

THE PLACE OF MUSIC IN MISSIONS WORK IN GHANA: WITH REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST

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Introduction

This article gives a brief narrative of the role that music has played and continues to play in the churches in Ghana with particular reference to the Church of Pentecost. It begins by acknowledging that the COP as an indigenous Ghanaian church sees music as an integral part of its missions in Ghana and beyond. It then examines the musical tradition of the churches in Ghana, and examines four models of musical types in Ghanaian churches, namely, Contrafactum, Eclectic, Creative Essays of Afro-Identity and Spontaneous types. The rest of the paper focuses on the Spontaneous Type of music as the Church of Pentecost's preference in worship and in its missional activities. It concludes with a brief comment on the importance of the Psalms in church music.

The Church of Pentecost (COP), an indigenized Ghanaian Church

Music, flowing from the mind and the heart of the African, has played and continues to play an important role in the worship and missions of the churches in Ghana. This is particularly the case when one considers the vast contribution that music has made towards the rapid growth of the Church Of Pentecost, a church that prides itself of its indigenous Ghanaian identity. According to Kingsley Larbi in the 'Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity' though the COP owes its origins to the missionary activities of James McKeown, from its inception deliberate attempt was made to plant the church firmly into the Ghanaian soil, without losing its rooting in Christ and the Bible. This is recognisable in its ethos, beliefs, and worship¹. Indeed, the first Ghanaian Chairman of the COP, Apostle F.S. Safo did not lose sight of the independence and indigeneity of the COP when he stated that,

The Church of Pentecost (until 1962, the Ghana Apostolic Church), is an indigenous Church. Since 1953, and with the break of the Bradford connection, The Church of Pentecost has governed her own affairs without any interference from any outside authority. The leadership of the church being Irish (up to 1982) and the fact that occasionally missionaries from the UK worked with us does not negate the assertion that The Church of Pentecost has always managed her own affairs from within Ghana. Perhaps we achieved this feat because we have always relied on internal resources to keep the church going.²

One of the internal resources that keep the Church Of Pentecost going as an indigenous church is its music, although surprisingly little has been written about the church's music and how it aids the spread of its doctrines. Throughout my readings on Pentecostalism and missions and the indigenization of the gospel in Ghana I found that the early writers on the history and growth of the COP did not say much about the place of music, drumming and dance and the impact they have had on the indigenisation of Pentecostal movement and the gospel in Ghana. To some extent this omission in the history of the COP is rather unfortunate for, to borrow the words of John S. Mbiti, "the African, is incurably musical,"³ and therefore, the role of music in the missions of the church in Ghana should not be ignored.

In Ghana, music cannot be separated from drumming and dancing. The three are intimately woven together. Ghanaians do not have a specific designation for the word "music". In Ghana 'music' is more than songs. It is the shadow of who we are. The words that probably come together to give us an idea of what constitutes music are: 'Ndwom' (Song), 'Ayan' (Drumming), and 'Agoro' (playing). Therefore, it is insightful that our foreign missionaries, especially James McKeown used music, that is, songs, drumming and dance as one of the models for their "indoctrination plan". In so doing they were unconsciously connecting us to one of our best ways of expressions. Eventually, as Annan K. Newlove puts it, "we snatched it, remoulded it, and replaced it where it belonged within our own frame of reality!"⁴

Musical Traditions of the Church in Ghana

Undoubtedly, church music in Ghana began with the coming of European missionaries, but there is much evidence to show that before the advent of European missionaries, the African life and culture was deeply-rooted in music. African music was and is rich, very much meaningful to its makers, and complex in its orientation.⁵ Ghana has been blessed with composers, writers and singers of church music who have made invaluable contributions in the promulgation of Christianity, the sensitization of faith, and the spiritual mobilization of indigenous believers to lift their voices in worship to proclaim their faith and to glorify their Maker.

