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The Influence of the Varied Musical Styles in the Liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana on the Attitudes of the Congregants

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Abstract



Since the inception of the Methodist Church Ghana, music has played a significant role in its liturgical activities. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of different musical styles such as hymns, canticles, ebibindwom, danceable tunes as well as praises and worship songs in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana on the attitudes of the congregants. The problem is why one has to include all these musical styles in the liturgy of the Church. The primary objective of this study was to document the influence of the various musical styles in the Methodist Church Ghana's liturgy on the attitudes of the participants. This study used interviews of qualitative research to elicit primary data from respondents such as the Clergy, Laity, Choristers, Singing Band members, Praises and Worship team and members from the Christ Little Band who are conversant with these musical styles and also the

practitioners of the various musical genres. The findings showed that music is as old as humanity and has always been employed for religious purposes. Music has influenced many people's lives in a variety of ways, as Christians and Methodists by faith. The goal of learning the lyrics to hymns, canticles, ebibindwom, (African songs acquired by the Methodist Church) and other songs is to develop and support their faith in the Lord, which they emphasize in everything they do. They seek sustenance and confidence from God through songs and other forms of Christian worship.

Keywords: Varied Musical Styles, Congregants, Liturgical activities, Influence, Attitudes

1. Introduction

It is an irrefutable fact in Ghana and elsewhere that music naturally captures people's attention wherever they go, and it has become an essential component of human existence; hence, life goes with music in any setting (Amuah, 2001; Bemah, 2009; Nketia, 1966). According to the foreword to the Methodist Hymn Book, Methodism was born in song, and Methodists have never stopped singing since (The Methodist Church, 1933, p. iii), and shortly after the Holy Spirit's baptism, the Wesley brothers incorporated hymn singing into the Methodist Church's liturgy. Hymns derive from religious traditions are marked by their structured lyrical substance and melodic simplicity. As such, they serve as vehicles for worship, transmitting theological concepts, praise, devotion, a sense of reverence, solidarity, and spiritual connection among congregations. They encourage group singing, introspection, and participation in religious events, fostering a sense of community and shared faith (Agordoh, 2004, 2011; Andrews, 1978; Arthur, 1992). Hymns became the primary musical style as the church travelled around the world, eventually landing in Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, in 1835 under the leadership of Reverend Joseph Dunwell. The service's song selection they were using was restricted to hymns, chants (psalms and canticles), and anthems (Amuah, 2014; Andoh, 2008; Ocran, 2015). Canticles are also hymns or chants based on scriptural texts, particularly from the Old Testament. They convey praise, thanksgiving, and devotion while emphasizing God's glory and sovereignty. Canticles are utilized in liturgical settings to complement worship sessions and rituals. Their solemn and meditative melodies, along with scriptural content, strengthen congregants' connection with sacred texts while instilling a sense of reverence and awe.

As time passed, new musical styles were introduced to meet the musical needs of the worshippers. Danceable music which is divided into several categories emphasize rhythmic elements, bright tunes, and uncomplicated lyrics in order to promote physical expression and emotional engagement. Danceable music enables congregations to express their faith through movement and physical worship. Its cheerful rhythms and inspirational lyrics create a vivid ambiance of celebration, spontaneity, and freedom, inviting audiences to actively participate in praise and devotion (Agordoh, 2011; Amuah, 2014; Nketia, 1958). Praise and worship music which has a profound emotional and transformative effect on congregations was introduced in the liturgy of the church. Its upbeat rhythms, passionate vocals, and message of deliverance are genuine, bringing joy, comfort, and empowerment. This musical style fosters a sense of communal joy and togetherness, transcending individual experiences and resulting in a shared spiritual experience (Acquaah-Harrison, 2017; Nelson, 1996).

Singing then became a key factor in the expansion of Methodism in Ghana, allowing the Church to make breakthroughs in its evangelism across the country and gain adherents. As the people met for worship service, they sang their musical traditions. These musical genres became popular and successfully drew and retained a large number of worshippers in the Methodist Church Ghana (Amuah, 2014; Amuah & Arthur, 2013; Andoh, 2008).

