

The Rebirth of Christian Theatre in Nigeria: The Zion Royal Theatre in Perspective

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Abstract

Sequel to the outlaw of theatre from the church in the Medieval era, Christian theatre moved from the church to the trade guilds and even beyond but never ended. In Nigeria, the same cycle had been repeated following the introduction of Christian theatre into the church through the window of the Church Missionary Society, followed by early dramatists such as Hubert Ogunde, who temporarily succeeded to infuse theatre into Cantatas but soon deviated from the church centred themes and secularised Christian theatre. Hence, the emergence of Mike Bamiloye and his others in the later parts of the 20th century with Christian theatrical productions which toured around the country under the umbrella of the Mount Zion Faith Ministries (MZFM) which would soon become the household name for Christian theatre and film productions in Nigeria. Although the MZFM diverted into film a few years later, the 21st century saw the inauguration of her Christian theatre arm named Zion Royal Theatre (ZRT) targeted at churning out phenomenal Christian theatrical productions on the contemporary stage. This is a descriptive study which chronicles the events leading to the emergence and progressive practice of Christian theatre in Nigeria by the ZRT. It identifies the point of departure from the old and the styles of practice for the new. In-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Christian theatre practice in Nigeria coupled with other secondary sources to enhance the literature review. ZRT proves to draw a viable connection to the rebirth of regular Christian theatre in Nigeria with regards to Christian themes, techniques and method of dramatising biblical stories to contemporary audiences.

Keywords: Christian Theatre, MZFM, Rebirth, ZRT

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Introduction

In recent years, the landscape of theatrical performance in Nigeria has witnessed a profound resurgence, particularly within the world of Christian theatre. This rebirth marks a significant cultural and artistic phenomenon, shaping narratives, values, and expressions within Nigerian society. At the forefront of this revival stands the Zion Royal Theatre, an esteemed institution within the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama. As we delve into the exploration of the rebirth of Christian Theatre in Nigeria, it is imperative to understand the context, significance, and impact of Zion Royal Theatre.

Christian theatre holds a unique position within Nigerian cultural heritage, intertwining indigenous performance traditions with religious narratives and contemporary artistic expressions. The evolution of Christian theatre in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay of historical, socio-cultural, and religious influences. From its nascent stages influenced by early Christian missionaries to its current prominence as a vibrant artistic medium, Christian theatre has traversed a diverse and dynamic trajectory, mirroring the complexities of Nigeria's societal fabric.

This research seeks to explore the rebirth of Christian Theatre in Nigeria through the lens of the Zion Royal Theatre. By examining its historical context, artistic innovations, theological underpinnings, and societal impact, we aim to elucidate the broader significance of Christian theatre within Nigerian cultural discourse. Through a comprehensive analysis of Zion Royal Theatre, this study endeavors to shed light on the intricate intersections of religion, art, and society, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of Nigeria's rich theatrical heritage.

This study is a descriptive study which seeks to document the events leading to the emergence, decline and then reemergence of Christian theatre in Nigeria. This study conducts a careful examination of the factors that led to the emergence of Christian theatre in Nigeria, its progressive development, the factors that led to its unfortunate relegation to the background, and the specific factors leading to its reintroduction into the mainstream Nigerian theatre. It displays an apt record of the practice of Christian theatre at its early beginnings in polarity with the practice of Christian theatre in Contemporary Nigeria.

It is a qualitative study that engages primary and secondary sources of data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the practice of Christian theatre in Nigeria to provide accurate experiential accounts on the practice of Christian theatre in Nigeria, as well as consultations with historical documents, books, articles in journals, online sources amongst others to provide a robust literature review.

Emergence of Christian Theatre: Drama Within and Beyond the Church

Christian theatre is an ancient phenomenon that has enjoyed a high popularity from the church and the society. Olatunji and Oki defines Christian theatre as “the practice of theatre by genuine Christians for the proliferation of the gospel message and the (re)connection of human souls to God.” (70). Historically, the entrance of theatre into the church is credited to the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church that sought to use drama as a means of communicating bible messages to indigenous audiences through pictures, gestures, movements, and dialogue in the language of the indigenes. Despite the proscription of drama towards the end of the Roman Era by the Roman Catholic Church, the same Roman Catholic

church in the Middle Ages soon found drama to be very useful years later to the propagation of the gospel. Isijola records further thus:

