



THE BIBLE AND MUSIC IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

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ABSTRACT: *This bibliographic study explores the interplay between the Bible and music within the context of African Christianity. Underpinned by the theory of syncretism, the paper employs a contextual thematic analysis to unravel the nexus between African indigenous music and Christian worship and draws implications for both scholarship and practice. Findings indicate that early European missionaries incited a satanic impression against the use of African indigenous music among Christian worshippers. It was contrarily revealed that Bible-informed use of African music in Christian worship is imperative for evangelisation, deeper spirituality, and faster church growth in Africa. In conclusion, the paper emphasises that the Bible and (indigenous) music are inseparable. It also maintains that music has the transformative power of fostering community cohesion, religious identity, and spiritual devotion among African Christians. Finally, the paper recommends greater collaboration among scholars, theologians, music educators, and gospel music practitioners in the African context in accomplishing the goal of the gospel.*

KEYWORDS: Bible, African Christianity, music, congregation, scholars, practitioners



INTRODUCTION

While the Bible does not dedicate a specific treatise or chapter to the subject of music, it is an integral and inseparable facet woven throughout the fabric of Scripture. The Bible instructs on music (Deut. 31:19–22) and provides its role in worship, which can be a guide to all generations of worshippers regardless of one's culture. Lockyer (2004) postulates that music, both vocal and instrumental, was among the Hebrews and has remained a valuable aspect of worship among the New Testament Christians through the centuries. Also, Kauflin (2020) unwraps how God's antediluvian people were devoted to the study and practice of music, which holds a unique place in the historical and prophetic books as well as the Psalter. Yet, uncertainties persist regarding the incorporation of music, particularly African indigenous music, within the context of the church and Christian worship. The purpose of this paper is to examine the place of African music in Christian worship with the view to creating a better musical atmosphere for maximising aggressive evangelism, discipleship, and ministry accomplishment in Africa and the rest of the nations.

Music in the Biblical Context

Scripture brims with recordings of songs and poetic verses, from Adam singing in response to the creation of Eve (Gen. 2:23) to the song raised in heaven in praise of God's sovereignty in Revelation (5:9). Ultimately, it makes unequivocal sense when Jesus Christ, the second person of the triune God, is on record to have sung with his disciples (Matt. 26:30).

Among the most famous collections of songs in the Bible is the book of Psalms, a compilation of Hebrew poems, songs, and prayers—many of them written by King David, who was himself a poet and harpist. The Israelites used this collection for worship in the temple (I Chron. 16:7–36) and reintroduced it during the construction of the second temple after the Babylonian exile (Ezra 3:10–11; Neh. 12:27–47). Comparatively, Song of Songs is a smaller, less often quoted book of poetry whose author is uncertain. It is a collection of Hebrew love poetry, featuring a man and his wife describing their love and desire for one another, along with a female chorus. According to Richardson (1997), theologians have subjected this poetic scripture to debated allegorical (Christ's love for the church) and naturalistic (husband's love for his wife) interpretations.

God grants monumental victories in response to significant incidents, leading to the appearance of other recordings of songs in the Bible. The song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15 is one example after God demonstrated his power over the natural world and saved his beloved Israelites from their enemies by drowning the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exo. 14:26–31). In their song, Moses, Miriam, and the Israelites praised the victory of God ("I will sing to the Lord, who has triumphed gloriously" in Exodus 15:1; 15:20) and worshipped God for the story he was unfolding in their lives, bringing his people out of exile and into a land prepared for them.

As seen in the Bible, music is a strong means of knowing and remembering who God is, what he does, and how he keeps his promises. The Psalms, along with numerous references in the New Testament letters to the churches, consistently convey genuine commands and exhortations for the people of God to engage in singing. This act serves as a profound means of proclaiming the wonderful deeds of God, acting as a powerful reminder of His presence and



significance in our lives through the expressive medium of music. “Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts” (Psa. 105:2).