The effort to indigenize Christian worship in Ghana was largely initiated by indigenous musicians. They helped the community to use music as a medium of reflecting on their Christian faith in the context of the local culture, so that the community will be able to readily internalize the message of the gospel in music and give external expression of it in their daily missional relationships. For instance, in the late 1920's Dr Ephraim Amu, a famous Ghanaian musicologist, sought to find ways to give the strict Euro-Christian Order of Service indigenous, cultural and contextual expression. The objective was to enable Christianity which was perceived by some people as a "foreign religion" to find general acceptability among the indigenous people of Ghana.⁶

Thus, the indigenous Ghanaian experience of Christian worship is one that is accentuated by some unique traditional musical elements that is still part of modern-day worship in churches in Ghana. In recognition of the indispensable role of music to the spread and growth of Christianity and missions work in Ghana, some churches, particularly the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, provided music education in schools and in specialized programmes. This gave participants the opportunity to learn music formats, within which art music could find its level in church worship.

Characteristically, Ghanaian Christians love to sing, drum and dance. Music has become the life blood of the Christian denominations in the country. However, knowing that our country is a musical one or that our people love to sing is not enough. If we are to become conscious

of what we do and also reflect on ways by which to improve upon what we do, we need to ask questions like: ‘Why has our worship become so infused with music, drumming and dancing? What do we gain from such practices? and, Where are we heading to with our music? and How can we make the best out of music in our worship and missional work?’ These questions are indeed relevant, but answering them is beyond the remit of this paper. Such an assignment belongs to the future, although in this paper attempts to indirectly respond to some of these questions.

Ghanaian church music began with the hymns, spirituals and anthems that were introduced by missionaries during the formative period of the missionary enterprise. The type of European church music that the missionaries brought to Ghana was derivatives of the Western musical tradition that was very prominent at least in the European church culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This European church music displayed elements of music with a deep and fine sense of melody and harmony with a union between harmonic function and counterpoint. This philosophy of composition manifested itself in the hymns, anthems and other types of music that were found in the song books, introduced in Ghana.

Of all the musical types that European missionaries introduced into the Ghanaian churches, perhaps the one that has had much influence on Ghanaian Christianity, particularly in worship is the “hymn”. To the missionaries, the introduction of hymn singing was simply a way of “rising to meet a challenge”. In particular;

1. It was difficult for the early missionaries to learn new music so foreign to their own. African polyrhythms were complex and also African tonal languages varied from region to region.
2. Missionaries, like all people, loved their own music. They found it expressed a “reverent” form of worship; a reverence they could not find in African sounds.

Although initially hymn singing posed some challenges for the African churches, they managed to master it and, in some cases, adapted it to their own cultural situations. Today in addition to hymn singing the churches have ingeniously come out with different models of musical types in worship.

Models of Musical Types in Ghanaian Churches

Basically, there are four models of traditional Ghanaian church musical types. These four musical types have served as the basis for creativity; and continue to give us representatives that keep each type alive in every generation. The four basic types are Contrafactum, Eclectic, Creative Essays of Afro-Identity and Spontaneous Music.

Contrafactum

By Contrafactum we mean in vocal music the substitution of one text for another without substantial change to the music. In Ghana there are known and unknown composers who either took existing tunes of hymns or songs and provided text for them; or the other way around, of composing tunes for existing texts. In some cases, some of the composers under this category composed both text and music, but within fixed parameters of a foreign musical type such as “the hymn.” Exponents of the contrafactum type include:

1. Rev. Gaddiel Robert Acquah (“Amensuon Twereampon,” “Wonfa Ndaase”) of the Methodist Church Ghana
2. Rev. J. Allotey- Pappoe, (“onso Nyame ye”, “Abodze Nyinaa”) of the Methodist Church Ghana
3. Apostle Prof. Opoku Onyina of the Church of Pentecost (see for instance the 2017, 2018 CoP. theme songs),

Eclectic Type

The second musical type is the Eclectic Type. It is comparatively a much newer trend and type of Ghanaian church music which seeks to satisfy a “seeker-friendly” worship style by putting together various cultural aesthetics to create a desired music or sound. They may use all foreign instruments and may even appeal to modern American music, such as jazz and gospel, insofar as the results satisfy aesthetic needs. Such groups include: Voices of Pentecost, Joyful Way Incorporated, Soul Winners, Koda, Joe Mettle etc. This type is normally referred to as Christian Contemporary Music.

