

**Gospel Music Ministry and the Remuneration Debate:
Perspectives of Select Clergymen and Gospel Musicians in Lagos,
Nigeria**

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Abstract

Gospel music is an integral part of Christian worship in Nigeria. It serves as an instrument of worship, evangelism, edification, and congregational participation. In recent times, paying gospel musicians (gospel music ministers) for their ministrations has become a contentious issue among the Christian populace in Nigeria, especially considering conflicting views of prominent clergymen and gospel music ministers on social media platforms. While one school of thought maintains that gospel music ministry is a divine calling that should be rendered without monetary expectations, another school argues that gospel musicians deserve financial compensation in recognition of their labour, professional commitments, and economic obligations. Despite the notoriety of this issue, academic discourse has not sufficiently explored the perspectives of key stakeholders in the controversy. This paper examines the issue critically, with the aim of fostering understanding among stakeholders and promoting pragmatic solutions. It employs a qualitative research methodology. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten select gospel musicians and ten clerics from major Christian denominations in Lagos State, Nigeria. The paper reveals that opinions of the clergy and gospel musicians on remuneration are greatly informed by varying interpretations of the nature and practice of church/gospel ministry, work ethics, biblical stewardship and contemporary socio-economic realities. Majority of the respondents believes that gospel music ministers should be paid for their work, while a few who hold contrary opinions emphasise that payments should neither lead to commercialisation of the gospel nor detract from the spiritual significance of the art of performing gospel music in church. The study recommends more understanding, ethical considerations, and mutually beneficial relationship between the clergy and gospel music ministers by adopting appropriate remuneration policies, promoting good work ethics, and mutual recognition of their individual vital contributions.

Keywords: clergy; gospel music; gospel music ministers; ministry; remuneration; Nigeria.

Introduction

Music is an integral element of Christian worship, which has continued to evolve through its role as a vehicle of praise, adoration, theological reflection, collective solidarity, and a profound medium for experiencing divine encounters. Among Christian denominations in Nigeria, gospel music continues to contribute to the liturgy of worship, serving as a vital instrument of evangelism and spiritual edification. Gospel music permeates various expressions of worship - from praise and worship sessions to thanksgiving ceremonies/services, altar calls, offertory processes, and sundry special ministrations and general worship services. Inevitably, individual musicians who offer their time, talents and resources for the express purpose of ministering through gospel music have become essential participants in contemporary denominational gatherings of churches in Nigeria.

The spiritual, educational and social significance of gospel music in Nigerian churches have been widely acknowledged by scholars like Udoka, Adedeji, and Agu. For example, Udoka (2024) highlights church music in Nigeria as including a diversity of traditions that are used by various denominations to facilitate worship, discipleship, evangelism, and religious education. Adedeji (2004) perceives gospel music as the music that is set forth to make proclamation about Jesus Christ. Agu (1991) posits that the characteristics of gospel music in Nigeria are functional relevance, aesthetic value and adaptation of local Nigerian musical idioms. This shows that gospel music serves in shaping spirituality and social interconnection of congregants in Nigerian churches.

The landscape of Nigerian gospel music has experienced considerable growth and transformation over the past few decades. Driven by advances in technology such as digital music production, distribution platforms and media, Nigerian gospel music has gained prominence and global reach. Today, gospel artistes are regularly invited to minister/perform at services/events organised by churches such as conferences, concerts, crusades, and in other socio-religious contexts.

Gospel musicians often lead teams composed of instrumentalists, sound technicians/engineers, managers, media crew, and backup vocalists that reflect the professional nature of contemporary gospel music performance. Catering to these needs has inevitably led to debates about the nature of financial remuneration for gospel music ministers within Nigerian churches. This debate assumed a greater dimension recently after several prominent Nigerian clerics and gospel music artistes publicly voiced their differing perspectives on whether gospel musicians should receive payments for ministering at church functions. These opinions were expressed on social media platforms and in various public fora. While some believe that ministry, by definition, requires selflessness and spiritual devotion rather than pecuniary compensation, others see ministry as labour that should be respected, valued, and justly compensated, particularly given the professional commitments involved and the socio-economic realities faced by music ministers.

