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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## LITURGICAL CHANGES IN THE REPERTORY OF THE METHODIST CHURCH GHANA

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**Abstract:**

The growth of Christianity in Ghana has led to the proliferation of liturgical changes leading to conflict of religious ideologies within the traditional (orthodox) and the modern (charismatic) churches. These liturgical modifications are seen not only in their worship, prayers and offerings but also in their music. This paper explores the changes that have taken place in the musical liturgy of the Methodist Church, Ghana. Through qualitative data collection, the paper investigates the factors leading to these changes and brings out the impact made in the Methodist church in general. It uses two epistemological frameworks: The separatism and the syncretism. The former looks at the liturgy in retrospect whereas the latter dwells on the changes culminating different beliefs as a result of the different movements in the Christendom in Ghana. To satisfy the varied congregational taste in this modern world, it is important that the shift in the musical liturgy of the Methodist church is well embraced by all.

**Key Words:** liturgy, Methodist church, change, repertory, Christian, religion, Ghana.

**Introduction**

The Methodist Church Ghana is one of the early orthodox churches that were established by the European missionaries. In the early Christian church, the liturgy centred on a ritual commemorating the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples as recounted in the New Testament (Matt.26:30). The instituted pattern of worship at the time included singing of translated Western hymns which favoured only the few educated elite. The liturgy of the early churches including the Methodist church was predominantly indoctrinated with Western culture.

As a result of the western culture, the Traditional African music performances were described by the early European missionaries as pagan practices of the ancestral worship and that discarded the minds of some heads of Orthodox Churches. For example, the use of *atumpan* and *ƒɔntɔmƒɔm*<sup>1</sup> brought conflicts in most Christian Churches along the coastal belt of Ghana.

Talking about the African worship, Brown-Okoh indicates that “to the African, the traditional approach to worship such as impulsiveness of prayer, singing, handclapping, drumming and dancing constitute the only way of achieving spiritual fulfilment” (Brown-Okoh, 2011: 1).

He explains that by the foundational liturgy, the uneducated and semi-educated fractions of the congregation of the early churches were socially side-lined during worship. This was an indication that, by the style of worship as introduced by the westerners, a cultural vacuum was created giving rise to some African religious movements that consequently “adulterated” the doctrines of the early established churches of which the Methodist church was among.

The development of Church music in Ghana with particular reference to the problems confronting the liturgical repertory in the Methodist Church has generated arguments among some Reverend Ministers, Church Leaders, preachers, organizational heads, and the entire congregation. At the All-African Churches Conference Nketia (1958) commented that the purpose of Africanization is not the abandonment of Christocentric worship, but the use of familiar means of expression to enable the African worshippers to understand better and feel more deeply at home.

It is worth saying that, over dependency on Western chants, psalms, hymns, canticles and anthems in the years back really made the African musician look down upon his own indigenous music as fetish. It is against this background

<sup>1</sup>Ghanaian traditional drums

of conflicting opinion that the problems of liturgical change in the repertory in Methodist Churches in Ghana have been considered in this paper, focusing on the concept of liturgy, causes of the liturgical changes, sources of liturgical materials, nature of the changes and the impact made on the younger generation and the congregation at large. Recommendations and conclusions are drawn to give suggestions for further practices.

### **Separatism versus Syncretism**

According to Definitions net (2013), Separatism is the advocacy of a state of cultural, ethnic, tribal, religious, racial, governmental or gender separation from the larger group. It is a theory or doctrine which supports a state of separation between organizations, institutions, or other societal groups (e.g. between church and state) or between different political jurisdictions (e.g. a country and its former colony). In the case of the Methodist church, this was the fundamental theory that led to its establishment from the Anglican Church by Rev. John Wesley through preaching and rendition of hymns and chants. Though had a different way of worship, the liturgy of the Methodist church was predominantly music coupled with evangelism throughout their worship.

The incorporation of hymn writing by the Wesleys called for congregational singing rather than liturgical music which restricted itself only to few Priests, musicians, trained choristers, and literates. Therefore, the need for congregational singing was the priority of the Methodists although the Missionaries' influence on African music in general affected the profitable use of Ghanaian local sacred songs and musical instruments.

According to the research, in 1835, Joseph Rhodes Dunwell arrived in the country, the then Gold Coast, to establish the Methodist Church at Cape Coast in the Central Region. The order of service used was an adoption of that of the earliest Church of Britain. It was taken from the Methodist Service Book (M.S.B.) published by the founder of the Church, John Wesley in 1874 to guide Methodist Societies in the worship process having separated from the Anglican Church. This made them independent and self-determined movement from the mother church.