Amuah and Arthur (2013), categorized hymns, canticles, danceable melodies, anthems, and ***ebibindwom*** as musical items in the Methodist Church Ghana. These musical traditions have evolved and adapted to changing cultural and religious circumstances over the years, but they are still excellent outlets for spiritual expression, social bonding, and transformative experiences among congregants. Their impacts vary, but they assist in shaping identity, reinforcing ideas, and fostering a sense of belonging within religious communities.

During worship services and other occasions, it has been observed that some church members have chosen hymns or other musical styles to reflect their own experiences. As a result, these hymns and other musical genres have become their favorites, which they request during times of joy and grief. In these conditions, they find contentment and comfort. It is thought that all of these musical traditions communicated God's message to the people. The issue is why does the Methodist Church Ghana has to incorporate all of these musical forms into its liturgy? The purpose of this study was to bring to light or identify the reasons for the inclusion of all of these musical types, as well as their influence

on congregants' attitudes at the Methodist Church Ghana religious event. The study will provide information for future research as well as a guide for music teachers, students, historians, curators, scholars, and readers.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Ethnography as a research design was used for this study where the researchers have to study the group in its natural settings for a period of time. This was to focus on the daily behaviour of group of people in terms of their interaction, communication and ritual with observation and interviews as important data collection methods (Leedy & Ormrod, 1980; Smith, 2015). In order to get detailed and firsthand information from the study participants, the researchers immersed themselves in some of the activities of the church such as how they conducted their worship services and how rehearsal meetings of the singing groups were held. This method enabled the researchers to establish cordial relationship with study subjects and had access to information. As a result, the researchers were able to write extensively, objectively and did critical analysis of the influence of the varied musical styles in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana on the attitudes of the congregants.

2.2 Research Instruments

2.2.1 Interviews

Interviews as research instruments that the researchers' had with the participants were extensive (Grech, 2017; Hyun, 2014) because they were interviewed during each service, as well as various rehearsal meetings of the study participants. Some of the study subjects were also interviewed in their homes and offices to find out how the varied musical styles in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana have influenced their attitudes. Aside one on one interviews, the researchers made use of video and tape-recording interviews and others were called on phones and the data that were obtained were used for this study (Brewer, 2000; Smith, 2015).

2.2.2. Participant Observation

According to DeMunck and Sobo (1998), participant observation is the primary method used by anthropologists during fieldwork. The fieldwork includes vigorous observing, improving memory, informal interviewing, and writing detailed field notes. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) argue that participant observation

is the practice that allows researchers to learn the activities of the people under study in their natural setting through observing and participating in those activities. The researchers therefore engaged in participant observation, where they observed the church choir, singing band, praises and worship team and Christ Little Band during their rehearsals as well as Sunday worship service. They took the opportunity to learn some of the musical styles and also taught some of the choirs and singing bands hymns and anthems. The researchers visited some of the research areas such as Mt. Zion Chapel, Resurrection Chapel, Freeman Chapel, Wesley Cathedral and other places to have an extensive discussion with some selected people to share their thoughts on the topic under discussion. Aside seeking information from people in these places, the researchers observed the way they conducted their worship service. This approach provided the researchers the ways to check for non-verbal manifestation of feelings, decide who interacts with whom, understands how participants communicate with each other and checked how much time is spent on the various musical type activities. The researchers objectively and critically analyzed the influence of the varied musical styles in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana on the attitudes of the congregants.

2.3. Sample selection procedure and sample size

Participants in the study were carefully selected from three regions in Ghana: Central, Ashanti, and Greater Accra. These regions were purposefully chosen because the Central Region is where Methodism began or where the Missionaries first resided. Again, after establishing itself in coastal areas, the church went to the Ashanti Region, where Methodism thrives. Greater Accra was chosen since it is the location of the Church's seat. Clergy, Laity, Choristers, members of the Singing Band, members of the Praise and Worship team, and members of the Christ Little Band were the study subjects. The researchers were convinced that the study subjects possessed in-depth knowledge, competence, and a diversified perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Guest et al., 2006) as well as being the users and practitioners of these musical styles and as result contributed useful insights on the issue under discussion (Stage & Manning, 2003). The researchers got a better knowledge of the phenomenon under inquiry by selecting study participants with diverse experiences, perspectives, or insights. This study had a sample size of forty three (43) people and they were chosen based on their desire and availability to participate in the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Gardener, 2004).