In spite of the huge opposition to drama that was being posed by the church, the religious rites of the Christian church invariably gave rise to a unique drama performance of the age. Ironically, the church became a key player in the evolution and development of drama that she once repudiated. Tropes, which serves as musical embellishment, were introduced into the mass services... One of such Easter tropes, which is titled *Quem Queritis*, is believed to be the earliest liturgical drama in 1000AD. (28-29)

Hence, the Roman Catholic Church served as the vehicle that led to the resuscitation of theatre that has been previously banned to existence and not merely to reemerge but to be used within the confines of the church as a tool for communication and outreach. They introduced the Tropes which were pieces of drama sketches performed at religious festivals. Following the introduction of the tropes, the Corpus Christi was established and this warranted an extended series of longer plays which communicated the essence of the gospel as well as the season of celebration. Hence, drama was properly developed into scripts, leading to the beginning of what began to be called the liturgical dramas a synonym for the Mystery plays, the Miracle plays, and the Morality plays. The Mystery plays were plays that told stories from the Bible, the Miracle plays were plays that told the stories of the saints and the various miracles of Jesus and that of his disciples while the Morality plays were aimed at teaching morals and reconciling men to God.

However, drama soon broke away from the church when the church dramas were reduced to mere entertainment by the congregation, leading to the gradual fading away of its essence as an evangelistic tool. Hence, drama was outlawed from the church and was embraced by trade guilds, who secularised the art and toured the liturgical dramas on wheels to nobles and laymen to make monetary gains (Olatunji 28). Hence, resulting into the departure of drama from the perimeters of the church as a sacred evangelical tool under the regulation of the church and gradually returned to its secular origin.

Evolution of Christian Theatre in Nigeria: From Beginnings to Mike Bamiloye

Christian theatre in Nigeria evolved in the similitude of the Medieval theatre courtesy of the Roman Catholic Church. The entrance of the Christian Missionary Society into Nigeria led into the proliferation of the Christian belief. However, the English-speaking team experienced difficulties in communicating the gospel message to the Yoruba dominated society. Hence, in close connections with the Middle Ages, drama became the tool for escape. Ogunbiyi records thus:

However, there existed in Lagos at this time, other types of entertainment in which drama was fully presented, productions in which music was not the main emphasis. The Roman Catholic Church was the pioneer of this tradition. Faced with the complex challenge of having to conduct church business in Yoruba to a predominantly Yoruba-speaking community and a Portuguese-speaking Brazilian emigrant group, in an English-speaking community... Not surprisingly, from 1881, when St. Gregory's School was founded by the French priests, to the end of the century, annual end-of-year performances were held. (21)

With the Roman Catholic Church spearheading the move, these dramas which were largely religious were engaged as stratagems in making the work of evangelism more graphic, understandable and appealing to the indigenes from the 19th to the 20th century. In an interview with Evangelist Bayo Abraham, he chronicles thus:

It got to a time when the church began to engage drama especially during Easter, Christmas, and little events with the productions of *Adam and Eve*, *Mary and the baby Jesus*, *The Three Wise Men*, and things like that. These were done innocently, carved from the scripture but with the little knowledge they had, it was not so elaborate. They were not so mindful of costumes and elements of adaptation but at least, people could identify with what they were presenting. (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024)

In trying to explain the causality, he revealed that at the time, “majority of the members and converts could not read nor write so to say have passed the age of schooling but so as to communicate effectively with them, dramas were used most of which were majorly parables of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024). These early Christian drama pieces had strong connections with the bible, communicated bible themes and were very effective tools in the hands of the church. Ogunbiyi reveals one of the early scenarios that featured drama in the Church to be “in 1902, under the joint sponsorship of the Bethel African Church and St. Jude’s Church, Ebute Metta, a play written by D.A Oloyede, *King Elejigbo and Princess Abeje of Kotangora* was performed by the Egbe Ife at the Bethel African Church School room” (22). However, since drama in the church broke out with strong touches of Yoruba, they became the prototype for the dramas written and performed for nearly two decades. This kind of drama had the introduction of “mild satires, the dialogues mingled with songs, the hymn tunes immersed with Biblical themes, the opening and closing glees, the insertions of sometimes unrelated sketches, etc.” (Ogunbiyi 23).