The discourse around remuneration, unfortunately, has often been characterised by highly emotional responses, religious sensationalism and theological polarisation, leading to simplistically polarised debates. The debates usually bypass the nuances and complexity of how theological belief, professionalism, economic reality, church practice and management culture shape people's attitudes to remuneration in Christian ministry.

While there has been a rich academic literature on issues like the commercialisation of religion, prosperity theology, materialism in contemporary Christianity, and the evolution of gospel music in Nigeria, studies that explore the specific viewpoints of gospel music ministers and the Nigerian clergy on remuneration have remained relatively scarce. This is an issue that affects thousands of Nigerian musicians, churches, and communities, which requires critical examination hence this paper.

The study's contribution to knowledge lies in providing an empirical account of the perspectives of gospel musicians and the clergy on the issue of remuneration, thus filling a significant gap in the literature. It will contribute to contemporary scholarship on gospel music in Nigeria, as well as on issues of church management and professional ethics within religious organisations. By highlighting the lived experiences and views of the primary participants, the study could foster informed discussion and development of appropriate guidelines that respect both the spiritual mission of gospel ministry and the dignity of labour for gospel musicians.

Aim of Study

The aim of the study is to critically assess the debate on remuneration of gospel music ministers in Nigeria by investigating the views of the clergy and gospel music ministers, and make pragmatic recommendations for an ethical, mutual and sustainable relationship between music ministers and church clerics.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. evaluate the divergent views of Nigerian clergy and gospel music ministers on remuneration for the work of gospel music ministry;
2. identify theological, ethical, occupational and socio-economic factors which influence opinions and practices relating to financial remuneration of gospel music ministers;
3. determine the consequences of the remuneration debate for contemporary Christian ministry and church administration in Nigeria; and
4. provide recommendations for bridging divides and cultivating harmonious working relations between the clergy and gospel music ministers.

Literature Review

Gospel Music in Nigeria

As a very important aspect of Christianity, gospel music has recorded greater transformations since the beginning of the twenty-first century in Nigeria. Beyond its

aesthetic and entertaining functions, gospel music is a vehicle for transmitting Christian doctrine, inspiring spiritual experience and encouraging the practice of biblical and moral principles. It plays a central role in congregational worship, evangelistic endeavours, evangelistic crusades, public concerts, and through various media. Unlike other forms of music, gospel music is aimed at praising God, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and nurturing the Christian community.

Scholars have defined gospel music in a variety of ways. According to Adeola (2020), gospel music is defined as Christian genre of religious music that is aimed at popularising the message of Christ, promoting faith, stimulating spiritual response, and guiding the worshippers. Olatayo (2024) states that gospel music are spiritually inspired compositions by ministers which communicate divine messages through music expression using biblical knowledge. Agu (1991) avers that Nigerian gospel music has the unique characteristics like its indigenous nature, which enables it to express Christian thoughts, and has also found an outlet in its call and response patterns, communalism in terms of involvement and participation, indigenous performance contexts, functional performance, and a high capacity for assimilation and adaptation. Udoka (2024) opines that the characteristics of contemporary Nigerian gospel music are the use of indigenous instruments with call and response musical phrasing, and indigenous rhythm and call-response features, coupled with speech melodic features.

In recent years, the way gospel music is practised in Nigeria has been impacted by the growth of Christianity, the digital revolution, globalisation, and increasing emphasis on marketing and show business. These trends reflect the rise in the costs of rendering services to the church by the gospel musicians

There is a concern that the rising financial expectations of gospel musicians and the use of specific remuneration standards could encourage, or may lead to the commercialisation of the gospel music ministry that could compromise its goal. Adeola (2020) notes that a strong current in gospel music in Nigeria today is the movement beyond spiritual service to financial gains.

Ministry, Profession and the Question of Remuneration

One of the central issues about the remuneration discussion is the philosophical distinction between calling (in its spiritual sense), and vocation or profession (in the secular sense). The Christian ministry has traditionally been perceived and practised as a divine calling and an ordained engagement where the service provided by individuals is purely an act of worship to God. This view, to some extent, portrays gospel ministers as self-sacrificing individuals who render services to the Church for free.