Table 1. Sample groupings of the study participants

Sample grouping	Number selected
Clergy	6
Laity	6
Choristers	8
Singing Band members	8
Praises and Worship Team	7
Christ Little Band	8
Total	43

The justification for the individual numbers of the sample was based on leadership and status in their respective groups. For the Clergy, the categorization was as follows: Bishops (1), Superintendent Ministers (1), Ministers who had been choristers before (1), Circuit Ministers (1), Probationers (1) and Supernumeraries (1). For the Laity, the categorization was; Lay Chairmen (1), and one (1) each from the various organizations such as Youth Fellowship, Men's Fellowship, Women's Fellowship, Guild and Susanna Wesley Mission Auxiliary. For the choristers, the following were selected; Choirmaster/Organist (1), choirmasters who are not organist (1), Organists who are not choirmasters (1), one (1) representative from each part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), and one (1) conductor. For the Singing Band, the following were chosen; Singing Band Masters/Organists (1), singing band masters who are not organist (1), one (1) representative from each part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), and one (1) conductor. For the Praises and Worship team, the following were picked; lead singers (1), chorus (3), and instrumentalists (3). For the Christ Little Band, the following were selected; leadership (1), male (1), female (1), youngest member (1), oldest member (1), instrumentalists (1), lead singer (1), and chorus (1).

2.4. Data collection procedures

The researchers employed a number of data gathering and engagement tactics. For the numerous study subjects, face-to-face interviews, phone calls or interviews, and video interviews were undertaken (Adom et al., 2020; Kabir, 2016; Kumeckpor, 2002; Leedy & Ormrod, 1980; Taherdoost, 2021). On the appointed days, thus, 31st March, 2020, 28th July, 2021, 10th October, 2021, 13th October, 2021, 17th October, 2021, 2nd November, 2021, 3rd November, 2021, 26th April, 2022, and 5th May, 2022, structured and unstructured interview methods

were used to collect information from respondents at their offices, homes, and chapels. Relevant qualities were noticed in telephone and video interviews, such as the researchers' flexibility and honesty, as well as keeping the room where the calls were placed silent to avoid disturbances (Adom et al., 2020; Kumekpor, 2002). Interviews with study participants were conducted in both English and Akan by the researchers. With the respondents' permission, the comments were captured on tape recorders and mobile phones and replayed at home. For parallels and discrepancies, the responses were extensively reviewed, compared, and contrasted with the available documented facts.

Table 2. Age and Regional/ Diocesan distribution of study subjects

Age grouping of the study participants		Regional/Diocesan distribution of study participants	
Age range	Number	Location in Ghana	Number
40-49	5	Central Region	15
50-59	6	Ashanti Region	17
60-69	12	Greater Accra Region	11
70-79	12	Total	43
80-89	6		
90-99	2		
Total	43		

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Influence of Methodist Music on the Attitudes of the Congregants

According to eight (8) choristers interviewed, they joined the Church Choir because of their interest, passion, and the texts from many musical forms. They told the researchers that without singing a hymn, danceable melodies, or an anthem during a worship service made them "sick." They claimed that by singing and dancing, they became closer to their Maker. As a result, they thanked God for sparing their lives and fulfilling their deepest wishes. This assertion was supported by the singing band members, who were interviewed on the same issue. Again, only two of the twelve (12) non-musicians examined stated that they were not interested in Methodist hymns, canticles, and other works. When asked why, they replied that the hymns and canticles were unfamiliar to them, and the words were difficult to grasp. The remaining ten (10) non-musicians expressed a strong interest in Methodist hymns, canticles, and other works.

