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## THE PRESENT STATE OF CHURCH MUSIC IN GHANA.

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The objective of this paper is to examine the development of church music in Ghana over the past one hundred and seventy years of Christianity. It is also to evaluate the contribution of various churches to the musical types practised in Christian churches in Ghana today. For the purpose of this paper, Christian churches in Ghana are examined in two broad categories.

**Older Mission Churches:** These refer to the existing churches, which are sometimes referred to as orthodox, mainstream established, mainline or historic churches. These include the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (1828), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (1847), the Methodist Church of Ghana (1835), the Catholic Church (1880), the AME Zion Church (1898), the Seventh Day Adventist Church (1898) and the Anglican Church (1904). These are the pioneer denominations whose missionaries came to Ghana between 1828 and 1914.

**New Churches:** Since the 1900's, there has been proliferation of new Christian religious movements in Ghana. In this category of churches are:

1. Independent churches
2. Pentecostal churches
3. Charismatic ministries

Independent Churches which are particularly isolated internationally, are usually referred to as "Separatist Churches" (Parrinder, 1953: 10). Others call them "African Instituted Churches", probably to stress their indigenous foundation and membership. Baeta (1962: 1) referred to them as "Spiritual Churches" because they engage in activities which are meant to be signs of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon worshippers. Mbon (1993) uses the adjective "protectionist" to describe them because members "feel the need to be protected against life's undesirable circumstances". Among the older Independent Churches are the African Faith Tabernacle, Musarna Disco Christo Church, the Twelve Apostles Church, Apostles Revelation Society, Cherubim and Seraphim, Church of The Lord (Group) and Saviour's Church of Ghana.

Pentecostal Churches in Ghana are the newer missions, which joined the older band of churches in the evangelistic work from the turn of the century. These include the Salvation Army (1922), the Assemblies of God (1931), the Apostolic Church (Bradford), (1937), Southern Baptist Convention (1947), Sudan Interior Mission (1956), Evangelical Lutheran Church (1956) and the Churches of Christ mission (1961). These churches are referred to as Classical or Old Pentecostal Churches.

Since the 1970s a new type of Pentecostal church has emerged which is usually labelled in Ghana as Charismatic. These churches, which are also known as neo-pentecostal churches, did

not come into existence as a result of a breakaway from the existing Pentecostal churches. Rather, they owe their existence to the evangelical movement in Ghana during the 1960s. It started as a movement, rather than an institution of people from different denominations. They focused their attention on Bible Study, directing their energy to schools and universities as Students' Unions and University Christian Fellowships. These churches do not differ much from the Old Pentecostal Churches in matters of theology, doctrinal issues and tenets of belief. Examples are the Christian Action Faith Ministries, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Redemption Hour Ministry, International Central Gospel Church, Word Miracle Church and a host of others.

### **Background To Music In Christian Churches In Ghana**

The formalized structure of worship of the early missionaries including the singing of Western (translated) hymns favoured the few educated elite. The poor and illiterate majority found the missionary mode of worship colourless and was perplexed by the lack of visible emotion. To them, the traditional modalities of worship such as spontaneity in prayer, singing and dancing constitute the only way of achieving spiritual fulfillment. The illiterate and semi-literate members therefore felt socially marginalized during worship. A cultural vacuum was created and this gave rise to the African Religious Movements.

The proliferation of new religious movements in Ghana in the 1900s, particularly Independent Churches, saw the emergence of a new musical culture, which served as an alternative to that of the orthodox Churches. The Independent Churches created their own local hymns known as Ghanaian Spirituals, coupled with handclapping and the use of traditional instruments.

Each category of churches has clear and distinctive characteristics of musical tradition employed in worship. The repertoire of the older Mission Churches included the translated German and English hymns, the Mass, Psalms, Canticles, anthems and traditional tunes. People consider the worship form of the New Churches involving drumming, dancing as well as handclapping, shouting and other signs of intensely emotional religious experience, as livelier than the worship forms of the orthodox churches.

The polarisation that had occurred in the Older Mission Churches created some tension. The poor, illiterate, and the youth became attracted to the New Churches. To stem this membership drain, the mainline churches started to adopt some of the modalities of the New Churches such as clapping, singing and dancing.

The New Churches, perhaps in order to earn some recognition and establish ecumenical bonds with the mainline churches, also started using some features of the music style of the mainline churches. These include choir organisation and singing of anthems and some Western hymns. This borrowing from each other's musical practices has led to the convergence that is taking place in Christian Churches. For example, the Western style of hymn singing, which was the preserve of the older mission churches, is now heard in the new churches. Handclapping, playing

of traditional instruments and singing of local hymns are also heard in both the older mission churches and the new churches.

