammie Okposo, DC Envoy, and Sinach. Following this period, gospel music in Nigeria has continued to develop into a unique, indigenous hybrid that resonates with diverse Christian audiences across the country (Aniye, 2023). However, traditionally, gospel music performed at social events during this time focused heavily on canonical text due to its rich and storied history that is deeply intertwined with the development of Christian worship and theology. Nevertheless, gospel music has long become a global phenomenon, adapting to diverse cultural contexts including Nigeria. Its foundation lies in the biblical mandate to praise God through music, drawing on scriptures such as Psalm 100:1 "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands." Theologically, gospel music functions as a form of liturgical expression, embodying spiritual truths and fostering a communal worship experience. The lyrics often recount themes of salvation, divine intervention, hope, perseverance, and thanksgiving. These themes serve not only to uplift the individual believer but also to build and sustain the collective faith community. But traditionally, gospel music in Nigeria as a sacred art form has been perceived as a primary purpose of glorifying God (Adedeji, 2012). However, the content and style of gospel songs have historically maintained a strong alignment with Christian doctrine and ethics. From which lyrical integrity is paramount both in Christian worship and social event because Christian songs are seen as extensions of preaching, teaching, and spiritual formation. Notwithstanding, over time, when most Christians began to deploy more of secular songs to evoke social presence in their public events, musicians such as Frank Edward, Moses Bliss, Mercy Chinwo, etc soon began realigning their compositions to resonate more with local languages, slangs, and more complex cultural expressions, enriching the global gospel music landscape in Nigeria. Despite this contextualization to meet audience demand, the theological foundation remains central as a vehicle for worship, moral instruction, and spiritual encouragement. However, as the current economic deflation in Nigeria began to surface in a beat bringing about more economic and environmental challenges in Nigeria. The need for broader understanding of God in addressing societal concerns gave rise to gospel music such as "Have Faith" by Pastor Paul Enenche featuring DaniellaEnenche, "For Life" by Moses Bliss. In addition, "Pour Me Water" by Esther Oneri and "No turning Back byGaise Baba featuring Lawrence Oyor etc. Whose musical compositions emphasizes gospel from a broader perspective from the use of secular beat to socio thematic expressions with relevant scriptural allusions. Giving rise to the questions by many Christians whether gospel music can maintain its doctrinal purity and worshipful intent in contemporary Christianity. Thus, understanding the historical and theological foundations of gospel music is essential for evaluating contemporary shifts in the Nigerian gospel music industry. This study provides the necessary lens to discerning whether modern adaptation is an authentic continuation of gospel's sacred mission or a departure into entertainment and secularism.

### **Paradigm Shift in Nigerian Gospel Music Composition**

In recent years, Nigerian gospel music has undergone significant stylistic and thematic transformations, reflecting broader cultural shifts and the dynamic nature of Nigeria's social landscape. While remaining rooted in its spiritual mission, Nigerian gospel music increasingly incorporates secular musical styles such as Afrobeat, hip-hop, highlife, and contemporary pop (Nwankpa, 2013). This fusion serves multiple purposes: appealing to younger audiences, reflecting local musical tastes, and broadening gospel music's reach beyond traditional church settings. Gospel artistes are emerging as prominent figures in this evolving landscape. Their works are notable for blending devotional lyrics titled to social concerns expanding the essence of the church to the society beyond praise and adoration, creating songs that resonate both as acts of worship and as social commentary. Below is a Christian love song "For Live" by Moses Bliss to express his engagement vows to his then Fiancee (now wife) Marie Bliss (Moses Bliss, 2024).

#### Lyrics of For Life by Moses Bliss

intro

Um, yeah

Ooh, ooh, oh

verse

From my heart to your ears

I'll sing these melodies for you

'Cause you've touched my heart in so many ways

Like I've never felt before

chorus

I thank the Lord for bringing you my way

And I'm never letting go

This loving is for life

This loving is for life

I thank the Lord for bringing you my way

And I'm never letting go

This loving is for life

I'm loving you for life

hook

Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

This loving is for life

I'm loving you for life

Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

This loving is for life

I'm loving you for life

verse

If challenges come, I'll stay with you

It's me and you, 'til Jesus comes

No going back, no backing down

We will serve the Lord, make the Kingdom proud

What more can I ask for?