Engaging in theologically rich music is not only a captivating way of witnessing the wondrous greatness of God to the world, but it is also a great blessing to us when we use our melodious voices to proclaim the sovereignty and goodness of God. God’s command for us to sing is not a burdensome obligation; instead, it is a gracious gift. Singing supernaturally brings us together, aligning our minds and hearts with His life-giving instructions. It is a joyful expression that goes beyond mere duty, creating a beautiful harmony between our spirits and the divine. This gift leads us steadfastly back to him and also reveals God’s heart to us for our flourishing. Through the gift of music, the Lord has strongly united art with truth, offering a deeply enjoyable way for the gospel message to sink itself artistically into our hearts. As Kauflin (2020) postulates, there is something about singing that both enables and encourages the rich indwelling of the word of Christ in our hearts. The word of Christ is the gospel; it is who Jesus is, what he has done, and why it matters. That gospel is to dwell in us richly through singing. Spirit-driven singing is how we cultivate and articulate the presence of the Word dwelling within us.

In Ephesians 5:19–20, the apostle Paul also intimates that there is a definite relationship between our knowledge of the Bible and our expression of worship in song. One way we teach and encourage ourselves and others is through the singing of the word of God. Paul instructs the church of Ephesus to use music as they relate to one another and mature in Christ: “Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:19). These exaltations to engage their hearts in music are part of Paul’s guidance for the church as they learn to turn away from old ways of life that sowed division and hurt. Instead of bickering and grumbling, music would help them walk in the way of God’s love.

Functionality of Music in the Bible

Doukhan (2002) argues that music in the Bible always accompanies functions. People did not see it as an occupation to be pursued per se (art for the sake of art) or for the sheer enjoyment of itself. Rather, it was a utilitarian phenomenon, functionally integrated into diverse daily life activities, ranging from manual labour to royal processions or *Gebrauchsmusik* (Friedmann, 2011). There is sufficient scriptural proof demonstrating that music played a defining role in the daily life of God’s nation, Israel. In addition to its conspicuous place in religious devotion, music was a part of family gatherings (Gen. 31:27), merrymaking (Judg. 11:34–35), military marches (1 Sam. 18:6), banquets (Isa. 5:12; 24:8–9), harvesting (Isa. 16:10; Jer. 48:33), well digging (Num. 21:17), and a slew of other activities.

Before King David and the establishment of Levitical orchestras and choirs (1 Chron. 15:16–24), music appears to have been distinctly popular and non-artistic (Werner, 1967). Werner suggests that non-professionals dominated music making, prioritising its practical functions over its aesthetic qualities. This functional awareness about music must be implied when Louw (1958) contends that Israel’s birth as a free nation was heralded by the song of the sea (Exodus 15), its monarchical system was defined by the archetypical musician King David, its moral as well as ethical guidelines were often received through musical prophecies, and its appointed institution for mediating worship was designed and officiated by a class of priestly musicians.



Comparable to the milieu of Israelites, the functionality of music has been ubiquitous in all other cultures since antiquity. For instance, in most cultures (both ancient and modern), the daily lives of the people thrive on functional songs of varied types, such as work songs, play songs, domestic songs, songs of rites of passage, war songs, and religious songs. However, Sendrey (1969) argues that the songs of Israel had an ethos that was absent in other music cultures. The significance of music for Israel transcended mere entertainment; it was intricately tied to their devotion to and worship of God. In the context of Israel, music held the profound purpose of serving and glorifying God through worship. According to Sendrey's (1974) postulation, the musical expression of a religious creed, the palpable affirmation of man's intimate connection with the eternal, and the union of the Creator and His creation in harmonious musical sounds are just another way of describing an Israelite. Among them was trite knowledge that the Psalms, for instance, are meant to be sung, not read. Music complements not only worship among the Israelites but also the totality of the Hebrew way of life. Hence, it is justifiable for Obianga (2021) to conclude that using music for unholy purposes such as pleasure amounts to sinfulness because, in doing so, pleasure (unholiness) infiltrates the way of the Lord.