Creative Essays of Afro-Identity Type

The Creative Essays of Afro-Identity is a musical type from African Christian composers who deliberately create songs that have unique African cultural identity. In their compositions they ensure the accuracy of language, prosody, rhythms, tones, cultural relevance and meaning that are appropriate for Christian worship. Even when they composed for foreign instruments, they make sure that those foreign instruments speak the language of the Ghanaian (or African.)

The Spontaneous Ghanaian Christian Music

As its name suggest the Spontaneous musical type is music that is created as a result of a spontaneous response to an event. It is in contrast to pure art music which is the result of a well-thought-out programme of assembling ideas and elements into the creative process of a single musical work. In Ghana, spontaneous music is exemplified through such traditional church musical genres such as: Ebibindwom, Asafo, Samanmo, etc. Composers who represent this musical type in our generation include, Eunice Addison (of blessed memory), Eunice Johnson, P.B. Appiadu, Opoku Onyina, Emmanuel Kwasi Mireku, Cindy Thompson and others. Most of their songs are in free-style and it is useful during “personal and corporate prayers, worship, and other Christian events”. Flow is incomparable with any known church musical type except Ebibindwom. The free-style and superfluous repetitiveness is only traceable to the spontaneous song type of music.⁷ Examples of such songs may include: Sunsum Kronkron bra (Holy Spirit come), Ode ne nsa teaa no aka me (He has touched me with His finger) by Opoku Onyina, Awurade kasa (God! Speak) by Cindy Thompson to name but a few.

However, it is important to mention that some of the spontaneous songs do not come from accredited musicians. There are some Christians, who may receive healing or other forms of miracles during worship and spontaneously express their appreciation to the Lord in new songs. These spontaneous songs, flowing out of personal testimonies, are usually considered the heart’s language, and they use traditional forms of expressions, usually accompanied by drumming and dancing in response to God’s miraculous saving acts. These songs then begin to spread from church to church by musical “pollinators”

using mainly oral means. These pollinators are usually “church musicians” valued for their abilities to memorize many songs and lead congregations through exciting worship experiences. Christian “spontaneous” or “heart music” are to be found in many Ghanaian communities, including The Church of Pentecost.

The Church of Pentecost and the Spontaneous Music

In the Church Of Pentecost the spontaneous music type is now called ‘Prophetic or Spiritual Songs’. These songs are mostly received during effective prayer and various worship sessions. Usually, as stated above, these songs are not already composed or created. In the COP, it is believed that the recipients of such songs must have received it from the Spirit of God. Some of these songs are received through prophecy, others are received during sermon delivery, others also are received as and when a spectacular event occurs. The spontaneous music type has played a major role in making The Church of Pentecost an indigenous church and also the leading Pentecostal church in Ghana. This type of music, spontaneous as it may be, appears natural to the ordinary Ghanaian and they are therefore easy to sing. The songs are tonal in nature, mostly in pentatonic scale, call and response, repetition of words, improvisation, short melodies and often times with predictive endings which makes the learning of such songs very easy and comfortable. Such songs, because they are easy to learn, travel far within the country. They are mostly sung in the Akan language, “Twi” in various forms.

There are many people in the Church of Pentecost who prefer spontaneous types of songs to songs or hymns already composed in English, and would like to sing them in their mother tongue. For instance, the Akan ethnic group, who speak the Twi language, would like to sing their songs in that language, that is, they want their songs or hymns ‘Akanly’ rendered. I believe this is partly because COP had its origin from the Akan communities before it later got established in other parts of the country.

To sum up, in Ghana one of the keen ways to identify a Church of Pentecost branch is by its music, particularly, the spontaneous songs that are usually considered prophetic or Holy Spirit inspired. A biblical text that informs this belief comes from apostle Peter, “For prophecy

never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Indigeneity of Music in The Church of Pentecost

Let me briefly draw out a few points that are considered relevant by the Church of Pentecost in its indigenization of music in worship. Firstly, as stated above, for the COP the European hymns would have to be indigenised for them to be accepted as songs for Ghanaian Christian liturgy. So most of the hymns that the missionaries brought had to be translated into Ghanaian languages because people want to understand the meaning of the hymns, and how they can appropriately apply them to their context in their daily living.