They believed that hymns, canticles, and anthems made the worship session more solemn and interactive. Four (4) of them informed the researchers that they listened to hymns and their meanings on radio Ghana every Sunday morning before going to church. Again, some of the choristers indicated that the hymns and other types of Methodist music were sources of inspiration to their life lives, and have also brought them closer to God and thus, convicted them to accept Christ. They indicated that hymns like “Blessed assurance Jesus is mine” (MHB 422), “Just as I am” (MHB 353), “Through all the changing scenes of life” (MHB 427) and “Pass me not” (MHB 335) have impacted them so much. The respondents explained that anytime they went to church and hymns were not sung, they became dissatisfied and as if they had lost valuable things. On the other hand, if hymns were performed, they became elated, satisfied and fulfilled. This was corroborated by another Diocesan Lay Chairman, who was interviewed on Thursday, May 5, 2022 at Mt Zion Methodist chapel and indicated that, the Methodist songs have grounded her faith in the Lord, and nothing on this globe can separate her from the Methodist Church. She added that all of these musical styles are biblical in character, and that every occasion has music for it, providing assurance that the Almighty God is available to help in all life situations. She cited MHB 478, 427, and 99 to support her claim.

Three (3) respondents also stated that when traveling, the only music they listened to were Methodist hymns and canticles. They were unequivocal that hymns, canticles, and anthems were among the best legacies that the Methodist Church Ghana has left to posterity. Some respondents stated that they preferred canticles, hymns, anthems, danceable melodies, and gospel music for the words alone. They stated that while they do not have good voices or play any musical instruments, they are delighted when others perform these musical types. Despite the fact that they were born into Methodism, the lyrics of diverse musical styles, among other reasons, have caused them to remain in the church to this day. Members of the Christ Little Band further stated that they utilised ***ebibindwom*** to recall our Lord Jesus Christ’s beneficial actions to humanity. They claimed that because they spoke the native language, they were able to express themselves freely. According to Acquah et al. (2015), when performers understand the meaning of the song’s texts, enjoyment improves since the efficacy of the song’s impact is heavily dependent on the meaning of the text used. On another level, Nketia (1974) claims that the song lyrics are motivated by the song’s importance as a vehicle for creative linguistic expressions that can portray both personal and societal experiences. Again, majority of the Christ Little Band study participants reported that even though, they sang hymns

and various types of music during worship service, they felt thrilled whenever the speaker in the pulpit sung *ebibindwom*, thus they have opted to stay in the Methodist Church Ghana. According to Amuah et al. (2014) and Agordoh (2011), Africans may only acquire spiritual fulfillment during worship through participatory singing, spontaneous prayer, handclapping, and dancing. The survey participants' comments validated the aforementioned argument, encouraging the Methodist Church Ghana to embrace local choruses to bring godly satisfaction to everyone.

Another respondent has this to say when he was asked about the influence of Methodist music on his attitude on 26th April 2022. He said:

I was not born into the Christian faith since my mother was not, and she died as a non-Christian despite being a Fanti. I received my primary education at a Methodist school, where hymns were taught and learned. During my primary school days in the late 1980s, I developed a love for hymns, which drew me to the Methodist Church. I began leading liturgy at the age of 14 after becoming a Methodist against my mother's wishes. My love of hymns grew, and I joined the church choir.

Some of the study participants said that in the 1980s, some of the singing groups in the Methodist Church Ghana used to go around town and sing. According to them, the singing groups normally went quietly at 4 a.m., stood in one place, sang incredibly beautiful and harmonized melodies, and then prayed. They would then go on to the next spot and continue the process until they had completed their tour of the town. Later in the day, they would overhear folks inquiring about the music groups that had arrived to perform. They would comment on how great and emotional their songs were, and they later became members of the Church. According to them this drew them and many other people who had previously attended other churches to join the Methodist Church Ghana (Personal communication: 31st March, 2020).