Music and Worship

Music is one of the most pervasive elements of human culture (Friedmann, 2011). According to Zeltner (1975) and Malefijt (1968), music and prayer are two significant aspects of religion. Therefore, the convergence of music and religion makes for a natural collaboration. Religious history indicates that all known cultures associate music with the supernatural and accompany religious activities with music (Nettl, 2005; Noss & Grangaard, 2017). In ancient Israel, the combination of music and religion pervaded the general population and the three major institutions of the day: monarchy, prophecy, and priesthood. Sabar and Kanari (2006) argue that divine consciousness infused these interrelated segments of society and that music played a significant role in stipulating and reinforcing the ideology, aspirations, sentiments, and rules that defined them.

The nexus between music and worship is avowed by Luther (n. d.), who discovered that "music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is a bitter enemy, for it removes from the heart the weight of sorrow, and the fascination of evil thoughts," emphasising that "beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us." This explains why music is such a powerful ministry in Christian worship. Music is, therefore, one sure way that the church and her faith interact with the world outside, bringing the lost and weary soul to the saving knowledge of God while edifying the saints. This becomes effective when the church, as part of its worship activities, can engage with the daily lives of the people through their musical lives.

African Music Explained

For us to better appreciate the use of African music in Christian worship, it should be appropriate to clarify the concept of African music. First, the meaning of the term music has been a divergent concept in African communities and is perennially contested among scholars and practitioners because "musical cultures are not universally understood" (King et al., 2008, p. 14). While acknowledging numerous anthropological and ethnomusicological consensus on music as a human invariant and also as a universal language, there remains a controversial



question as to what makes music universal in its meaning and/or usage (Hodges, 2020). Asked differently: Are there aspects of all music (product) and all music making (process), including instrumentation, singing, and dancing that are common to all people in all epochs and domiciles? Certainly, no is the answer (McKoy & Lind, 2022; Nettl, 2000; Nketia, 1962). Perhaps due to the vast heterogeneity in musical practices across the continent, it has not been possible among Africans to settle on one definition for the term music, as Mbede (2018) argues:

Honest observers are hard-pressed to find a single indigenous group in Africa that has a term congruent with the usual Western notion of “music.” There are terms for more specific acts like singing, playing instruments, and more broadly performing (dance, games, music), but the isolation of musical sound from other arts proves a Western abstraction, of which we should be aware when we approach the study of performance in Africa. (p. 140)

Similarly, other researchers concur that although various cultures have their respective words that connote music as well as a variety of musical activities, other groups such as the Akan and Ewe of Ghana, the Hausa of Nigeria, and the Southern Paiute of Nevada engage in countless musical activities but have no specific term that refers distinctively to music (Hodges, 2020; Cross & Morley, 2009). Societies that seem to have a word for music often mean different things by it. In the foundational roots of Western civilisation, traced back to ancient Greece, the concept of music transcended the contemporary understanding of sound and rhythm. It encompassed a broader spectrum, embodying the interconnected arts of melody, dance, and poetry (Merker, 2000; 2009). Similarly, *Ngoma* in Bantu means drumming, singing, dancing, and festivity, while *saapup* among the Blackfoot indicates singing, dancing, and ceremony (Nettl, 2000). If there is no agreement on what exactly music is or represents, then there could hardly be any successful bargain that intends to make music universal (Nettl, 2005). The only universality of music is its ability to alter human emotions (Sloboda, 1985).

The term “African Music” may be used widely to denote the musical practices or traditions of the African people living on the African continent. However, among many scholars, African music connotes the music of the Black Africans who inhabit the region south of the Sahara (Nketia, 1998). The African continent is known for its complex rhythms described elsewhere as ‘hot’ rhythms, call and response patterns of singing, the metronome sense, and contextual usage of music in a wide variety of socio-economic, religious, and political events in the life of the individual and society at large. Meanwhile, Africa’s foremost musicologist, Nketia (1972) argues that on stylistic grounds, the music of North Africa is essentially Arabic and belongs to the oriental family of modal music and, as such, should not be included in discussing the music of Africa. He excludes music made by European settlers in southern Africa, concentrating his study on the music of black Africa. Musical cultures of Black Africans do not only have their roots in the African soil but also form a network of distinct yet related traditions that overlap in certain aspects of style, practice, or usage and share common features of internal patterns, basic procedures, and contextual similarities.