Many gospel music ministers invest a substantial amount of their personal time, knowledge, resources and energies in the practice of gospel music ministry. Beyond songwriting and leading worship, they engage in organising events, managing personnel, marketing their work and even providing administrative support for their

ministries. These entail financial expenditure on professional tools, and other resource needs to enable them perform creditably. Adeliyi (2020) points out that Christian ministries generally make their ministers susceptible to a range of real-life expenses, which require continuous source of income to take care of.

Awoniyi (2013) points out that any labour deserves to be recognised and compensated in accordance with biblical understanding; the Bible emphasises that wages should be paid for all services rendered. Therefore, workers should not be denied their fair wages for the work done by them. A successful gospel music ministry can combine calling and professionalism in a balanced manner where a minister can still be devoted to the call and be rewarded financially.

Commercialisation of the Gospel and Contemporary Christian Ministry

Commercialisation of religion has gained a wide scholarly interest in contemporary African Christianity. Concerns over financial practices among religious leaders have motivated academic discourse on prosperity theology, religious entrepreneurship, commodification of faith, and religious economic dimensions (Idonor 2020; Jegede 2025; Adabembe 2024). Idonor (2020) defines commercialisation of religion as the point at which religious services which ought to be focused on spiritual values or needs become mainly propelled by financial and material gains.

Idonor (2020, p.78) observes that ‘many contemporary religious activities exhibit tendencies of commercial enterprise instead of the focus of spiritual care which it ought to be thus giving a rise to an array of questions concerning the ministerial intentions’. Jegede (2025, p. 33) posits that Nigerian Church has become “materialistic minded”, putting a lot of pressure on men of God as many leaders are concerned about money.

Adabembe (2024) makes a nuanced assertion on the role of money in religious institutions. According to him, religious institutions participate in economy “as a fact of society through contributions by members, payment for services in administrative aspect of religious organisation, projects that enhance social well-being and welfare of members” (p. 45). He says further that it is “not necessarily commercialisation but ethical issue rises when finances are prioritised above spiritual aspect of the work” (p. 45). This distinction is vital to understand the debate on payment. Whereas commercialisation involves unethical misuse of ministerial privileges, receiving reasonable financial appreciation for performing one's rightful duties could be in line with biblical precepts as long as the church is not exploited or defrauded and the minister operates ethically and Transparently.

Religious Labour and the Dignity of Work

In Christianity, labour has a unique importance, both spiritual and economic. The Bible clearly teaches that labour is a divine institution where humans reflect God's creative activities and promote human welfare and the welfare of the community (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 104:23). It teaches that productive labour contributes to the meaning and purpose of human life and the glorification of God (Utomi 2004; Oke&

John 2021). The dignity of work, Utomi (2004) argues, comes from the participation of the worker in God's creative purpose in the production of goods and services and the satisfaction derived from useful labour. The concept of work as a vocation in Christianity, Oke and John (2021) maintain, signifies that "workers are respected for what they do, and receive a fair compensation for their labour" (p. 90). This requires respect for the dignity of the worker and recognition of his or her rights as well as appropriate compensation.

According to Awoniyi (2013), work fulfills diverse functions; it is essential for human survival, discourages idleness, instils discipline and provides means for charity. Awoniyi (2013, p. 72) states that: From scriptural perspective an employer should avoid exploiting and maltreating his employees; similarly, the employees are obligated to be honest, diligent, and responsible in their duties. This concept is relevant to the remuneration debate because gospel music ministers engage in numerous form of labor such as preparation for ministration, travel to venue, practice with band and vocalists, stage production, sound engineering, spiritual engagement etc, which demands some compensation for financial and material reciprocation even though it is for God's glory. Thus the debate should shift from payment per se, to the establishment of an ethical framework that guards the sanctity of ministry work, and that which enhances the dignity of labour in gospel music ministrations.