Colpe(1977) is of the view that “no religious revolution is possible without paying the price of syncretism”. He states that the principle of religious syncretism holds that when any two cultures meet and interact they will exchange religious ideas with the dominant culture prevailing in the exchange.

The exemplifications of this principle are what have resulted in the liturgical changes experienced in the musical life of the Methodist Church of Ghana. The issue of religious syncretism is very paramount in affecting the liturgy of most religious institutions. Firth (1996: 87) states that sociologists and anthropologists have thrown much light on the variety of religious forms through their studies of belief systems, rituals, symbols and meaning all over the world but they have not paid adequate attention to the phenomenon of syncretism, though we find a few exceptions. Similarly, Worsley points out that in anthropological literature of the Cargo cult has been described as a form of syncretism. Cargo cults are essentially syncretistic, blending the “Christian doctrine” with “aboriginal beliefs” (Worsley, 1990). Anthropologists have also included the blend of African, Native American, and Roman Catholic saints and deities in Caribbean “voodoo” cults as instances of syncretism. The process of syncretism then provides an impact and brings about changes in the liturgical foundations of religious institutions.

### **The Concept of Liturgy**

According the New Harvard Dictionary of Music liturgy has been defined as “the formally constituted services of the various rites of the Christian church; also the particular formal arrangement of any such church service (Randel 1986:454). Powers (2003) contributed on the Internet (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia edition) by stating that although the word, liturgy is sometimes applied to Jewish worship; it is especially associated with prayers and ceremonies used in the celebration of The Lord’s Supper or Eucharist.

It was in the liturgy that Christians assembled to become the church and they learned about the Christian faith. Liturgy, therefore, embodied the faith of the church. It was no wonder that the liturgical assembly itself eventually became a source of *theology*, particularly from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, when Christians’ faith had to be explained to the masses of the new converts who flocked to the church after the peace of Constantine.

The Methodist Church is theologised to have been dominated with songs. All aspects of their liturgy, even those to be recited, has been set to music, therefore, any change in the liturgy affects the routine musical life of the church consequently.

### **The Liturgy in Retrospect**

The musical Liturgy of the Methodist Church was characterized with the following after they had separated from the mother church.

Firstly, the early Church music was contemplative in nature. The solemnity and spiritual aspects that affect inner feeling was more beneficial to the individual worshipper so the kind of music performed did not attract bodily

movements in any form. It was not that the leaders of the church disliked the music itself but that they wanted to wean converts away from everything associated with the paganism of the past including banning all instrumental music.

Secondly, church music was sung in a prayerfully mood and that only few among the congregation, the clergy, the church Choir and literate ones benefitted from the liturgical music. The liturgy was then non-congregational. It was dull in nature due to the slow manner in which hymns and canticles were being performed. Besides, the congregation's appreciation to church music in particular was concealed. This can be traced to the slow nature in which canticles, psalms, hymns, anthems and doxology were performed. These were non danceable tunes and that forbade members of the church to move about because there was strong meditation on the texts. Also, the mode of worship was more structured or programmed under strict control of the Minister in-charge or the liturgist. For instance, whoever conducts church service or prayer meeting follows the order of service as planned, therefore the congregation was dogmatic to the liturgical presentation performed by the liturgist.

Finally, the only accepted musical instruments used to accompany ancient church music were mainly strings which included harp, lyre and lute.

It is a gainsaying that the early European Missionaries tended to distort the image of Africa for their own purposes. For this reason, Berman writes "many missionaries truly believed that Africans were savages, whose barbaric tendencies were manifested in their pagan customs, licentious dancing and drumming, and communal family structure" (Berman 1974:527). In affirmation of this statement, Bediako states that "Africans were not only 'savage' and barbarous; they were also in the very depths of ignorant superstition" (Bediako 1997:194).

### **The paradigm of Change**

The period of liturgical change could be viewed from two perspectives: The indigenization of the church and the influence from other religious bodies.

#### **Indigenization of music and liturgy in the church**

Nketia, quoting Micklem (1988-1976), notes the crucial period of change as "a fundamental principle of the Reformation Movement that the Christian faith must be brought home to the minds and understandings of ordinary people". Nketia continues to assert that "this principle found expression in the translation of the Bible and the growth of liturgies in local languages" (Nketia 1958:271).