Despite this position by previous scholars on the meaning of African music, this paper subscribes to the view of Mbede (2018) that in discussing African music and the impact of foreign culture (missionaries) on it, no region should be left out, because every part of Africa has come under some sort of overt or covert foreign hegemony either from Europe or the Islamic world at one time or another. These contacts have made and continue to make significant impacts on music on the African continent. Like the Israelites, the music-making process is what the African seeks to accomplish, not counting music as an external, independent



object (Wade, 2009). Furthermore, it is music-making in a social context that is at the heart of Africans' conceptions of being musical. As Blacking (1995a) opines, "Every musical performance is a patterned event in a system of social interactions, whose meaning cannot be understood or analysed in isolation from other events in the given system" (p. 227).

Finally, it is worth indicating that music in Africa is not only vocal. It is also instrumental. Therefore, an exposition on "African music" will be deficient without touching, no matter how briefly, on African musical instruments, which in turn may be better understood when contextualised in terms of their vegetative characteristics.

Musical Instruments of Africa

Africa is characterised by a wide variety of vegetation types, ranging from dense mangrove swamps and tropical rain forests in the south to sparse vegetation in the Guinea, Sudan, and Sahel Savannah regions of the west, east, and central parts of Africa. The continent is also trendy for its extremely arid Sahara Desert, which occupies almost the entire landscape of North Africa. This geographical spread of vegetation is important in understanding the distribution of musical instruments across Africa, which to a large extent determines the musical practices and styles of each region. For example, in the evergreen forest areas with durable hardwood, one finds multi-sized carved membranophones such as the *bormaa*, *atumpan*, and *vuga* in Ghana. In the mangrove swamp areas around the coast, where one finds fairly large trees with long tendrils, we have lots of instruments made from wood and clay, while in the savannah belt with sparse vegetation, we find more instruments made from materials such as gourds, dry seeds of plants, and hides of cattle and sheep (Nketia, 1974).

METHOD

This research is a bibliographical study conducted in the descriptive-qualitative mode. The study was conducted during a three-month period (from October through December 2023), with extensive document reviews until data saturation was attained. For triangulation, we reviewed literature from multiple sources, including the Holy Bible. Other sources comprise books and dissertations/theses in the Osagyefo Library as well as the graduate library at the south and north campuses, respectively, at the Winneba campus of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), while utilising books and other relevant literature that are available in our (researchers') personal libraries. Also, we retrieved several peer-reviewed journal articles via the UEW (institutional) e-library resources, including WINNOPAC. Further materials were accessed from Google Scholar. To ensure adequate coverage of the topic, we retrieved relevant journal articles and books, guided by the titles of those publications, and they were stored in folders on our laptop computers. After retrieving a sufficient number of publications, we counted each book, each dissertation, and each journal article as a 'data set', and then subjected them to context-content thematic analysis (within and across data sets) using the six-phase approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic data analysis is defined as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data; a way of making meaning out of what is going on in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 1). Qualitative researchers generally agree that there are six main phases involved in thematic data analysis: (a) familiarisation with the data; (b) generation of codes; (c) generation of initial themes; (d) reviewing initial themes; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) writing the research report



(Braun & Clarke, 2006). As part of the analysis procedure (phase c), we generated initial themes independently and subsequently synchronised the themes (see Table 1 below for synchronised themes), followed by phases d-f, as explicated in succeeding sections of the paper. We then drew implications to inform practice, followed by a conclusion.