Another factor which contributed to the indigenisation of churches in Ghana including musical practices, was the result of critiques in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Ghanaian intelligentsia in the fields of music, theology and sociology. People such as M. Casely Hayford, Kwegyir Aggrey, J.W. deGraft Johnson, J.B. Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, K.A. Busia, E. Amu, J.H. Nketia(1968, 1974), C.K. Dovo and K.A. Dickson criticised the attitudes of cultural superiority of the early missionaries. Ghanaians started to re-examine the historical foundations of this nation and studied critically, the meaning of worship and the value of certain Christian worship patterns. After Independence, Ghanaians became more aware of their cultural identity and this affected the churches too. Since Independence, a lot has taken place on the musical scene in Christian churches in Ghana. This includes the employment of traditional musical elements in Christian worship.

### **The Missionary Paradox**

Though the early missionaries were criticised for pushing traditional practices to the background, after the departure of the missionaries, the African Church leaders continued to show a hostile attitude to these traditional practices, including harmless folk music and dances. It must however be acknowledged that it was the early missionaries who laid the foundation for church music education in this country. Initially, the missionaries insisted on the Western hymn and the Mass as the only musical types acceptable for Christian worship. Ironically, it was through the efforts of Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman, a Methodist (Wesleyan) missionary, that *ebibindwom* (Akan church lyric) came to be accepted in church worship. This perhaps, laid the foundation for traditional musical practices in Christian churches in Ghana (Sackey 1991).

The efforts of the missionaries should also be acknowledged in their bid to establish schools, colleges and seminaries, which emphasised the teaching of music. The result of this was the production of the early art music composers such as Reverends Gaddiel Acquah and E. Allotey-Pappoe. Though these pioneers wrote mostly hymns in the Western style, they also helped others to become greater musicians in the church. For example, the music tuition which Ephraim Amu received from E. Allotey-Pappoe in the 1920s, gave him the background to later improve upon what he learnt from his master. At Akropong, it was the Scottish missionary Reverend Thomas Beveridge who gave Amu the encouragement to explore African ways of making music. Also at Achimota College (1949), Amu met Mr. Ward, a Western historian and musician who told him of duple and triple effects in jazz music in America and Europe and how these were notated.

The establishment of music schools in Ghana, first in Achimota College (1949), followed by the one in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (1951) and later Winneba

Specialist Training College, University of Ghana (Legon) and the University of Cape Coast, was through the efforts of the products of the missionary schools and colleges.

Individually, each of the mainline churches has made some contribution to the development of church music in Ghana. For example, these churches have over the years produced many composers, choirmasters and organists. Music teaching has also been emphasised in most of the institutions established by these churches. Examples are the Presbyterian Training College, Akropong and the Evangelical Presbyterian College, Amedzofe.

### **The Contributions of the Different Churches**

Today, the religious environment in Ghana is filled with diverse religious groups, which have entered the scene from all corners of the globe, each with its musical identity and contributing to the musical tradition of Christian churches in Ghana.

The contribution of the mainline churches is immense. These churches have over the years accepted the Western hymns, the Mass and Western anthems introduced by the missionaries. In addition, they have created their own forms such as African hymns and anthems. What makes Ghanaian forms peculiarly African is the fusion of the Western type of harmony with African rhythmic motifs, and the close observation between melody contour and text. Also the relative lengths of syllables in spoken texts dictate and determine the length of note values. The mainline churches have therefore laid the foundation of choral music in African idiom for worship in Christian Churches in Ghana.

The main contribution of Ghana's Independent churches to the musical repertoire of Christian churches is the introduction of the local hymns in worship. The words of the local hymns are adaptations from the scriptures but the rhythm and other properties are traditionally Ghanaian or African in form. Most of these songs are in the highlife style, which attracts handclapping and the use of drums and other traditional instruments to accompany them. Most of these hymns are in simple English or Pidgin and some of the major languages of Ghana – Akan, Ga and Ewe. They are short, simple and in the everyday language of the people. Because most of these local hymns have not been documented, people sing them for a few years and forget about them.

The contribution of Classical Pentecostal Churches and the Charismatic Ministries to church music in Ghana is the development of Gospel music singing. This musical genre, which started as Ghana spirituals, has in the 1980s and 1990s developed into an art form comparable to what pertains in the United States of America. Gospel music singing in Ghana today is the popular church music of the day and both stars and non-stars emerge daily with new cassettes. Gospel music now constitutes about 60% of the country's cassette production and musical airplay time. It has contributed positively towards the success of the banderole system in the country since its inception in 1992. Of all the total banderole sold between 1992 and 1996, Gospel music accounted for 19.2 million out of the 24 million sold, representing 70% of the total sales.