Empirical Review and Research Gap

The Nigerian academic discourse on gospel music has covered broad areas such as: history and development of gospel music in Nigeria (Agu, 1991), characteristics and functions of gospel music (Olatayo, 2024), influence of western music on contemporary gospel music (Udoka, 2024), the economics of gospel music industry (Adeola, 2020) etc. Similar studies on commercialisation, materialism, prosperity theology and their impact on Christian ministry in Nigeria include but not limited to (Idonor, 2020; Jegede, 2025; Adabembe, 2024). The ethical considerations concerning labor, remuneration and the dignity of work from biblical perspective have been explored by researchers such as Awoniyi (2013), Utomi (2004), and Oke and John (2021) among others.

However, few empirical studies have been dedicated to the recent controversy surrounding remuneration of gospel music ministers, especially exploring the viewpoints of the clergy and gospel music ministers who are direct parties to the controversy. Although previous studies discuss commercialisation, materialism, prosperity theology and the economy of church ministry, there is a gap in research that empirically examines the lived experiences and attitudes of those directly involved in the gospel music remuneration debate. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the perception of gospel music ministers and the clergy on financial compensation for gospel music services.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts a framework that draws on the complementary theories of Labour Theory of Value and Substantive Theory of Religion. This choice is informed by the need to address the various perspectives on remuneration for those who render services in the gospel music ministry in Nigeria. The Substantive Theory of Religion highlights how religion (church ministry in the context of this paper) is understood from the spiritual or ‘in-ward looking’ point of view as a divine calling. The convergence of these two theories allows for a balanced interpretation of the debate between the practice of remuneration and religious calling.

Labour Theory of Value

The Labour Theory of Value was developed in the 18th and 19th centuries by classical economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and further debated by later economists such as Karl Marx. The theory proposes that the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour time that is required to produce it. Applying the Labour Theory of Value for this study acknowledges that gospel music ministers provide valuable services within the church community especially.

The labour input into a typical gospel music ministration is substantial, involving years of training, practice, songwriting, recording, traveling, production and performance. A gospel ministration typically requires significant investment in personnel (musicians, back-up vocalists, sound technicians, managers), equipment, travels, and publicity. Because of the investments made by gospel musicians on personnel, equipment, time and labour for the benefit of church ministries, the theory implies that they are to be fairly compensated. This perspective underpins the argument that financial rewards for gospel music ministers are justifiable.

Substantive Theory of Religion

Substantive Theory of Religion is largely attributed to Tylor (1871) and Frazer(1922). The theory provides definition of religion in terms of the nature of its basic beliefs, doctrines, rituals, as well as relationship between the human and the super natural realm. Instead of the functions of religion, the focus of this theory is on the meaning that religion gives to believers as they engage in worship of the divine. Within Christianity, church ministry is generally conceptualised by the theory as a calling from God with a view to advancing God’s kingdom, requiring that services must be characterised by obedience, selflessness, submission and commitment to divine purpose rather than worldly material rewards. This view has for long formed the background to the contemporary views about the nature of pastoral and missionary work and the gospel music ministry.

Remuneration for gospel music ministrations has become controversial, with opposing views from those who are guided by the Substantive Theory of Religion, it states that musicians must freely give as their musical talents are gifts of God, aimed at glorifying him not as a means to make worldly gain (e.g. Matthew 10:8). However, the substantives perspective is not totally insensitive towards material gain

for workers. It emphasises that the divine call to ministry and service is primary, and material rewards become appropriate to the extent that it does not compromise divine purpose.

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework

Remuneration for gospel musicians in Nigeria presents a conflict of two value systems: the Labour Theory of Value, which accepts the services of gospel musicians as meaningful and deserves appreciation; and Substantive theory of religion, which presents ministry service as a divine call that should not be commercialised by material gain. However, it could be argued that both perspectives can complement rather than oppose each other. In the light of this, the services rendered by gospel musicians can be viewed as a religious calling, and that in the light of such call, gospel musicians are engaged in meaningful labour, therefore, they are entitled to due remuneration. In the light of the foregoing, this study adopts a synthesis of these two perspectives to guide the analysis and interpretation of data.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach due to the nature of the study topic, as it involved subjective beliefs, experiences, perceptions and interpretations on the issue of remuneration of gospel music ministers. The study focused on 10 clergymen and 10 gospel music ministers in Lagos State, Nigeria, who were purposively selected. These individuals were considered relevant to the study because they are major stakeholders in the issue of gospel music ministrations, and were, therefore, presumed to have requisite knowledge and expertise to provide first-hand information on the various concerns, perspectives, and challenges in relation to remuneration.

