

## Changes In The Music Of The Liturgy Of The Methodist Church Ghana: Influences On The Youth

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines the current liturgy of the Methodist Church to ascertain how the youth of today have been influenced by the musical content. Musical traditions of the Methodist Church such as ebibindwom, hymns and canticles, anthems, danceable tunes from the singing band and other liturgical musical elements present in the Methodist Church Ghana, will critically be reviewed to realise the response of the youths. The methodology of the research will include visits to selected churches in selected dioceses, interviews of choirmasters and singing band masters selected members from the congregation as well as local preachers and Reverend, Ministers to find out about how they perceive the youths response to the variants of musical styles on the liturgy. The findings will go a long way to enlighten, reform and educate various Methodist youth to adjust to the new Order of Service.*

### I. PREAMBLE

This work has four sections: the first two sections discuss the ministration and involvement of the youth in the Methodist Church Ghana. The last but one section, the bedrock in which the whole topic is based emphatically contributes to the effects of change in the music of liturgy on the youth, while the writer concludes the last section of the article by discussing in detail the negative impact of the liturgical change in the music of the Methodist Church Ghana on the youth of today.

Perham (2000:3) asserts that liturgy is that subtle blend of words (sermon), songs (music), movements (dancing), gestures (symbols or signs) and silence (meditation) that enables the people of God to worship together.<sup>1</sup> Comparably, the musical diversities and developments of liturgy of the early Christian churches in Rome, England, and the Mediterranean regions of Africa were different from that of Ghana from the period of 1800 up to the late 1900. When Joseph Dunwell (a white Wesleyan missionary) arrived in Ghana in the year 1835, the then Gold Coast to establish the Wesleyan Methodist Church at Cape Coast, the Order of Service used was an adaptation of that of the earliest Church of Britain. It was taken from the Methodist Service Book published by John Wesley in 1874 to guide Methodist Societies in the worship process. The repertoire used in the service was rigidly the singing of chants (psalms and canticles), hymns, and anthems by the then church choirs in the Western style.

In 1936, the British Methodist Church approved of a revised Book of Office at the Conference held at Newcastle-on Tyne. This book was translated into several Ghanaian local Languages for use throughout the Methodist Churches in the country. This also paved the way for the use of Ghanaian Art music in other Christian Churches. The early 1920s also saw tremendous changes in the liturgy with its varied forms of worship in other Orthodox churches as a result of the influence of Western missionaries, formal education, indigenization, and modern computer technology. John Wesley, realizing the slow and dragging nature of hymn singing during his lifetime, advocated for additional vocal music as part of the liturgy of the Wesleyan Church; hence, the publication of a pamphlet *The Grounds of Vocal Music* in 1740.

<sup>1</sup> Liturgy, body of rites prescribed for formal public worship. Though the term is applied to Jewish worship, it is associated with prayers and ceremonies which are used in the celebration of the Lord's Prayer or Eucharist.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Book of Office of 1936 could not meet the worship needs of the Methodist Church any longer, this was because as stated by Darkwa (1980) during the 1980s a great number of Charismatic Churches referred to as “Spiritual Churches” or ‘Pentecostal Churches’ sprang up with lively forms of worship; the worship was characterized by singing, shouting, jumping, drumming, dancing, clapping, and the use of songs that aided worshippers to express their spiritual benefits as well as physical emotions. Moreover, in the early 1980s, saw the drift of the youth to other Christian churches from the Orthodox Churches of which Methodist Churches nationwide was no exemption. Another aspect of liturgical changes, as a result of modernity is attributed to the formation of new Choral Groups with African taste of musical styles springing up in some Christian churches in the country. All the same, instrumentation was also expanded in number, and varieties of electronic gadgets, for the sake of amplification were necessary for an effective change in the music of the liturgy in the Methodist Churches throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

Besides, with the impact of Internet Computer Technology (ICT) in today’s worship, Methodist church service is seen to be innovative, amplified sounds, creation of extra musical elements, with strong electronic components and with extravagant performance projected by microphones, overhead-projectors, mixers, and personal computers (PCs). The adoption and adaptation of these modern musical equipment introduced in the Methodist Churches though have enhanced general worship on the other hand, have also created attitudinal change among the youth which need to be discussed as far as this article may permit.