You are all I prayed for

Woman of the word, you're my dream come true

I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you!

hook

Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

Ah. yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah  
 This loving is for life  
 I'm loving you for life  
 Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah  
 Ah yah, yah, yah, yah, yah  
 This loving is for life  
 I'm loving you for life  
 chorus  
 I thank the Lord for bringing you my way  
 And I'm never letting go  
 This loving is for life  
 I'm loving you for life  
 I thank the Lord for bringing you my way  
 And I'm never letting go  
 This loving is for life  
 I'm loving you for life  
 outro  
 Baby, ooh  
 I'm loving you for life

### Textual Analyses

"For Life" by Moses Bliss is a heartfelt gospel love ballad that blends spiritual devotion with romantic commitment. Rooted in Christian values, the song presents love not as a fleeting emotion but as a lifelong covenant guided by divine purpose. Through its lyrical simplicity and emotional resonance, the song communicates a profound message: true love is a gift from God, to be cherished, nurtured, and lived out in service to Him.

Thematically, the song centers on love, gratitude, fidelity, and spiritual partnership. Lines such as "I thank the Lord for bringing you my way" and "This loving is for life" express a deep sense of appreciation for a God ordained relationship. The commitment is unwavering, even in the face of challenges, as seen in the lyrics, "If challenges come, I'll stay with you." This reveals a love rooted not only in emotion but in faith, patience, and covenant. Musically, the structure supports its message with verses that tell a story, a chorus that affirms lasting love, and a hook that captures emotional joy through vocalizations. The repetition of the phrase "I'm loving you for life" reinforces the idea of enduring commitment. The tone is intimate yet declarative, making it suitable for both personal reflection and public celebration, particularly use for weddings, engagement and wedding anniversary.

Contextually, the song reflects the cultural values of modern African Christianity, where relationships are often seen as part of one's spiritual journey. The inclusion of lines like "We will serve the Lord, make the Kingdom proud" positions the couple's union within the broader mission of faith, echoing scriptures such as Joshua 24:15 and Proverbs 18:22. The love described is not merely romantic it is spiritual, purposeful, and eternal.

Moses Bliss "For Life" music is more than a love song; it is a musical testimony of godly relationship. Moses Bliss masterfully weaves together scriptural principles, emotional depth, and socio cultural relevance to deliver a message that honors both divine providence and human affection. The song serves as beautiful reminder that when love is grounded in God, is indeed for life.

This new wave of gospel artistes does not only focus on individual spiritual growth but also addresses broader societal concerns such as poverty, educational, political and environmental concern etc. The adoption of secular musical forms in gospel music can be seen as a response to the realities of modern Nigerian life. Music becomes a tool not only for spiritual encouragement but also

for social engagement. For example, songs that celebrate communal festivities or comment on social issues contribute to a sense of shared identity of solidarity among believers as emphasized in Esther Orerigospel music of activism (Esther Oreri, 2020).

### Pour Me Water by Esther Oreri

Verse 1: See the way you dey pour me your blessings o,  
 Your blessings dey make me run temperature ooo.  
 The way you dey change my level,  
 the way you dey change my life,  
 dey make me, dey make me burn like flame.

Chorus: Somebody Pour me water,  
 Somebody pour me water,  
 Somebody pour me water o,  
 Somebody pour me water o,  
 Somebody pour me water.

Verse 2: So it came to pass, it came to pass, it came to pass,  
 Oh what a Saviour, He brought my dream to pass,  
 My heart is lightened and my soul is lifted high.  
 The host of heaven says my years of weeping o,  
 its done and dusted

(Access Pour me Water Video [https://youtu.be/99qp\\_t6b5KA?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/99qp_t6b5KA?feature=shared))

### Textual Analyses

The song uses metaphor and repetition particularly the phrase "Somebody pour me water" to symbolize God's outpouring of blessings, peace, and restoration. Inspired by Psalm 30:5KJV (..."weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning"), the lyrics celebrate transformation after prolonged suffering. Contextually, the song responds to systemic challenges within Christian religion and educational sector, especially the "No School Fees, No Exam" policy in 2015/2016 session that nearly derailed Oreri's academic journey. Until God intervened through some compassionate Uniport staff such as Dr. Isaac Ibude, Mrs. Margaret Shina, Mr. KachiNwanze, Prof. OnyeeNwankpa, and others who became pivotal, to helping her complete her education. Thereafter, just like "Pour me water" her music conveys a powerful narrative of divine intervention, personal triumph, and spiritual renewal rooted in her real-life experiences of loss, hardship, and all-round struggles. Pour Me water features collaborators from the University of Port Harcourt such as Prof. Ogunbiyi S. Samuel, Prof. Godfrey Omojefe (Current Dean, Faculty of Management Sciences) etc. Such collaborations do not only capture the conclusion of her education but highlights how religious leaders can interface with professional bodies such as educational sector etc to navigate a robust evangelistic approach on faith centered support for humanity.