In another development, Ekwueme (1973-74), commenting on the emergency of the vernacular liturgy and its implication in Christian worship, quotes that:

One of resulting effects of the Reformation in Christian Church has been the making of worship more relevant to the masses of professed Christians. It has meant the employment of vernacular, which will be understood by the congregation instead of the 'dead language' comprehensive only to a few initiative who have spent years of apprenticeship in monasteries. It has also meant the use of tunes familiar to worshippers; tunes in which they could join whether in meek supplication, in whole adoration, or in a hearty praise of the one who is by faith, the Lord and Saviour (1974:64).

This effect is what Routley (1962) referred to as the 'democratic' aspect of Reformed teaching of Church music. For example, the translation of the *Apostles' Creed*, *the Lord's Prayer*, and other doctrines by the western Missionaries also fulfilled the dreams of indigenization when individuals had the chance of expressing themselves freely during daily

The indigenization may therefore incorporate changing foreign cultural materials and practices in the liturgy or adapting foreign materials that will be complementary to indigenous requirements as seen in the Charismatic churches.

The repertory used by the Methodist Church Ghana was rigidly the singing of Western chants, canticles, hymns, and anthems. 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 Languages for use throughout the Methodist Churches in Ghana.

Through the effort of Rev.Thomas Birch Freeman (1809-1890), the *Ebibindwom*, (Akan Sacred Lyrics) which became accepted and widely used in worship,was incorporated in the revised book ofoffice.This laid the foundation for the use of traditional music in Christian Churches in Ghana. Like Nketia opines:

The organization of traditional music in social life enables the individual to acquire his musical knowledge in slow stages and to widen his experience of the music of his culture through the social groups into which he is gradually absorbed and through the activities in which he takes part” (Nketia, 1988).

It became important that the musical liturgy was indigenized to allow full participation of all class of the congregation because the dogmatism of the initial liturgy favoured only few people.

With scholarly writings on indigenization regarding the study of church music, several views have been expressed by both Western and African musicians and musicologists. For instance, Nketia (1958) has commented on the activities of the European missionaries on the coastal regions and have raised concerns about the influence of African indigenous music on Western culture.

### **Influence of Other Religious bodies**

Darkwa (1980)states that 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 drumming, clapping, dancing, shouting, jumping and the use of songs that aided worshippers to express their spiritual as well as physical emotions.

The liveliness of the worship of the Charismatic Churches, according to Darkwa (1980), made majority of the worshippers in the Pentecostal Churches who were mostly illiterates jumped into conclusion that the mode of worship in the orthodox churches, with particular reference to their repertoire, was boring and without any meaningful liturgy.This form of worship which was peculiar to the Methodist Church was devoid of bodily movements in any form and this has resulted in the syncretism in the worship of the Church.

### **The Move towards a change**

In 1965, the Methodist Church Conference, Ghana called for the modernizationof the language and style of the Fante bible and Methodist Hymn Book (M.H.B.). This was to change the grammar used in those books to be very simple and familiar to the people. All these were geared towards preparing the ground for the great task of strengthening converts in the faith of the various Ghanaian Languages.

Fieldwork showed that in 1977, a Sub-Committee on Translation and Liturgy was re-activated under the auspices of the Methodist Book Depot Limited to review the Book of Offices and undertake the translation of hymns into various Ghanaian Languages for both family and public worships to accommodate a lot more worshippers.

To encourage church sub-committee of the Methodist Church liturgy review committee organized choral competition and the Methodist Book Depot gave prizes. The singing of *Ebibindwom*Akan sacred lyrics was even further improved with the introduction of Ghanaian “choruses” or ‘shouts’.

In the light of this problem, during the time of the late Most Reverend Professor Emeritus Kwasi A. Dickson, as a President of the Methodist Conference, substantive liturgy committee was constituted for the review of the liturgy which started operating in the year 2000. The committee was to take into consideration the doctrinal basis of the church, making sure that the new liturgy allowed for meaningful and active participation that would satisfy the religious aspirations of the congregation and the clergy.

It is the Liturgy Committee with the approval of the Methodist Conference that came up with Methodist Liturgy and Book of Worship (M.L.B.W.) for the enrichment of worship life, and to serve as a useful guide to the conduct of all religious services both by Methodists and Non-Methodists alike.