Table 1:

Summary: Spectrum of thematic review of related literature

Synchronised theme	Frequency	Percentage
Music in the Biblical Context	17	14.5
Functionality of Music in the Bible	21	17.9
Music and Worship	14	12.0
African Music Explained	5	4.3
Musical Instruments of Africa	7	6.0
African Music in Christian Worship	23	19.6
African Music in Different Church Settings	15	12.8
Congregational Musicing as a Precept of the African	12	10.3
The problem of Syncretism	3	2.6
Total	117	100

FINDINGS

African Music in Christian Worship

Issues surrounding African music in Christian worship were described decades ago by Mbunga (1963) as a “sad fact.” As a “sad fact,” Mbunga bewails the way missionaries and Africans who have converted to Christianity have misconstrued, belittled, neglected, and suppressed African music because this music is pagan and primitive. He points out that this maltreatment was achieved by “substituting foreign Western music and convincing Christian Africans that African music was nothing” in the born-again experience (p. 23). Mbunga is primarily concerned about the negative mental attitude that young Africans develop, leading them to devalue and distance themselves from their musical heritage while embracing Western music instead. A decade later, Ekweme (1973) shares in this lament when he observes that early Christian missionaries branded all indigenous forms of art, including music, as the work of the devil, especially as some of these were associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremony.

Many African congregations have had their minds obstructed by the progressive denunciation of African culture and the superimposition of the superior-branded Western culture, tap-rooting this discrimination. It subsequently informs every religious decision an African Christian makes, both individually and collectively. One may argue that Mbunga’s lament is merely perceptive, but it is not. In 1934, the Akropong Presbyterian Teacher Training College dismissed Ephraim Amu, the music tutor, for his criticism of the negative attitude of the missionaries towards Ghanaian culture, including its music in the church (Adjepong, 2018; Agawu & Amu, 1987). Specifically, Amu took an “uncompromising stand on the wearing of native cloth to preach, and lead the College choir to drum and sing traditional Ghanaian songs



during church services” (Amuah et al., 2014, p. 88) and had to sacrifice his livelihood in favour of African music in worship.

Contrary to the view in the preceding paragraph, this “sad fact” has been debated by some members and leaders of the church. Studies abound to prove that several African church leaders, scholars, and musicians have advocated for the use of African music in the church (Jessee, 2019; Mbede, 2018; Löytty, 2012). Corroborating the argument against the “sad fact” lament and further underscoring the need to promote African music in the church, Kwesi (2000, p. 110) avers that during “the encounter between Christianity and another religion, the latter cannot expect to remain unaffected. The truth of the matter is that, similarly, the Christian faith cannot expect to come out of the encounter unaffected” while triumphantly achieving the primary mission objective. In any event of faiths colliding, there are unavoidable impacts that result in the change of one of the faiths. Indeed, the message of the gospel eternally exerts forceful transformation on other faiths, courtesy of the power of God behind the proclamation of the word of God.

When the gospel fuses with music and encounters men in their daily routines, it produces results. It will influence their worldviews, affect their thought systems, and transform them as they embrace the message of Christ-centred music, which is presented in a culturally organic tune. This music, in the language, idioms, styles, and experiences of the people, will meaningfully affect their thinking about God and influence their daily practice as they go about their businesses. They will perceive themselves as directly belonging to God’s family rather than contemplating acceptance of a foreign deity imposed on them. The global church must consistently strive to make the gospel more relevant to particular cultural contexts in ways that inspire lasting interaction with the living God (King, 2008). Louw (1958, p. 51) reveals the essence of native (African) music in Christian worship.

When one true African Christian musician is brought to disregard any form of church music that he may have known in the past and breaks forth praising God in the musical medium that lies closest to his heart, half the battle will have been won.

This voice echoes the conviction (Askew, 2003) that the use of traditional music, local musical instruments, and traditional techniques of playing instruments and dancing make worshippers feel free in their cultural environment; hence, they participate fully and flourish in church worship.