In another instance, some of the study participants claimed that the Methodist Church music in Ghana has assisted some of them who could not read the scripture to recite some of the passages from the bible. They explained that most of the texts used in the various musical styles in the religious ceremony of the Methodist churches in Ghana were taken from the bible and they typically utilised a great deal of repetition. The repetition of the words according to them allowed those who could not read to participate and memorize some of

the words from the scripture before, during and after the worship service. The preceding remark is supported by Amuah (2001), who claims that some people who were regarded officially illiterate became scripturally literate as a result of using **ebibindwom** and learning about the content of the scripture.

Some of the respondents indicated to the researchers that when they have no words to express their feelings, they can find them expressed meaningfully in the words of the various musical styles. In order to break away from monotony and boredom during worship service, different musical shades are used so as to bring 'life' to the worshippers. In this way those who enjoy hymns will be happy, and those who enjoy canticles will be satisfied since their wants will be addressed. Furthermore, individuals come to church to express their gratitude through music and dance; consequently, if danceable melodies are not performed at all, their demands may be perceived as not met. Others believe that if **ebibindwom** is not performed, the church should not have been opened (Personal communication: October 10, 2021).

Following and understanding the liturgical order of the church, according to some ministers who were choristers was a huge step towards becoming a minister in the Methodist Church. Ministers of the choir descent had an unreserved penchant for hymns. They were inspired and edified by the hymns. Fine-tuning sermon with supporting sentences, phrases, and quotations from the hymnal makes it rich in content and context. A true Methodist is always armed with two great weapons, the Bible and the Hymn Book. With these, the enemy is bound to be defeated in any battle. According to the study participants' comments, most of them became Methodist as a result of their songs. One of them stated that, as a minister with a choir background, the Methodist music, particularly the hymns, had greatly aided his spiritual growth. He noted that hymns have lyrics that address every aspect of life's experiences as well as obstacles linked with the Christian life. In times of sadness or joy, hymns provided words of comfort or exhortation. When life's wild restless arms bind the mortal being, the respondent found spiritual deliverance in hymns, he explained. Furthermore, the respondent mentioned that Methodist music has influenced him to achieve moral perfection and one cannot enunciate on the usefulness of hymns without mentioning the impetus it adds to life and thus, patrons of hymns are deeply encouraged on a daily basis by the contents.

On the same issue, another respondent gave her responses to the researchers when she was contacted on the 26th April 2022 on her residence. She explained

that Music is as old as human and from the early days, it has been employed in the service of religion. As a Christian and a Methodist by faith, music has influenced her life in many ways. The purpose of memorizing the lyrics of the hymns, canticles, danceable tunes, and others is to foster and encourage her faith in the Lord, which she dwells on in everything she does. Through the hymns and the rest, she looks up to God for sustenance and assurance in her phases of Christian life. In times of grief, Methodist music, hymns, and lyrics soothe her soul and provide her relief. When she is lonely and in agony, she turns to the Lord and comforts herself with hymns such as MHB 478, 475, and canticle 44. Such hymns increase her faith in the Lord and thus increase her Christian life as well. According to the interviewee, she is happy when she listens to Methodist music, which has allowed her to make friends both as a chorister and as a church member because they sing and exchange songs together. Music brings her joy, and as a poet, it helps her understand more about language (Personal communication, April 26th, 2022).

One of the study participants described meeting a lady in church who informed him that whenever ***Te Deum Laudamus*** (Canticle 2) is not sung, she feels unfulfilled and departs empty-handed, but when it is sung, she feels content. He stated that chants are taken from the psalms, and once pronounced, you have prayed, therefore the chants supplement the prayers we offer. Another respondent confirmed this, telling the researchers about an old chorister he knew as a young choirmaster. He described how the old man comes to church for the canticles and selects to sing them, which are usually taken from the psalms. He will choose one and sing it several times, indicating that the canticles have had an impact on his prayer life. (Personal communication: July 28, 2021; October 13, 2021; and November 2, 2021).

Another respondent who was interviewed by the researchers on October 17, 2021, stated that:

Originally, I was not a Methodist, though my mother was. I got endeared to Methodism by the words in the Methodist Hymn Book which belonged to my mother and I chanced upon. I was fascinated by the words inscribed therein and began reading them and that actually whipped up my enthusiasm to become a Methodist. Accordingly, I found in the hymn an alternative scriptural book to the Bible when I became a convert to Christianity. In the hymns I find assurance of salvation. Hymns re-enforce my hope in salvation and

as true heirs to the kingdom of God. In hymns are words of assurance that the Christian is grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.