In actual fact, some of the Reverend Ministers contacted during the fieldwork were of the view that the change in the music liturgy had come at the right time when the lost church members felt the need of joining their mother church again as a result of the Charismatic aspects of worship which have been introduced recently. Quite a number of the Methodist Churches now portray the characteristics of ‘Pentecostal Church’ to its mode of daily worship and Sunday church services as well. One practical example is the use of gospel songs, praises and worship songs in Church service which was absolutely absent.

### **Impact of the Liturgical Changes**

Generally, the current liturgy is said to have been lively due to the form it takes. Unlike the pre-reformation period whereby only few people took part in the worship, the use of electronic gadgets and other percussive musical

instruments during church service make the entire congregation have the liberty to express their appreciation through body movements in diverse ways. In the same way, the combination of both Western and African musical instruments for worship depicts Ancient and Modern forms of music.

Another remarkable impact is also seen in the financial growth of the Church through offertory, funds raising activities and other outreach programmes: drums accompany songs and since the congregation is given the opportunity to dance, they pour out their hearts by making quite appreciable donations.

Besides, modern technology in the form of computers, overhead projectors and screens which project the vocal music to far distances are used in today's Methodist Churches; for instance, the use of cordless microphones, horn speakers or combos, amplifiers, mixers, electric guitars, portable synthesizer organs, and many others enhance church service in terms of liturgical change in the repertory.

Furthermore, unemployed young men and women who are not professionally trained musicians are rather engaged to handle and manipulate such modern electronic musical instruments. Those talented ones are brought up musically through imaginative and constructive manner.

### **Causes of Liturgical Changes in the Repertory**

The introduction of modern Church Music that had gained prominence in most Methodist Churches throughout the country could be traced as far back as in the late 1980s and the early 1990s in the form of choral music.

In the early 1980s, the liturgical activities including the nature of music making which side-lined dancing and bodily movement made the Methodist Church lose her membership to other charismatic churches. The liturgy was devoid of drumming right from the onset. The move to introduce drumming and dancing in the church became important to stop the members from further migration into the charismatic churches. The reason was that the influence of Charismatic or Pentecostal music on the Mainline Churches was a major threat since most of youth in the early 1980s were charmed by their instrumental music which articulates their bodies in different directions. The drift of the youth to other Christian churches from the Orthodox Churches resulted in dullness in the worship style of the Methodist Churches nationwide. This brought the need to change the repertory in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana.

Furthermore, there was a pressure of conformity among the African elite in the church where they could not imagine the uniformity in liturgy used by the White Missionaries and black Africans in the spread of the gospel. It was realised that the Europeans did not understand the culture of its counterpart in an unknown continent, Africa. In spite of the abandonment and condemnations of African's rich culture by the European missionaries, series of meetings, workshops, and conferences were organized by the African religious authorities in order to arrive at a unified mode of liturgy to be used in the spread of Christianity in the African context. This in effect paved the way for the translation of their hymns and the bible into the local languages.

### **Sources of Liturgical Materials**

One typical example which can be mentioned is the Gospel music with its varied styles such as highlife, calypso and slow rock. Gospel music was originally referred to as hymns and songs whose texts relate to the Gospels rather than the Psalms. The term came to describe that extensive body of evangelical hymns and songs used at revival services, camp meetings, Sunday Schools and Church services (<http://www.gospelmusic.com>).

When Ghanaian Choral music took roots in most Christian churches from the United States of America, the youth on one hand, also brought these charismatic ways of worship into their former churches and this new change in the liturgy brought conflicts between them and the Church Leaders at one time. According to Hastings, an African church historian, the use of gospel songs, choruses, praises and worship songs was a protest against the white domination in the mission churches" (Hastings 1979:68). The youth in Cape Coast Wesley Methodist Church, realizing the good side of the Pentecostal liturgy, imitated their way of singing, clapping of hands, and jumping in the course of dancing. The increase in the Church music repertory resulted into the formation of several organizations. For instance, the Praise Team Bands found their way into the Methodist Churches during the early 1980s.

Ghana "Spirituals", variously described as 'Shouts', "African hymns" or 'local hymns' according to Agordoh (1997), started with the Spiritual churches, mostly the independent and the Old Pentecostal Churches. These songs, of mostly anonymous authorship, were adopted by these churches as their liturgical music. This may stem from the fact that most of the converts in these churches were illiterate or semi-illiterate and might have found singing of these types of songs more comfortable than the original translated Western hymns.