Further to the foregoing advocacy, Sanga (2006) maintains that the deployment of African indigenous music in Christian worship began several decades ago, perhaps in the nineteenth century, when the then-conservative church opened up to the possibility of integrating folk music into Christian worship songs. Recent findings from Mkallyah’s (2016) ethnographic study on the subject reveal three intriguing reasons that necessitate the use of African indigenous music in worship. First, he indicates that performing indigenous music traditions during Christian worship makes congregants participate optimally in church activities, such as giving contributions (tithes and offerings) to their God. He stresses that the extent of excitement and euphoria aroused in church members determines the level of generosity demonstrated in their contributions. Secondly, the study argues that beyond inspiring generosity, appropriating familiar indigenous music traditions causes a change in people’s lives by either having them surrender their lives to Christ or deepen their commitment to Christian values. Finally, Mkallyah’s findings further suggest that when traditional music is used appropriately in church



activities, it helps promote unity among the people and motivates members of the congregation to be more active in church activities.

When church members are joyfully active in congregational worship, they sometimes express their joy through the sporadic exhibition of their indigenous musical traits to the glory of God. For instance, in the Ghanaian context, it is common to observe that the innate yearning of the worshipper to express worship life in their own culture is hard to suppress beyond a certain point during church services. Very often, while singing, clapping, ululating, and dancing, some of them cannot help but suddenly transition into native dialects or dance styles (e.g., *Kinatso* of the Konkomba and *Agbadza* of the Anlo-Ewe people) in synchrony with the predominant typical highlife rhythms. It is therefore gratifying to find some church leaders in recent times who are not only allowing their congregants to express their native musical affinities but also encouraging their musicians to harness and minister indigenous music during church gatherings. The extent to which specific church contexts implement this undoubtedly varies from one church to another.

African Music in Different Church Settings

Differences in the use of African music in various church settings are partly attributable to the trite knowledge that church denominations differ in their doctrines and practices. Furthermore, these churches appropriate indigenous culture, including musical traditions, and integrate them into worship in diverse ways. Mkallyah (2016) noted that Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Pentecostal churches integrated musical materials from African and European music. This fusion formed a new complex music genre, where indigenous instruments accompany Western hymn tunes. On the other hand, many churches sing songs that are characteristically indigenous and use foreign instruments for accompaniment. Askew (2003: 612) refers to the genre derived from this hybridisation as “hybrid.” Hybridisation entails three dimensions. First is the use of hymns or European music translated into local African languages. These translated hymns are deemed to facilitate Africans’ comprehension of the context/content of the songs that they had failed to understand when the hymn was sung in English.

Christian worship songs transform indigenous tunes into 4-part Western music, featuring soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, and accompanied by local and/or Western instruments or a combination of them. The third dimension employs the indigenous African tunes of given ethnic identities with lyrics drawn from the Bible. The improvised songs are also accompanied by indigenous instrumental resources, which are played using the techniques of the ethnic group as well as the group’s vernacular language. Congregants sing the songs in traditional harmony and exhibit the dancing style of the particular ethnic group from which the songs are derived. Congregants exhibit minimal devotion in the first instance and maximal devotion in the third instance.

The foregoing illustration offers an understanding of the Acts 2:6 experiences where everyone—Jews, devout men, out of every nation—confronted God in their languages or mother tongues, per the power of the Holy Spirit that worked in the disciples of Jesus Christ. This must be proof and a demonstration of the crucial need to do away with cultural hegemony in the New Testament church. It must be divine and symbolic to heal the sense of exclusion and frustration worshippers endure as long as they have no choice but to express their worship in (musical) cultures to which they are aliens. It, therefore, means encouraging the use of music familiar to the worshippers (Jessee, 2019); music in which they could join, whether in meek



supplication, in holy adoration, or in hearty praise of the one who is, by faith, their Lord and Saviour.

In an ever-evolving world, Christianity has consistently been a living faith, not by conforming to but by adapting to the cultural context wherever the gospel is to be proclaimed. Hence, for an African Christian to encounter God meaningfully in worship, the ideal genre for achieving this spiritual quest is their own native African traditional music.

Congregational Musicing as a Precept of the African

God wants us to be one people, united with each other, connecting His will for our lives to our body, spirit, and soul. Musicing in the church is not a solo ministry. Rather, it is a communally privileged command to all. This largely explains the corporate call of the Psalmist: “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” (Psa. 95:1). “Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods” (I Chron. 16:23–25).