## II. THE YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE METHODIST CHURCH GHANA

According to the Church Constitution, Methodist Conference observe both Adult (M.S.O. 294) and Juvenile (M.S.O. 231) organizations respectively. In his Bachelor of Divinity research, Amoateng (2003) defined youth ministry in the Methodist Church as “a Christian educational ministry to all the members of the Church who are within ages of twelve to thirty-five years”. A majority of this group are found in such organizations as Methodist Youth Fellowship, Boys’ and Girls’ Brigades and the Methodist Girls’ Fellowship. However, there are other members of the church whose ages fall within the youth age bracket but do not belong to any of the above mentioned organizations. These organizations include Guild, Girls’ Fellowship, Junior Choir and Sunday school children. Nevertheless, the adult organizations constitute Israel, Adult Choir, Singing Band, Christ Little Band, Women’s Fellowship, Men’s Fellowship and Susuana Wesley. Of all, *Israel* is said to be the oldest recognized organization in the Methodist Church, Ghana whose membership neither belong to any society nor held position in the church administration. Similarly, and as a social organization, their presence is much felt in decision making and during Societal Meetings.

The membership of the foregoing organizations is the baptized and confirmed members who wish to join any organization voluntarily. From my research, according to one of the past presiding Bishop of Cape Coast Wesley Methodist Cathedral, I was convinced that not all the organizations in the church make use of the liturgical music during meetings as expected. For instance, whilst Guild, Girls’ Fellowship, Boys’ and Girls’ Brigades are associated with the singing of ‘praises and worship’ songs, the Youth Fellowship also take the initiative to learn songs from the recorded foreign cassettes, compact discs (CDs) and at times watch video musical films on compact video discs (CVDs) or the digital video discs (DVDs) at their meetings, practices and rehearsals. Actually, the Church admires these organizations involvement during church activities.

## III. THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE YOUTH IN THE CHURCH

Today’s youth who are said to be the future backbone of the Methodist Church Ghana cannot be overstressed since their involvement in the various church activities are concerned. This is because majority of them occupy leadership roles like being liturgists, organizational heads, lead singers, instrumentalists, bible readers, ushers and others are involved in the general church administration; for example, some occupy positions such as secretaries, accountants, auditors, architects and many more. Currently, some youth are fully employed as security personnel in some of the Methodist Churches.

Charles Wesley affirms that, hymns constitute a body of divinity, and a great majority of congregation gets their ideas of *theology* and religion very largely from hymn singing and bible reading.<sup>3</sup> Some of the youngsters are proud to say that “Methodism was born in song” (MHB 1933: iii). For that reason, diversity of hymns and their

<sup>2</sup>Instrumentation used here means, the set of musical instruments that are used to perform piece of music.

<sup>3</sup>Theology, that attempts to express the content of a religious faith as a coherent body of propositions (Microsoft Encarta 2009).

corresponding hymn-tunes are invariably used for processional, introit, church service, sermon, benediction, doxology and recessional by the choir who lead the congregational singing.

However, it is sad to observe how majority of the youth fumble even with the singing of the first stanza of some common hymns being announced by the liturgist. The reason is that most of them do not possess hymnbooks and, therefore, try to sing from memory as they were taught when they were kids in the Elementary School choir and members of Sunday school. Besides, most of them depend on the hymn texts being mounted on the overhead projectors and computer flat-screens. To some of the youth I interviewed, chants and hymn texts were outmoded and therefore need a set of modern musical instruments to modify them.

In the absence of these modern electronic gadgets put the youth minds off singing from memorizing hymn texts. Any time the Methodist Youth Fellowship is requested to perform during Sunday Church Service prefer to sing simple worship songs, praises and gospel songs rather than ancient hymns or Ghanaian art songs. Furthermore, their style of singing and dancing always accompanied by jumping, bodily movements, shouting, running, blowing of whistles and many other energetic musical activities. For that reason, hymn singing does not form the bulk of their repertoire. Meanwhile, some hymns are used during prayer meetings.