The tradition of having the gospel preached through indigenous performances blossomed and gradually began to enjoy modifications even while in the perimeters of the church. Ogunbiyi records that “by the mid-thirties, a new kind of drama, Native Air Opera as it was called, had become popular, due largely to the efforts of the church movement; but more specifically, due largely to the efforts of A.K Ajisafe, who started ‘to relate church hymns to ‘native airs’ at the United African Methodist Church”” (26). Following the example of the Native Air Operas, other artists like E.A Dawodu, Ajibola Layeni, A.B David, G.I Onimole, A.A Olufoye among others joined in the creation of drama pieces that had such operatic elements in common and set the template for Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola, who would later expand the practice and extend the performances beyond the sacred borders of the church.

The emergence of Ogunde into the scene in the early 1940s when he joined The Church of The Lord, Ebute Metta, Lagos was not to introduce an entirely new practice. Instead, he leveraged the developments that have been made and attempted to modify the art; some of which he succeeded and some of which he failed as far as the Church was concerned. The summary of Ogunde’s emergence in the church scene is tied to the success of his early plays in the church between 1944-1946 -*The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God*, after which he decided to launch into professionalism, secularising the art and taking theatre on wheels.

In the 1960s, Duro Ladipo also had close interactions with the church with his involvement in the Easter Cantatas in Osogbo. The success of his first drama encouraged him to add local

drums which the church frowned at. The belief was that at the time, “Bata was specifically identified with the Sango people. So, there was no way the church could embrace the idea of bringing bata into performance within the church, hence, Duro Ladipo had to leave.” (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024). This refusal led to his departure from the church to seek for platforms that could accommodate his creative invention. Ogunde’s breakaway from the church due to desire to go professional and Duro Ladipo’s thirst to find a comfort zone for his art left the church with an epileptic performance of total theatre. Suffice to say that full-blown theatrical presentations continue but they were no longer in the church. The performances that filled the streets and halls were majorly societal, political and less Christian. In the words of Abraham, drama in the church soon became irregular like before, and even though some attempted to carry on with the zeal, for many reasons, they were proscribed. He speaks thus:

Since the principal people left, drama was only coming to the church and fizzling out...it didn’t mean that drama became non-existent after Ogunde and his others broke away from the church into secularised, political and occultic dramas. Drama existed in fragments until about the 1970s before it became elaborate in the church...Another reason was the issue of negative bouncebacks because they do not know the principle to follow. When a powerful drama is acted and there are negative bouncebacks, as a response, the church would ban the operations of drama as a way to curb the problem. So drama in the church was inconsistent until the 70s when some groups like ECU drama, Obafemi Awolowo University; IVCU drama, University of Ibadan; Quintessence Drama ABU, which were campus-based apart from the church-based. (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024)

This cycle continued and Christian theatre became more prominent with campuses especially in the 1970s. Several campus fellowships across the nation were divinely inspired to set the ball of Christian theatre productions rolling through campuses and this became a big deal prior the emergence of Evangelist Mike Bamiloye onto the scene with the phenomenal Mount Zion Faith Ministries (MZFM). According to history, “there is also the record of Kunle Ogunde, who toured powerful drama pieces on campus until he was quenched with his desire to do movie and did not succeed. Daddy Mike started with people on campus...Upon graduation, he established the ministry with some of the members” (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024). He captures it further:

Mount Zion started in 1985 but between 1985 and 1986, they were having fellowships fasting and prayers, and weekend retreats until November, 1986 when they had the first drama at St. Margaret, Ilesa. Later the same drama was adapted into *God bless Nigeria*. At the beginning, Mount Zion attempted to begin with film but God instructed that the entry point should be stage. These productions were taken to between 15 to 20 states in this country. (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024)

Alademoni categorises the existence of Christian theatre in Nigeria to be in fragments until the emergence of Mike Bamiloye when he says that “prior to the mid-eighties, there was nothing officially referred to as the drama ministry. The highest drama available then was either drama unit or campus drama unit (52). Akoh and Olayiwola unveils another perspective to the reemergence of Christian theatre through the MZFM to expose the place of Christian theatre at the time as they reveal that “when Mount Zion started in the 80s, the Yoruba theatrical arts of Hubert Ogunde and others were already rounding off from stage

performances, the focus then was on film production... This succeeded in creating a unique cultural space for Mount Zion” (360). The foregoing states that as at the time Mount Zion was entering the scene with Christian theatre productions, Hubert Ogunde and his contemporaries, who had always had the control of the art and the crowd on the Nigerian scene were diverting into filmmaking and this allowed MZFM to have a fast grip and dominion over the space as those who previously dominated it have been distracted into making movies being the latest invention at the time. Although MZFM also desired to kick-off with filmmaking but “God instructed that the entry point should be stage. These productions were taken to between 15 to 20 states in this country” (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024). Mike Bamiloye, the President of the Mount Zion Faith Ministries reminisces on the first attempt to produce films and the sequence of events leading to the entrance into stage productions. He recalls thus:

Our first attempt of film production was a flop in 1984...determination to gather together to make a movie brought forth a colossal failure and waste after about six weeks of shooting SECRETS OF THE DEVIL in 1984. A large number of drama ministers from campuses, churches and ministries gathered at Orita-Mefa Baptist church for more than five weekends for rehearsals and preparations to shoot the first major christian movie in 1987...So, we entered into discouragement mode and the Lord told us to shelve the idea of movie production and go and minister on stage ministrations from churches to churches. Therefore, we forgot about film productions and began massive stage ministrations in cities like Kano, Kaduna, Warri, Jos, Ilorin, Lagos, Zaria, etc. (“Bamiloye”)

With this sense of direction, MZFM under the direction of Evangelist Mike Bamiloye fully launched out with Christian theatre and became a major rival and alternative for the previously existing secular theatre productions, while also serving as a major force in the process of restoring strength to the practice of Christian theatre on all levels. The entry point for MZFM at the time were Christian theatre productions which were performed on large stages such as the Oduduwa hall of the Obafemi Awolowo University. These Christian theatre projects the example of *God bless Nigeria, I will Heal the Land* and *Hell in Conference* before the likes of *Unprofitable Servant*, *The Beginning of the End* and so on which were done as portfolio dramas (collapsible dramas) which like Ogunde (but with Christian themed messages) toured several parts of Nigeria hence, resulting into its popularity.

From Stage to Film and Back: MZFM and the Rebirth of Christian Theatre in Nigeria

Indeed, MZFM became invested in these Christian theatre tours until the need arose to take a foray into filmmaking and forgo theatre. This came as a result of a sponsorship received from ‘a General Overseer of a church who had seen the stage version of *The Unprofitable Servant*’ and would like it to be recorded so as to broadcast it (Akoh and Olayiwola 360). In alignment to Akoh and Olayiwola’s account, Mike Bamiloye further exposes the sequence of events leading to the emergence of MZFM on the filmmaking scene. He chronicles thus:

We didn’t actually know how to make movies. the earlier attempts were full of technical blunders. But Mr. Kayode Oyeboode has been into movie productions far ahead of us, shooting secular movies. So we trusted him, and began planning. He helped us to shoot the movie... In the Easter festive period of 1990, THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT was broadcast on NTA 10, Lagos, and we were in

Lagos sitting on the floor of the living room of a host of ours as we watched the Movie on television! Then it occurred to us! We have made a Movie! We have made the first Mount Zion Movie! What we had suffered to do, and the Lord told us to leave it and go on stage, had finally been done without stress. With that encouragement, I wrote another script: BEGINNING OF THE END and we went on location again, in October 1990. (“Bamiloye”)

The successful recording, editing and broadcast of the production led to MZFM’s first step into regular filmmaking such as *The Beginning of The End* (1990), *Lost Forever* (1991), *Last Generation* (1991), *Perilous Times* (1992), *Ibere Opin Aye* (1992) - the Yoruba version of *The Beginning of The End*, *Agbara Nla* (1993) among others. This breakthrough into filmmaking created a presence for Christian drama in the Nigerian home video scene however on the other hand, it also led to an unintentional silence of Christian theatre productions on the Nigerian scene for a long time.