### Scriptural Paraphrase

The use of water in Oreri's music evokes references from Isaiah 44:3 and John 7:37-39, aligning with biblical themes of renewal, the Holy Spirit, and divine timing. "Pour Me Water" functions not only as liturgical music composition for Christian theater art performance, but as a faith-centered alternative for Christian social events like graduations ceremony. It fills a long-standing gap in Nigerian gospel music by merging devotional content with social themes, encouraging inclusivity, compassion, and environmental consciousness just as God's mandate to Adam in the Garden of Edem (Gen. 1:28). Also, in Psalm 24:1 KJV where King David acknowledged that "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."

Nigerian gospel artistes are increasingly using their music to speak out on issues such as Christian youth empowerment, gender equality (Oreri and Ibude 2023). In addition to environmental stewardship marking a shift from a purely devotional focus to a broader mission that integrates faith with social action. Digital platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and social media has also

played a crucial role in popularizing this new form of gospel music. These platforms enable artists of such category to reach diverse audiences, fostering community engagement and dialogue around gospel music's evolving identity. Another outlook as stated below clearly portrays a call for Christian youth in Nigeria harsh economic condition to reaffirm their total surrender to Christ in a celebratory manner. No Turning Back by Gaise Baba featuring Lawrence Oyor (Gaise Baba, 2025)

No Turning Back II

Refrain:

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back, no turning back

No no, no no, no no

No no turning back

No no, no no, no no

No no turning back

Mi o ni choice, I go narrow

Them think say I no know road, o

Emimimo (Holy Spirit), Na Him dey move me, dey lead me dey go, o

On God, mind's made up o

Of course, no going back o

Non-stop, on 240

Esugan on damiduroti (Even the devil cannot stop me)

I'm steady revving, on the throttle

Got eyes on the prize, o

Baba nlaenikan, kole (Father, no one can) snatch me from His hand, o

Ife Jesu lo wamiri (The Love of Jesus has found me)

To gba'ku mi ku o (He died in my place)

That's why I follow

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back, no turning back

I can never turn back (No, no)

It's already too late o (No, no)

E won't make sense o (No no turning back)

Where am I going to (No, no)

It's already too late o (No, no)

I've already come too far (No, no)

It's already too late o (No no turning back)

Call and Response:

We will burn the world

We will spend the billions

We will spend for Jesus

Till we shift the culture

We will heal the sick

We will raise the dead

Transform the nations

Till we hear "well done" (Repeat)

(Refrain)

I will never, never

I will never, never  
I will never, never  
Never turn back!  
Never turn back! x3  
(Call and Response)

### Textual Analyses

No turning back by Gaise Baba featuring Lawrence Oyor at its core underscores a declaration of unwavering allegiance to Jesus Christ. The central refrain "I have decided to follow Jesus No turning back" is a timeless Christian confession of faith and perseverance. It echoes foundational biblical themes such as discipleship, the cost of following Christ (Luke 9:62), and unwavering commitment, despite life's trials. This theme permeates both the verses and the recurring call and response structure, reinforcing a message of spiritual resilience. The song's linguistic diversity is central to its expressive power. The use of English ensures clarity and universal Christian comprehension, making the song suitable for broader audiences. Pidgin English, on the other hand, adds an earthy, conversational tone that resonates with everyday West Africans, grounding the song in lived realities. Yoruba, a widely spoken Nigerian language often used in religious settings, lends a deep emotional and spiritual resonance, allowing listeners to connect at a more intimate cultural level. Several lines demonstrate this effective layering of language. For example, the phrase "Mi o ni choice, I go narrow", a Yoruba inflected Pidgin expression, alludes to Matthew 7:14 (choosing the narrow path that leads to life). Similarly, "Emimimo, Na Him dey move me" translates to "The Holy Spirit is guiding me," combining theological doctrine with cultural familiarity. The song's literary devices further enrich its message. Repetition, such as "No no, no no, no no" turning back," builds emotional intensity and affirms the singer's spiritual resolve. Metaphors like "On 240" (a reference to high speed) symbolize an unstoppable spiritual momentum, while biblical allusions to healing the sick and raising the dead evoke the miraculous ministry of Christ and the early Church (Matthew 10:8). The use of symbolism "Burn the world" and "shift the culture" signifies a desire for radical spiritual transformation and societal renewal. Structurally, the song is refrain-based and utilizes call and response techniques, making it ideal for communal singing. These structural choices reflect African musical traditions and help reinforce a sense of unity and participation during worship.