Some respondents claimed they were able to play musical instruments such as the piano or organ, a set of drums, various types of guitars, and other electronic instruments as a result of their participation in the many singing groups in the Methodist Church Ghana. They also stated that they were encouraged to learn some of the musical instruments that would be utilized to accompany the singing throughout the worship session while performing various musical art forms. In view of that they sought higher levels of education in music education, and they are now teaching at various levels of education in Ghana, and other institutions and organizations in Ghana (Personal communication: November 3, 2021).

More noticeable influence can be seen in the church's financial growth and the usage of Methodist music by some members. For example, some composers offer hymns, *ebibindwom*, and danceable melodies on CDs, pen drives, and other formats. Those who engage in this profession generate income to support themselves and their families. They pay tithes and other offerings from this money, which helps the church raise funds. During the worship service, a set of drums accompany the songs, and because the congregation is given the opportunity to move their bodies, they empty their hearts by making big contributions. Finally, the church hires some of the unemployed youth who are not properly trained musicians to care for and operate the automated musical instruments. The Methodist Church Ghana employs all of these musical forms during worship services. Furthermore, these musical forms have a healing component that benefits those who accept and employ them (Amuah, 2001; Amuah et al., 2014; Nketia, 1974; Sackey, 2016).

It was observed during the research period that hymn singing and performance of other musical styles allowed everyone in the congregation, regardless of literacy level, to join in worship and share their experiences. Thus, the many musical styles were distinguished by emotional depth and personal expression. By singing these songs, worshippers were able to express their spiritual experiences and feelings while also connecting with one another. Methodism's hymns and other musical genres have had a lasting impact on the Methodist congregants.

4. Conclusion

The Methodist Church musical styles have helped some members who are unable to read scripture to recite parts from the Bible. This is because the majority of the texts used in gospel music, hymns, *ebibindwom*, and danceable tunes are derived from the Bible and typically employ repetition. The repeating of the phrases enabled those who couldn't read to participate and memorize portions of the text before, during, and after the worship service. Some members of the Church Choir, Christ Little Band, and Singing Band joined the Methodist Church Ghana because they were enthusiastic, loving, and passionate about the lyrics of hymns, canticles, and anthems, which made them "sick" whenever they were not performed during worship services. The congregants became closer to their Creator as they sung, clapped, danced, and thanked Him for saving their lives, even as their deepest desires were fulfilled.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that ministers or caretakers in charge of the Methodist societies ensure that the various musical styles are graciously preserved while providing extra explanations to the congregation. For example, the reasons for employing various kinds of music in church liturgy, as well as the roles they play throughout the divine service, must be explained or made available to worshippers. Furthermore, the Church should consider expanding access to scripture by incorporating additional audiovisual resources, such as recordings of hymns and gospel songs, into worship services. This can provide valuable support to members who may struggle with reading or literacy, enabling them to engage more fully with biblical texts and participate actively in worship. It is also important to cultivate a culture of passion and enthusiasm for worship music among congregants. This can be achieved by prioritizing the performance of hymns, canticles, and anthems that resonate deeply with members, and by encouraging active participation in music ministry groups. By fostering a love for gospel music and its transformative power in worship, the Church can enhance members' spiritual growth and worship experiences.

In addition, the Methodist Church Ghana should ensure that worship services are inclusive and accessible to all members, regardless of their musical abilities or background. This may involve providing opportunities for congregants to participate in singing, clapping, dancing, and other forms of worship expression that resonate with their spiritual experiences and preferences. Finally, it is important to celebrate the spiritual fulfillment and joy experienced

by congregants through their engagement with gospel music and worship. By acknowledging the profound impact of music on members' spiritual lives and encouraging continued expressions of gratitude and praise to God, the Church can strengthen the spiritual bonds within the community and foster a deeper sense of connection to the divine.

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