Between 1995 and 1996, Gospel musicians took 6 out of the 10 top spots for the most banderoles sold (see *Daily Graphic*, Wednesday October 1, 1997. Issue No. 14560, centre page). Today, the Classical Pentecostal Churches and the Charismatic Ministries have produced more of Ghana's Gospel music artistes than the orthodox and Independent African Churches.

### **The Church Music Scene Today**

Christian churches in Ghana today regard themselves as one large body of worshippers professing the same Christian faith. For some years now, the Christian Council, the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church of Ghana, and the Pentecostal Council of Ghana have made attempts to establish good rapport among themselves. National fora are occasionally held to bring members together to discuss issues concerning themselves and the nation as a whole. For example during public events, church leaders of different denominations co-operate to perform priestly functions. Liturgical hymns sung on such occasions are both Western and local.

Among Christian churches in Ghana today, there has been borrowing from one another's musical practices. As earlier indicated, Western hymns which used to be the preserve of the mainline churches are now heard in the worship services of the New Churches. This is because there is now the realization that the words of most Western hymns are biblical and therefore speak universal truth, and they do not age. The singing of local hymns, playing of traditional instruments and handclapping are now heard in both the older Mission Churches and the new Churches. This is because of the awareness that "the more the African sings his religion in accordance with the characteristics of his musical genius, the more he will love it, and proportionally his religion will penetrate his soul" (Thiel 1964: 75). It is gratifying to note that, unlike in the past, Christian churches in Ghana are now beginning to appreciate one another's musical tradition. This move will one day lead to total musical ecumenism in Ghana.

Although in most Christian churches in Ghana it has been accepted that the sacrifice of praise is central to worship, the problem that faces church authorities is what type of liturgy to offer in order to satisfy all categories of worshippers. These include the educated, non-literate, children, young adults and the elderly. In this regard, every effort should be made to make congregations more conscious of the meaning and purpose of worship. The concern for worship should not be the exclusive responsibility of pastors but the whole congregational leadership. Worship committees should fulfill a significant role and contribute to making worship more meaningful and participatory. There is the need for music that will enable all members of the congregation, irrespective of age and education, to relate to worship in a meaningful way. Though people still criticize the worship mode of the older mission churches as rather dull and lifeless, one must be cautious of the rather too celebrative nature of worship in some new churches. Sometimes the services could become trivial and thus degenerate into mere merry-making. An example is the undue shaking of the body by the youth during "praise hour" which appears to be similar to the

flirtatious movements of the youth in nightclubs and other places of entertainment. When we talk of indigenisation, care must be taken in order to avoid the extremes of wanting to bring anything African into the Church for the sake of being Africans. Rather, we should consider things we value in our culture, those things we treasure and consider to be worthy of offering to God.

Since traditional music styles in worship are practised on an ethnic basis, there is the need to expand the horizons of ethnic musical styles and to evolve common forms of African Church Music, which cut across ethnic boundaries. Local hymns (Spirituals), which are mainly in English or Pidgin, Akan, Ga or Ewe, could be collected and documented for use by both categories of churches as an ecumenical hymnbook. In order to maintain our links with America and Europe our hymnbooks translated from English and German languages should be retained and used alongside the local ecumenical hymnbook. Denominational hymnbooks should be revised once every thirty years to update their orthography and theology. Both the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church are doing this. It is necessary for the church in Ghana to intensify church music education for all those who play leadership roles in church. These include pastors, art music composers, instrumentalists and Gospel artistes. I suggest the subject "Music and Worship" be introduced into the curriculum of Pastor training institutions like the Trinity College and other Seminaries. Finally, musicians in the church should be aware that Ghanaians, as Africans, are different psychologically and socially. Therefore, whatever music they offer during worship should aim at taking care of the spiritual, emotional and sociological needs of the people, emphasizing its theological soundness.

### **Conclusion**

The early missionaries succeeded in establishing Western music and musical ideas in Ghana through choral works like the hymns, anthems and chants as well as Western instruments like the harmonium, the piano, and brass band music as an aspect of the culture of Christians and the literate population. The efforts of the missionaries to establish schools, colleges and seminaries, which emphasized the teaching of music, should be acknowledged. In Ghanaian Christendom today, what constitutes church music includes what we have been adopting from both the Western and traditional sources as well as what we have been creating out of the musical sources of both traditions. Musical enculturation of worship is taking place in both the older Mission Churches and the New Churches. The Catholic Church must be given the credit for being ahead of all the mainline churches in integrating traditional music into Christian worship.

However the pressure the New Churches are exerting on the Orthodox Churches is not only because of worship style, but the New Churches seem to be the faster growing churches in Ghana today. The Orthodox churches must therefore change and renew their worship to include musical activities. Otherwise these Orthodox Churches will continue to decrease, not only by failing to grow, but also by losing members to the New Churches. If the causes of this trend are not

addressed, there is the fear that these Older Churches may become minority churches in Ghana one day.

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