The Zion Royal Theatre: An Overview

Though, at the foray into film production towards the tail end of the 20th century by the Mount Zion Faith Ministries, Christian theatre production almost went into extinction. Many years later, the rebirth of Christian theatre is a recent phenomenon accorded to the Zion Royal Theatre. The Zion Royal Theatre (ZRT) is a subsidiary of the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama which has conducted successful attempts to resuscitate Christian theatre in Nigeria with the creation of robust Christian theatre productions. The Zion Royal Theatre (ZRT) emerges as a beacon of innovation and excellence within Christian theatre. Founded and inaugurated on the 26th of May 2022, under the auspices of Evangelist Mike Bamiloye, the Executive Director of Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama, Zion Royal Theatre embodies a commitment to artistic integrity, spiritual enlightenment, and cultural enrichment. Through its compelling productions, Zion Royal Theatre has captivated audiences with its exploration of Christian themes, and spiritual journeys. With the examples of *The Gods are Dead* (2021), *Covenant Child* (2021), *Final Trump* (2021), *Ogbologbo* (2022), *Arewa* (2022), *Night of Ijalo* (2023), *Abe Sonso* (2023), *Papa Egan - Journey to Jungle* (2023), *Aiku* (2024), *Alapandede* (2024), *Arakunrin* (2024), and *Proverbial Dodo* (2024) among others, the reintroduction of Christian theatre through the ZRT was provoked by the need to preserve the art of Christian theatre through education under proper supervision. Bayo Abraham affirms that “over the years, God has given us the mountain of the family through productions and movies. But there is another mountain that must be conquered... Therefore, the reemergence of Christian theatre through the Zion Royal Theatre is due to the need to conquer the mountain of education” (Interview with Bayo Abraham, 8 February 2024).

Also, this establishment of the ZRT was inspired by the discovery of the theatrical productions of the Sight and Sound Theatres, USA which is renowned for their sophisticated theatre productions. Gradually, the Sight and Sound theatre became a model for the practice of contemporary Christian Theatre in Nigeria. Though the indigenous Christian Theatre in Nigeria cannot boast of sophisticated media technologies yet, the yearning to understudy the modus operandi of the Sight and Sound Theatres fueled the passion to recreate Christian Theatre in Nigeria by the Zion Royal Theatre.

Creating the Contemporary Christian Theatre: ZRT's Technique and Innovations

Zion Royal Theatre, renowned for its innovative approach to Christian drama, employs a diverse range of artistic techniques and innovations to captivate audiences and convey profound spiritual truths. From compelling storytelling to imaginative staging, ZRT continually pushes the boundaries of theatrical expression, creating immersive experiences that resonate with audiences on both emotional and intellectual levels. Akoh and Olayiwola reveals that the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama which inaugurated the Zion Royal Theatre as its theatre production arm has afforded it the ability to create its own techniques and unique style - 'Zion's Style of production' (362). The following are some of the technique and innovations peculiar to the Zion Royal Theatre:

i. Script Writing and Narrative Structure

At the heart of Zion Royal Theatre's artistic process is the craft of scriptwriting and narrative construction. The Theatre's productions are characterized by intricately woven storylines, rich character development, and compelling dialogue that engage audiences from start to finish. Through meticulous attention to detail and a keen understanding of dramatic tension and pacing, Zion Royal Theatre creates narratives that are both entertaining and thought-provoking, drawing audiences into the world of the play and inviting them on a journey of discovery and transformation.

ii. Symbolism and Allegory

Zion Royal Theatre employs symbolism and allegory as powerful artistic tools to convey deeper spiritual truths. Through evocative imagery, metaphorical language, and symbolic motifs, it communicates complex theological concepts in accessible and engaging ways. Whether through the use of visual symbols, such as light and darkness, or through allegorical storytelling, Zion Royal Theatre invites audiences to reflect on the deeper meanings embedded within the narrative and to discern the presence of divine truths beneath the surface of the drama.

iii. Theatrical Production Design

A hallmark of Zion Royal Theatre's productions is its commitment to excellence in theatrical production design. From elaborate set designs to innovative lighting and sound effects, the Theatre creates immersive environments that transport audiences to different time periods, locations, and emotional states. Through meticulous attention to detail and a focus on creating a multi-sensory experience, Zion Royal Theatre enhances the impact of its performances, eliciting emotional responses and fostering deeper engagement with the themes and messages of the play.

iv. Performance Techniques and Acting Styles

Zion Royal Theatre cultivates a distinctive performance style characterized by authenticity, emotional depth, and spiritual resonance. The Theatre's actors undergo rigorous training in dramatic techniques, character development, and vocal expression, enabling them to inhabit their roles with conviction and empathy. Through nuanced performances and expressive storytelling, Zion Royal Theatre's actors breathe life into their characters, compelling audiences to empathize with their struggles, triumphs, and spiritual journeys.