In point of fact, majority of these youth enjoy the liturgical order of Charismatic Churches as a modern type. This is mainly due to the part music plays in their worship with singing of *praises* which involve the use of percussive musical instruments with high tense volume sound amplification that accompany dancing and hand clapping to and flow. All the same, one remarkable trend about the youth is that time is spent during Sunday Service, weddings, 'peace of love greetings' and offertory if the liturgist happens to be a young person. These and other attitudinal change also have resulted to modifications of the main contents of the former Wesley Methodist liturgy as laid down rites stated in the *Common Book of Prayer*.

#### IV. THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE IN THE MUSIC OF LITURGY ON THE YOUTH

Notwithstanding the factors responsible for the change in the music of the Methodist liturgy, one can moreover mention the western missionaries' influence on the African music, the emergence of vernacular liturgy, the introduction of formal education and the use of computer technology in the Christian churches. While 'change' is a persisting factor, not everything changes completely. Most of the time, elements of the past are always carried into the present and future.

In the first place, the new order of service (found in the Methodist Liturgy and Book of Worship) had omitted some of the popular chants being sung on Sunday service these days. For example, Canticle 1 (VENITE EXULTEMUS DOMINO: Psalm 95), Canticle 3 (BENEDICITE, OMNIA OPERA), Canticle 5 (BENEDICTUS: Luke 1: 68-79), Canticle 6 (JUBILATE DEO: Psalm 100) and Canticle 46 (Psalm 90). The elimination of these canticles and psalms have affected the youth mostly in the course of Sunday Church service. As a result of their inactiveness during church service, they are seen dormant. This is inevitable, because Saint Augustine once said that "He who sings hymns prays twice".<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the evolution of *Ebibindwom*, (Akan Sacred lyrics) was seen as the first musical change in the Methodist Church in the Gold Coast. Many at times, singers are depressed upon how some preachers' approach may be. Music appreciation on the part of these preachers is hidden. Again, it is scarcely to see the youth's involvement in the singing of *Ebibindwom*. It is also overwhelming to notice why youngsters do not sing the chorus part at all. Surprisingly, while some ladies respond by hand clapping, majority of their male counterpart even sit down unconcerned. When verbal interviews were conducted among the congregation, others gave their impression that *Ebibindwom* was meant for the old women and men and not for the youth of today. Unfortunately, ill-health, old age and the demise of old men and women who were formerly lead singers have resulted to the decline of performance of *Ebibindwom* in most Methodist Churches Ghana where visits were made.

It is not only the performance of *Ebibindwom* that has made Methodist Churches unique in terms of the liturgical change, but also the incorporation of African musical instruments in worship. For example, such African idiophonic instruments as *firikiyiwa* (castanet), *dawur* (bell), *awosowa* (rattles), *akasamu* (maracas), *ngyegyeho* (local-made jingles), and *akyen* (drums) are currently used to accompany *Ebibindwom* by the youth. Occasionally, *atenteben* (bamboo-flute) and *mmensuon* (ivory trumpets ensemble) are also used when there is funeral.

One can agree with the writer that the juxtaposition of these local-made musical instruments have increased in the number of the existing western musical instruments which include harmonium organ, Hammond organ, pipe-

<sup>4</sup>Saint Augustine (354-430), greatest of the Latin Fathers and one of the most eminent Western Doctors of the Roman Catholic Church.

organ, and the modern portable-electronic organ. It was in Cape Coast Methodist Cathedral, that the Youth Fellowship and Scripture Union (S.U.) members who started using such Western percussion instruments as tambourine, a pair of claves, and conga or tom-tom during *worship* and offertory time. It is clear over here that Methodist Churches along the coast of Ghana in the early 1835 were using limited number of Western musical instruments in their liturgy as they inherited from the early European missionaries,

The debatable and controversial question to be asked is, do the Methodist Churches currently accept the playing of *fontomfrom* (or *from*) and a pair of talking drums (*atumpan*) in the church yard during church service? For sure, there is disagreement between some of the stronghold Youth Fellowship members and elders in other Methodist churches where I visited. It is hard to believe the motive behind the banning of some African musical instruments meant for religious worship in today's church service.