Secondly, short melodies are an indigenous means of remembering important issues or events in Ghana. So, the COP uses short melodies in music for easy transmission of the gospel message to the people. These short melodies, which are spontaneously received by some members of the Church are believed to contain messages of God’s redemptive plan for all levels of people in society, namely - the great, small, rich or poor, literates and illiterates and the like.

Thirdly, since traditionally in Ghana music is used as ‘a storage facility’, the COP also considers music a means to safeguard the doctrines and practices of the church. In other words, to indigenize the gospel message, the songs, hymns and other spiritual songs must capture the core theological and doctrinal beliefs of the Church.

Fourthly, the indigenized ‘free style’ of the songs sung makes the COP attractive to the majority of people in Ghana. One such popular songs is evangelical in nature, asking people to turn to Christ because He receives all kinds of people, without any form of discrimination, - the poor, the sick, the lonely, the powerful, the rich, etc.

Bra! Bra! Bra! Na obegye wo
Bra! Bra! Bra! Na obegye wo
Ogye ahiafo, ogye ayarefo, ogye asikafo, etc.
Yesu de, onsa mu

The song literally means in English,
Come! Come! Come! For He will receive you
Come! Come! Come! For He will receive you
He receives the poor, He receives the sick, the rich, etc.
As for Jesus, He does not segregate (or discriminate).

The Church of Pentecost and the Psalms

It is appropriate to conclude this discussion by briefly stating the relevance of the Psalms and other biblical texts in the Church Of Pentecost's worship. The COP shares the view that the Psalms served as the Hymn Book of the Temple in Jerusalem. It believes that every day had its own psalms as the people met to worship in the Temple. As we read and meditate on the psalms, we are enjoined to 'sing to the Lord a new song'. In Psalm 33 we are to 'sing joyfully to the LORD, and to praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre'. We are to sing to him 'a new song;' 'play skillfully', and 'shout for joy' (Psalm 33:1-3). Again, in Psalm 150, we are exhorted to use all types of musical instruments available to praise the Lord. That means, since musical instruments are vast and sound different, making music to the Lord cannot be the same for all groups of people. Every group or nation is at liberty to use the musical instruments and traditions available to them to praise the Lord.

In Ghana the Church of Pentecost has taken this line in its worship. In playing its active missional role of making disciples of all nations, it is important also for the COP to accept the fact that indigenization of music applies to all groups of people everywhere. Therefore, the church should not expect people in other nations to sing the same songs and use the same musical instruments as we do in Ghana. One of our missionary approaches is to respect the musical traditions of every nation and the various cultural settings in which they worship the triune God⁸

Again, the Church of Pentecost believes that we have something to learn from the apostles when it comes to the use of music in worship, for they continued the practice of using music as a vehicle of worship. In Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, Paul exhorts the church to 'teach, admonish one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace, pouring our hearts to the Lord'.⁹

The early fathers of the Church of Pentecost also made use of music in all their services. The Holy Spirit baptismal services, the anointing, healing miracle services, rallies and conventions were characterized by the Spirit filled spontaneous music. They found that it had power because it had direct appeal to the hearts and minds of the people.

The early missionaries of The Church of Pentecost engaged in church planting without forgetting the use of music, and this practice is still being followed. Up till today the COP does not only train people in the art of teaching and preaching, but also in the use of music in its missions. Men and women such as Eunice Addison, Eunice Johnson, P.B. Appiadu, Opoku Onyina, Mireku and a host of others have served their generation and they have kept the high standards of musicality. It is not surprising that in the establishment of the Church of Pentecost's 'Pentecost Theological Seminary' a music department has been set up as an integral part of its missional activities, because the COP puts a high premium on church music in order to affect our generation and the next.

Endnotes

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