Another way in which Methodist Church Ghana has increased the Church music repertoire is through the use of Internet Computer Technology (ICT). This is seen in learning classical pieces or watching movies and listening to some recorded choral performances with the aid of Video Compact Disc (VCD) or Digital Video Disc (DVD) Player

and Media Player on the computer connected to screen or computer monitor, amplifier and speakers. Apart from watching live performance by the various church organizations, the congregations of Cape Coast Methodist Cathedral also appreciate recorded choral music on video tapes, cassettes, Compact Discs (CDs), and DVDs. These attitudinal changes from the enjoyment of sacred to secular music in the said church have brought variety of songs in the liturgy as a result of modernization.

### Recommendation

Though music is not the only factor for membership drain from the orthodox churches to the charismatic churches, Methodist Church liturgy must still be strengthened to combine both the former and current music that the youth admire most. This has been confirmed by Dovlo's (1996:160) as: "...we must not forget that the old is part of our heritage and must be blended with the new". It is then necessary that the flavour of charismatic does not supersede that of the orthodoxy so that the traditional doctrine is not marred.

Besides, to encourage uniformity in singing, there should be a scheduled day for hymn practice for the entire congregation so that common errors can be rectified. This should aim at correcting technical and typographical errors, replacing some letters of alphabet, re-examining liturgy, theology and expanding the contents of the hymnbooks. To fulfil its future dreams, there should be a Methodist Hymnbook Committee formed with the aim of translating and compiling only hymns that suit Methodism.

By evaluating both the current and the former liturgy (Order of Service for Sunday) the researchers had the pleasure to comment on the following observations as far as the liturgy of Cape Coast Wesley Methodist Cathedral is concerned. Even though the performance of the Western canticles, psalms, hymns, and anthems remains unchanged, one must take notice of the number of canticles sung on Sundays.

Apart from the use of electronic organ to accompany Western church music one may also identify such African musical instruments as castanet (*firikiyiwa*), rattles (*awosowa*), hourglass drum (*dondo*), and others in today's worship which attract variety of modern dances; for instance, *Highlife* is found to be associated with the youth and other middle aged groups more than the adult. Medley of *highlife* pieces with intention of socializing its members during Peace and Love Greetings prolong the Church activities.

The initiative already taken by the Christ Little Band where *Ebibindwom* competition is organized at the societal, circuit, and diocesan levels is well encouraged but must also be extended to the national levels and hopefully would motivate and sustain the interest of the youth who are now learning in some Methodist Churches in and around Cape Coast vicinity. The introduction of *Ebibindwom* (African lyrics) which was seen as the first additional singing style in the liturgy of Methodist Churches is facing extinction. The youngsters nowadays do not respond to the chorus of the responsorial aspect of the *Ebibindwom* with the notion that it is meant for old men and women.

Apart from the use of electronic organ to accompany Western church music one may also identify such African musical instruments as castanet (*firikiyiwa*), rattles (*awosowa*), hourglass drum (*dondo*) and other drums like conga and tomtom which demands bodily movement as a result of its articulated rhythms.

With the idea of Vernacular Liturgy, I suggest there should be All African Christian Churches Day whereby worship will be conducted in one's native language so as to encourage all the members of the congregation to participate fully. This means the church music, dancing, sermon, prayers, announcements, and even church costumes must be in African traditional wear so that members can feel more profoundly at home than in the Western world.

To sum up, Ministers in training should also be given the opportunity to take a course in music since Theology and Music are inseparable. This will assist them in their ministerial work.

### Conclusion

The paper sought to examine the musical traditions in relation to the liturgical changes of the Methodist Church in Ghana. The theories of separatism and syncretism have unearthed the liturgical trends from the era of the European missionaries to the present day, Ghana. Today, the Methodist Church is undergoing reform in style and texts as well as music. The reforms include a stronger emphasis on the Bible and more involvement of the congregation. One of the major characteristics of the Methodist Church is a great wealth of hymns, which mark the various Liturgical Circles.

The major causes of liturgical changes in the Methodist Church Ghana include the influence of the African elites, the adoption and adaptation of Western liturgy, the introduction of *Ebibindwom* (African songs/Fante lyrics) versus English language as medium for preaching, the effects of Charismatic (Pentecostal) music on Orthodox Churches, the emergence of Ghanaian Art Songs compositions and the Internet Computer Technology (ICT) application.

The change has come to positively impact on the spiritual, social, psychological and financial growth of the church. It is imperative that all Methodist churches in Ghana and the Africa as a whole would embrace this religious syncretism, merge with their traditional doctrines to yield perfect liturgical consumption in their churches.

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