Lagos State, the area of study, is a major Christian centre in Nigeria, and was selected for the study because it houses several important denominations. These include The Anglican Communion, The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Pentecostal ministries and independent evangelical churches, among others.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted between 18 and 20 June, 2026. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the interviewees to freely respond to the questions, and the interviewer to probe further where there was need. The interview schedule contained broad question areas:

1. Is it appropriate for gospel music ministers to earn money for their ministrations?
2. What theological, ethical, professional or practical reasons contribute to your answer?

The analysis of data is presented thematically rather than participants in order to promote clarity as well as a better representation of the themes that emerged from the analysis. Select anonymised excerpts are incorporated in presenting the results to illuminate the discourse.

Results

A thematic content analysis of the interviews with twenty participants (ten clergy men and ten gospel music ministers) generated four major themes on the subject of remuneration for gospel music ministers. Although participants showed varying perspectives on remuneration, there was a general consensus that the debate extends beyond finances into theological and ethical dimensions, professionalism and contemporary socio-economic factors.

Theme One: Generally, Financial remuneration is appropriate for gospel music ministry

A primary finding from the research is that all the respondents (the 10 clergymen and 10 gospel music ministers) agreed that it was appropriate for gospel music ministers to receive financial compensation for services rendered. Although the mode of compensation varied amongst participants: many were of the opinion that there is significant work and resources involved in the contemporary gospel music ministry that warranted recognition.

The 10 gospel music ministers highlighted numerous expenses in their modern gospel music ministry that differentiate it from the past. This included transportation, studio recording and production, maintenance of instruments, accommodation when on ministrations, and catering for team members (such as instrumentalists, vocalists, sound engineers, and managers). These costs, they claimed, were absent in the earlier times in Nigeria when participation in the gospel music ministry was predominantly voluntary and less intensive.

Of the clergymen, 7 noted that gospel music ministers should be budgeted for in churches, similar to how resources are allocated for programmes such as conferences and workshops, marketing and logistics. According to them, financial compensation does not mean ‘commercialising’ ministry but rather “adequate appreciation of work done”. Likewise, all the gospel music ministers stated that financial resources help them maintain and develop their ministries, provide good musical production and meet basic family and personal needs, without compromising their commitment to the gospel.

Theme Two: Ministry Should never be Commercialised

Despite the acceptance of remuneration, all the participants overwhelmingly distinguished the payment for gospel music ministry from commercialisation of the gospel. They stressed that ministry should primarily remain a divine calling, focused on glorifying God and for building believers up.

The clergymen, however, expressed the concern that placing undue emphasis on the financial aspect of the music ministry could gradually turn gospel music ministry into a business-driven venture. For instance, some music ministers (who impose stringent financial requirements before accepting invitations), could discourage some less-fortunate congregations from requesting the services of gifted gospel artistes. In

some cases, this can lead to negative perceptions of people about the gospel music ministry.

Nevertheless, the gospel music ministers agreed that financial gain should never outweigh spiritual and ministry responsibility. According to them, although financial resources can be beneficial, accepting an invitation for a ministry engagement should not solely depend on financial consideration, but on the purpose of the programme, the capacity of the host church, and the guidance of God. The consensus among both the clergy and the music ministers was that while some form of payment for services rendered is acceptable, financial greed and materialism do not conform to Christian principles.

Theme Three: Poor Communication leads to Conflict

Another significant theme that emerged from the interviews relates to the frequent communication breakdown between churches and invited gospel music ministers. 8 gospel music ministers reported cases where invitations were extended by churches without any discussion on the expected financial compensation before the ministry engagement. Several ministers cited incidents where a lack of clear understanding between the church leadership and the invited minister resulted in disappointment and disagreement after the service or event. Some artistes reported traveling long distances with their team, only to receive inadequate or no compensation despite significant expenses.