Another remarkable trend that can be attributed to the present-day liturgical change which I observed in the course of field research was the attitude of some Methodist Church young organists towards church music in general. As Campbell (1941:17) put it, "No organ prelude need be long ... for he must not tolerate the maltreatment of any music." In his interview, the late Dr. Atta Quartey (personal communication, March 5, 2007) explained that it is not sufficient for the organist on duty to know the texts or even the general outline of the sermon in selecting the music (tune) for the service. For that reason Mathis states, "if the service is to be unified, it is more important that he (the organist) understands the *mood* the preacher with the congregation to be when he begins on the sermon" (Mathis 1962: 57).

Manford (2004:5) reacting to the foregoing statement quoting Pope Benedict XIV (1675-1758) asserted that, "church music with accompaniment by organ or other musical instruments should not sound worldly or theatrical in character". Furthermore, "instrumental accompaniment of the singing must not overpower the voices". *ibid.* With the preceding statement, the young instrumentalists who accompany the Praise Team Bands and the Methodist Youth Fellowship as well perform contrarily to fulfill the above quotation.

Historically, Christian Churches in the 19th century and 20<sup>th</sup> century often opposed certain types of dances. C.F.W. Walther and other Lutherans in America for example, prohibited dancing that included close embrace, suggestive gestures and acts, and accompanying music that tended to arouse passions. For instance, the dance of the daughter of Herodias was often cited as sensuous type (Mark 6:22) of which the youth of today are warned against. Like CaselyHayford, Amu had wondered why African traditional dresses, dances and musical forms could not incorporate in Christian worship. Agawu (1996) emphasizing on the legacy of Amu, states, "some who knew Amu personally testify to his preference for 'African' dress" Furthermore, in a Christian environment, dance steps and movements are learned to interpret scriptures, hymns, Ghanaian art songs or pre-recorded music. The problem on the youngsters' part is not the mere fact of introducing foreign dances of some sort during church service, but the manner in which those dances are performed without meaning to the congregation is doubtful.

The modern Choreography, probably the best-known and, to many youth, the most popular 21<sup>st</sup> century dance in some Methodist Churches nationwide cannot be overemphasized. Besides, the fact that it has been partially accepted by some Christian Church authorities to be part of the worship process would yield a profitable meaning to the congregation as a whole. In one way or the other, the youth and children as well appreciate the movements that accompany the recorded music or musical interlude provided by the Praise Team Bands.

Besides, choreography also attracts other Youth Fellowship members from different Christian churches to join their friends who invited them. In my own opinion, apart from the social aspect that characterizes choreography nothing educative about 'bodily movements' is worth achieved at the end of the musical performance.

With regards to this controversial issue, the late Most Rev. Samuel B. Essamoah (1916-1987), the fifth African Presiding Bishop of Methodist Church, Ghana once commented on the use of only the upper part of the body in praising God. Interacting with the Youth Fellowship leaders at the Cape Coast Wesley Methodist Cathedral, most of them asserted that certain types of foreign dances are found to be associated among the youngsters are mainly dances associated with sexuality. Some of these foreign dances found to be popular among the youth in the Methodist Church include *mapuka*, *awilo*, *shakes* and *azonto* introduced by both the Nigerian and Ghanaian artistes respectively. Even though no one can desist these youth' habit in the church yard can easily influence the mood of the church service.

In the same way, there are some modern costumes that affect liturgy too. For instance, wearing of trousers, tight clothes, *Rasta* hair style, lip shine, and wearing of gorgeous dressing on the females' part are generally or partially accepted by the Methodist Church. Alorvi (2015) argued about the art of indecent dressing among Christians in general. He said although much had been done to reverse the trend, there was evidence of such negative acts in some Christian churches which he said undermined the dignity bestowed on humanity by God. It is therefore, necessary for authorities in the Methodist Church to educate the entire congregation about the recent

change in the music of the liturgy in the Church and its positive or negative influence on the current youth especially.