Contextually, the song is situated within the Nigerian gospel music tradition, which often merges Western hymnody with African rhythms, languages, and experiences. The incorporation of Yoruba and Pidgin English reflects the Pentecostal/Charismatic worship culture prevalent across West Africa, known for its passionate expression, spiritual warfare themes, and bold declarations of faith.

Theologically, the song embraces conservative Christian doctrine. In terms of soteriology, it affirms the belief in substitutionary atonement; Jesus Christ as the one who died in our place. The blend of languages English, Pidgin and Yoruba for cultural depth is for universality and relatability, which helps to ensure the song, connects across diverse demographics, from rural communities to urban congregations. By embedding social consciousness, theological clarity, and cultural richness into a dynamic musical experience, the song becomes a template for how gospel music can transcend personal worship to inspire societal change. It reflects the heartbeat of a generation that desires not only to serve God privately but to publicly shift the spiritual and cultural landscape through sound, song, and sacrifice. However, as contemporary Nigerian gospel music reflects a vibrant and complex interplay between tradition and modernity, sacred worship and social commentary. Understanding these trends is essential for evaluating the implications of gospel music's evolving role within Nigerian Christian society from a theological and ethical point of view.

### Theological and Ethical Evaluation of Gospel Music Paradigm Shift in Nigeria

The current transformation in Nigerian gospel music has drawn significant philosophical and theological scrutiny among Christians. While some view this evolution as necessary for cultural relevance and social engagement, others argue that it compromises theological integrity. However, Milbank (1990), for example, would likely oppose this shift if it only leads to secularization or aesthetic superficiality. Despite that Milbank would often argue that Christian practices must remain rooted in the redemptive and sacramental life of the Church. Milbank theology advises that gospel music should not be co-opted as a mere platform for activism or entertainment but should reflect the Church's eschatological hope. This obviously considers such paradigm shift in Nigerian gospel music to be edifying seeing that Christian beliefs are captured in the three analyzed song text. Such as pour me water that addresses numerous social concerns in Nigeria. Also, Moses Bliss while maintaining Christian moral ethics provided a direct and exceptional repertoire of love song which typically responds to the theme of Christian sacrament such as marriage. However, Moses Bliss shift from traditional gospel music norm is viewed by some fans as a spiritual decline (Skabash, 2024). In addition to this critique, Esther Oreri also stated that in the year 2021 she'd been pressurized by close acquaintance to follow the traditional norm of devotional gospel music hence she is not likely to be famous or be promoted by the Church. Regardless she continues to pilot this vision as a guest gospel artiste in graduation parties. With such experience, Caputo similarly critique rigid religious metaphysics that reduce God to fixed doctrines. To them such philosophical narratives of gospel music as mostly portray in praise and adoration text or liturgical themes/imageries demonstrate a weakness of understanding of who God is. As such, Caputo (2001) calls for an ethics grounded not in institutional authority but in radical openness to the exposition of God as a divine being. While also considering the current economic deflation which has affected every aspect of human engagement in Nigeria. Giving rise to increased poverty state, mental health decline, ecological degradation, social vices and so on, this shift therefore does not only help to address social concerns both to integrate more self-employed outlets for talented Christians. However, MacIntyre's would suggest that as Nigerian gospel artistes prioritize branding, fame, and commercial success, they risk losing the communal and moral telos that historically grounded their art (MacIntyre, 1984). From a scriptural view point, Christians are always regarded as a distinct entity irrespective of their interaction with the world, for instance just like it was easy for the disciples of Christ to be recognized as Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). In other words, being a born again Christian without moral prove while discharging the duty of a gospel entity offers a compelling lens to converts moral fragmentation. He warns that the displacement of virtue-based, tradition-rooted practices by emotivist individualism leads to a breakdown in moral coherence (MacIntyre, 1984). From this perspective, secularism and superficiality within gospel music composition extend beyond the textual analyses to encompass the ethos, pathos, truth and spiritualism in the Christian context and the thematic relevance/appropriateness of the work to its audience etc. This analysis therefore challenges Gaise Baba's stage presence and intention to disseminate his music "No Turning Back" widely across all societal spaces, including nightclubs (Iffy Agatha, 2025). Such indiscriminate inclusivity risks diluting the gospel's profundity, as exemplified by the song "No Turning Back," which serves as a reaffirmation of faith for those already converted. The study suggests that befitting songs for evangelistic purpose of such nature should deploy themes on holiness and repentance, such as "Where Will You Spend Eternity?" or "Without Holiness No Man Shall See the Lord". However, the likelihood that DJs or club managers would embrace such solemn themes even when set to secular rhythms is doubtful, due to their awareness of the songs' implications and the potential business risk when their clients become spiritually alienated. Hence it is obvious that Gaise Baba shares same burden with other emerging gospel music artiste of such category (to expand the understanding of God through music in social spaces beyond church settings). However, his philosophical approach to gospel mandate from a secular depth, if not properly guided, may cause more harm than good. As such, even though Caputo rejects ethics that domesticate God and would support this paradigm shift as a creative reimagining of the divine, he ultimately warns against commodifying faith in ways that obscure its ethical depth