Conversely, 6 clergymen expressed concerns about invited gospel music ministers, who after accepting an invitation without prior mention of financial requirements, began demanding certain financial compensation, which then became a challenge for the hosting church to manage without prior budgeting.

The clergy and the gospel music ministers concluded that clear and open communication regarding expectations for remuneration is essential for preventing conflicts or misunderstandings. Issues such as transportation, accommodation, fees/honoraria, and general logistics should be clarified in advance.

Theme Four: Decision Making should be Context-Specific

A recurring sentiment throughout the research interviews was that remuneration should not be treated as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Instead, it should be approached contextually - it should be based on the specific circumstances of each ministry engagement. Participants (particularly some of the clergy), suggested that churches with limited financial capacity should not be pressured with exorbitant demands. On the other hand, financially well-established churches, according to them, should be cautious not to exploit invited ministers under the guise of serving God.

4 of the clergymen reiterated that remuneration may not always be in the form of an agreed professional fee. Rather (depending on the circumstances), churches may provide transportation, accommodation, gifts or honoraria as forms of appreciation.

Many of the gospel music ministers reported cases where they often waive their chargeable fees for ministries with compelling spiritual significance, or churches with limited financial means. This emphasises the need for a flexible approach based on understanding and sensitivity to the prevailing economic realities in contemporary Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The participants suggested that poor communication about expectations surrounding payment prior to engaging a gospel minister was a more frequent cause of disputes between music ministers and the clergy than the actual issue of payment itself. In other words, many disagreements could have been avoided if clear arrangements regarding transportation, accommodation where necessary, feeding, and remuneration had been communicated and mutually agreed upon before the engagement. This finding extends existing literature by identifying communication failure as a practical cause of conflict that leads to and perpetuates controversies surrounding remuneration. Organisational scholars have argued that clearly communicated mutual expectations form the basis of healthy working relationships, whereas ambiguity or perceived breaches of such expectations often result in conflict, dissatisfaction, and diminished trust (Schuster et al., 2022; De Clercq et al., 2021).

The perspectives of the gospel musicians and the clergy as key stakeholders offer valuable insights towards an amicable resolution of the remuneration controversy. Thus, the discourse moves beyond the polarised view of morality versus money or spirituality versus material reward to examine how a fair balance can be maintained between the financial capacity of churches and the professional services rendered by gospel musicians. Such balance requires openness, mutual respect, and clearly negotiated expectations that recognise both the ministerial and professional dimensions of gospel music practice. The findings suggest that transparent communication before engagement is essential for building trust and preventing misunderstandings that may undermine long-term collaborative relationships (Schuster et al., 2022).

Conclusion

There is no simple answer to the question of whether or not remuneration should be paid by churches to gospel musicians. Rather, the controversy represents a convergence of theology, ethics and current day socio-economic realities in the Nigerian society.

Most gospel musicians and their clergy patrons have a theological framework within which they appreciate the place of service but, they recognise and respond to the practical issues involved in gospel ministry that border primarily on payment of reasonable compensation/remuneration.

Many of the controversies regarding remuneration are not so much rooted in theological differences as much as they result from a breakdown of communication between gospel music ministers and church leaders concerning payments and related logistics, which often lead to tension. The effective resolutions of the remuneration issue requires the establishment of positive and profitable working relationships between the two groups through honest and transparent discussion of the cost of the logistics that may be required for every church programme where the services of any gospel musician are needed.

Recommendations

1. Churches should develop clear guidelines on remuneration for the gospel music ministers they invite to perform. This would require that policies for honoraria, transportation, housing, and welfare facilities are documented (and reviewed from time to time) to minimise vagueness with attending consequences.
2. Pastors and gospel music ministers should communicate their financial expectations before finalising engagement agreements.
3. Theological institutions should ensure that their curricula include contents that address professional and ethical expectations for the clergy and music ministers, as well as financial administration.
4. Further research should involve a larger sample size covering several geographical regions in Nigeria. Multi-disciplinary research could contribute significantly by taking a wider perspective on issues of remuneration, denominations, congregational views, and a comparison of similar ministry contexts in other African countries.

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