## V. .CONCLUSION

“Music plays a vital role in human society. It provides entertainment and emotional release, and it accompanies activities ranging from dances to religious ceremonies” (Kamien: 2006). For that rationale, a quick overview and thorough research about Church Music in the Methodist Church, Ghana reveals that it is not only the youth who are adversely affected by the current trend in the music of the liturgy but also the entire congregation’s negative thoughts generally contribute a lot. For example, showing applause for a ‘choreographic musical performance with secular texts is questionable.

To conclude this paper about the change of music of the liturgy in the Methodist Church and its influence on the youth of today, there are five main factors which need to be discussed briefly. These factors include the advent of the western missionaries, charismatic feature of worship and its impact on the Ghanaian youth, introduction of formal education, acceptance of indigenization worship and the application of ICT in today’s worship.

In the first place, Christianity which gave birth to Methodism prohibited some aspects of Ghanaian cultural practices during worship with regard to the singing of *Ebibindwom* (African lyrics), traditional dances, playing of such African traditional instruments as *akyen* (drums), *atenteben* (bamboo-flutes) and *mbentsia* (ivory trumpets). The Methodist youth though have been educated to the higher level are still influenced by the foreign culture. For example, singing of *praises* and *worship* songs and the creation of choreography during Sunday worship is mostly enjoyed especially by the youth. To them, the former liturgy introduced by the White missionaries was primordial and will not favour them today. Hence, the youth should be given equal opportunity in decision making. For example, their feelings and opinions concerning liturgical functions must be welcomed in good faith. This can be done by asking them to serve on Church committees and boards.

In the early 1980s saw the tremendous drift of the youth from the Orthodox churches to the Charismatic churches nationwide. For that reason, Edusa-Eyison (1996) suggested that “Failure to cater for its youth was partially responsible for the rise of Charismatic Ministries.” Charismatic form of worship must not change the youth’s mind instead, should inculcate the habit of giving prominence to the former liturgy which include the singing of ancient hymns, *préces* and responses, canticles and psalms (chants). To that effect, the formation of junior choirs and the youth choirs in today’s Methodist Churches are highly recommendable and need the Church Leaders’ supervision for effective organization and administration.

Besides, the introduction of formal education which was a gateway towards modern civilization had influenced the youth socially, morally, religiously and even financially. With the old liturgy, the youth in the Methodist Churches do not assume certain positions; for instance, to become a class leader, a preacher, a lead singer, an instrumentalist and teaching in the Sunday school programme were in the hands of only the adult. Luckily, today, the Praise Team band members are mostly the youth. Undoubtedly, the singing of praises, gospel songs and the introduction of foreign dances must be cherished by these youngsters.

Ghanaians and for that matter the Methodist youth were suppressed by the western Christianity. For example, their freedom in worship is hidden but with the acceptance of indigenous liturgy, both youth and adult as well are able to express themselves freely in their local languages. This made it possible with the introduction of *Ebibindwom* when illiterate men and women joined the main church service at Cape Coast when Methodism took firmly foundation.

Moreover, with such a musical change in the Methodist liturgy, the youth had been exposed to various singing and dancing styles, which permit them to move freely about, and also identifying and using local musical instruments around them. For instance, the use of *dondo* or *donno* (hourglass-drum), *mfirikiyiwa* (castanet), *dawur* (bell) and other aerophones (like *atenteben*) in worship had contributed positively towards Africanism and Ghanaian indigenous form of worship.

It is the responsibility of the Church to motivate, educate and address the youth on the concept and contents of the term ‘liturgy’ as applied to Christian worship, church administration and organization in general. Last but not the least, with the concept of sound acoustics and amplification, the use of combo speakers, personal computers, over-head projectors, FM microphones in today’s Methodist Churches is being manipulated by the youth as a result of their background in ICT. Besides, these modern electronic equipment had gone a long way to contribute positively towards liturgical change in the music of the Methodist Churches throughout the country. Finally, these sudden changes in sound acoustics at long last, had influenced Methodist congregations physically, socially, economically and financially.

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