v. Musical Composition and Choreography

Music and choreography play integral roles in Zion Royal Theatre's productions, heightening emotional impact and reinforcing thematic resonance. Original musical compositions, ranging from stirring cultural songs to haunting melodies, are carefully crafted to complement the narrative arc and evoke mood and atmosphere. Similarly, choreographed movement sequences and dance routines add visual interest and symbolic depth to the performance, enhancing storytelling and eliciting visceral responses from audiences.

vi. Prerecorded Audio

Prerecorded audio serves as an integral component of Zion Royal Theatre's theatrical productions, enriching the auditory landscape and enhancing the storytelling experience. The Theatre utilizes prerecorded dialogues, sound effects, and music to create a multi-dimensional soundscape that complements the action on stage and reinforces thematic resonance. Whether evoking the ambiance of a bustling marketplace, heightening tension during a dramatic confrontation, or underscoring moments of emotional significance, prerecorded audio adds depth and texture to the performance, immersing audiences in the world of the play and enhancing their engagement with the narrative.

The Impact of Zion Royal Theatre on the Nigerian Theatre Scene

Zion Royal Theatre has exerted a profound and far-reaching impact on the development and evolution of Nigerian theatre. Through its innovative approach to Christian drama and commitment to artistic excellence, the Theatre has not only inspired audiences but also transformed the cultural and artistic landscape of Nigeria. Bamiloye reveals that “Nigerian Christian Drama is, no doubt, wielding much positive impacts on the society today. It has proved a quintessential tool in defining values for its audience, as well as serves as panacea for diverse ills, correcting vices and misbehaviour in the society” (25). Therefore, the emergence of ZRT in the Nigerian theatre scene, has achieved the following:

i. Promotion of Christian Theatre

Zion Royal Theatre has played a pivotal role in promoting Christian theatre in Nigeria, providing a platform for the expression of Christian narratives and themes. By producing compelling productions rooted in Christian spirituality, the Theatre has helped to legitimize Christian theatre as a vibrant and respected genre within the broader theatrical community. Through its engaging storytelling and high production values, Zion Royal Theatre has attracted diverse audiences, both within and outside the Christian community, fostering greater appreciation for Christian-themed theatre in Nigeria.

ii. Artistic Innovation and Excellence

Zion Royal Theatre's commitment to artistic innovation and excellence has raised the bar for theatrical production standards in Nigeria. Through its use of innovative staging techniques, compelling storytelling, and immersive production design, the Theatre has set a new standard of excellence for theatrical craftsmanship. By pushing the boundaries of theatrical expression and embracing new technologies and artistic trends, Zion Royal Theatre has inspired a new generation of Nigerian Christian theatre practitioners to strive for excellence in their craft, thereby elevating the overall quality and sophistication of Nigerian theatre productions.

iii. Cultural Enrichment and Preservation

Through its culturally rich adaptations of biblical stories and indigenous narratives, Zion Royal Theatre has contributed to the preservation and celebration of Nigerian cultural heritage. By drawing inspiration from Nigerian cultural diversity, the Theatre has helped to foster a deeper appreciation for the cultural richness and diversity of Nigeria's artistic heritage. Through its performances, Zion Royal Theatre has provided a platform for the expression of Nigerian identity and values, celebrating the unique cultural heritage of the nation and promoting cultural understanding and dialogue.

iv. Community Engagement and Outreach

Zion Royal Theatre's commitment to community engagement and outreach has endeared it to audiences across Nigerian Universities - public and private universities. Through its touring productions, workshops, and outreach programs, the Theatre has brought the power of theatre to diverse educational communities. By fostering dialogue, collaboration, and social cohesion through the arts, Zion Royal Theatre has empowered individuals to engage with issues of faith and spirituality, thereby contributing to positive social change and community development.

Conclusion

The practice of Christian theatre in Nigeria has weathered many storms especially in its early beginnings where the modus operandi were developed through the hands of Christian dramatists, who practiced Christian theatre merely on the basis of religion but soon secularised the means. The cycle continued in search of a true saviour until the emergence of Mike Bamiloye and his others, who gave Christian theatre in Nigeria a sense of meaning and purpose through the early portfolio stage dramas and subsequently the inauguration of the Zion Royal Theatre which was equipped to present Christian theatre in a contemporary fashion. Thus, these performances which range from the not-for-profit Christian theatre productions in public halls, to public performances in Nigerian campuses proselytising Christian themes for the obvious motive of soul winning have become the archetype for standard contemporary Christian theatre productions in Nigeria.

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