(Caputo, 2023). In this light, Pannenberg offers a more conditional approval of gospel music's social engagement. He argues that Christian theology must remain historically grounded and eschatological focused. To him if a gospel music would address social concerns while bearing witness to Christ's redemptive work, it can be seen as a valid form of public theology. However, if it succumbs to entertainment and emotionalism, it ceases to function as a theological witness (Pannenberg, 1991). Beyond theological critique, the framework of lived religion helps us understand how gospel music mediates everyday faith among Nigerian Christians. As gospel music moves into non-religious spaces to engage with Christian activities more effectively, it reveals how religion is practiced outside formal institutions. This shift if properly managed would not necessarily reflect decline, but rather transformation (McGuire, 2008). Boff's (1995) cry of the earth, cry of the poor as captured in his scholarly discourse introduces integral ecology as a model that connects spiritual devotion with social and ecological justice. Boff's ethics of care and interdependence align with gospel music that amplifies the voices of the oppressed and promotes communal healing. Under this lens, gospel music that addresses poverty, injustice, or climate despair while retaining spiritual depth is not a deviation, but an extension of Christian mission(Boff, 1995). Following the Nigeria current socio economic state, Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity as interpreted by Rhodes (2016), as that which is shaped by ethical storytelling, where Gospel music that tells real stories of hope, loss, injustice, or redemption can foster deeper ethical self-understanding and community formation. This shift reflects an ethical expansion of gospel music's purpose from vertical worship (God-centered) to horizontal concern (neighbor-oriented) as emphasized by Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* where he emphasized the interconnectedness between environmental degradation, economic hardship and social injustice in religion. Hence he calls for a multi-layered approach which includes ethical, spiritual, and practical responses. In continuation, this innovation is highly commendable especially in Nigeria, where environmental damage intensifies economic hardships such as loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and health risk etc. Pope Francis describes the inclusion of integral ecology in society as ecological conversion, a transformative change in how human relate to both nature and their neighbors, particularly the poor and vulnerable (Pope Francis, 2015).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Building on the study's discussion concerning the current paradigm shift in Nigerian gospel music particularly its effort to incorporate broader liturgical themes. Within a socio-cultural framework to address urgent societal issues and advancing the gospel mission. This transformation may be viewed as ethically commendable. However, with Gaise Baba's physical appearance and deep socio-cultural metaphoric languages, contemporary Nigeria Christians now stands at a critical juncture: as while his approach to current paradigm shift possesses the potential to remain a powerful vehicle for Christian communalism. It also risks devolving into spiritual superficiality if the visual and performative distinction between gospel musicians and secular artists continues to blur. This concern stems from the evolutionary nature of gospel music. Over the centuries, while gospel music has undergone stylistic and thematic transformations, its core identity as a medium for preaching the gospel of Christ has traditionally continued to shape the moral values and appearance of gospel music artiste distinguishing them from secular musicians. Should this distinction erode, particularly in the Nigerian context, there is a risk that Christianity's moral influence in the society may diminish in future iterations. Therefore, it is recommended that, despite the gospel music's expansion into addressing societal concerns, certain foundational elements must be preserved. Specifically, the moral and visual identity (regalia) of gospel musicians regardless of their stylistic category should have a clear bridge from that of a purely secular artiste beside sacred thematic expressions. Therefore, it is recommended that church leaders should corroborate with music institutions and Theologians for proper enlightenment in order to develop an expanded theological frameworks for current gospel paradigm shift. This will enable pastors; music directors and praise

leaders etc in evaluate gospel music and gospel music artiste suitable for liturgical worship and that of Christian socio events. Also, this will help to proffer a standardized identity for both categories of gospel musicians in other to annul some current unethical Christian demeanor in gospel music expression. Nevertheless, the church should equally support the growth of gospel artiste in the societal gospel music category because it's an effective extension of the church mission to the world.

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