The communal imperative of the church has already been a percept of the Africans before their conversion. Africa, before European and Islamic contacts, was made up of self-sustaining ‘ethnic nations’ who lived in more or less homogenous communities where life was largely communal. Music in these societies was an integral aspect of life, and musical performances punctuated important milestones in the life of the individual from the cradle to the grave. Discussing “music in community life,” Nketia (1966, cited in Agawu 1992) writes:

Music making is regarded as a part of the traditional way of life and not an embellishment of it. It is as necessary to the fullness of living as any other human need that has to be satisfied. A village that has no organised music or neglects community singing, drumming and dancing is said to be dead. Music-making is, therefore an index of a living community and a measure of the degree of social cohesion among its respective units. (p. 249)

Nketia does not proceed to name any example of African communities that have been perceived to be “dead” on account of not singing, drumming or dancing, since that may lack absolute proof. Also, the fact that modern conveniences such as mobile cinemas, videos, radios, cassette/DVD/CD/USB players, and numerous social media tools can now be found in many remote and rural parts of Africa suggests that there is at least less music-making of the sort described by Nketia but no resulting “death.” Indeed, only a scholarly plot seeking differences between Africa and the West will insist on growing this mythology. However, the relevance of Nketia’s proposition to African Christian worship remains the fact that African music is a cultural capital for realising meaningful worship in Africa.

The communal music-making in Africa was built around communal activities such as agricultural and other economic activities, domestic chores, religious rites and rituals, rites of passage, and festivals, to mention but a few. Song texts were derived from shared history, myths, legends, and philosophies, while musical instruments were constructed from materials found in the environment. Music was also an instrument of social control as well as a symbol of political authority. The songs were folk in nature, and no one claimed authorship of any composition. Music was used for recreational activities as well as worship, and at no point was



music or musical performance sold as an ‘economic product’. However, according to Agawu (1992), this state of things changed drastically with the coming of Islam and Arabic culture, as well as European contact with Africa.

The Problem of Syncretism

Both biblical and African contexts have established the functionality of music as a component of human culture. The Bible does not present us with any discrete list of music that would be either “good” or “bad” in terms of a specific genre or style. It is imperative to be convinced that the given music is theologically sound, edifies the audience, and glorifies God. Furthermore, these instruments (e.g. harps and lyres) were employed for sacred purposes and occasions reproved by the prophets. Once we understand the biblical model of music as being performed for God and pleasing to God, the question of “good” or “bad” concerning any musical genre becomes obsolete. The same will happen on the level of our quest concerning styles. There is no evidence that temple music had a particular genre style that was untouched by the surrounding cultures. Temple service did not present only one particular style of music as proper.

As we observe the musical practices in the temple and compare them to contemporary practices in surrounding cultures, we find many parallels and similar patterns between liturgical practices in the use of cymbals for signalling musical events by both the Jewish temple musicians and Canaanite cultic musicians, just as some musical genres are still found both in the world and Christian worship. This observation illustrates a key principle in the Bible that one should never lose sight of. To avoid the danger of syncretism, existing concepts or symbols often underwent transformation and re-interpretation of meanings. The term *tsetselim*, used to designate the cymbals in earlier texts (2 Sam. 6:5), traditionally associated with the pagan, orgiastic Canaanite cult, is noticeable in our case. In later texts (1 Chron. 13:8), the biblical writer designates these cymbals with a different word, *metsiltayim*, probably to avoid any connotation with pagan practices. What we learn from this, then, is the concern of the biblical writer to keep a liturgical situation clear of any ambiguity. While we notice the use of similar instruments and musical practices in both pagan and Israelite worship, care is taken to change the meanings, symbolism, and motives in the utilisation of a given instrument or practice when the context changes, and there is a danger of syncretism or ambiguity of meaning and utilitarian intention. While Israel uses the cultural patterns of the surrounding nations, it may re-interpret the meanings of certain elements of them, steeped in the quest for appropriate music-making to the glory of God.

We have also discovered that music in the Bible was not a static phenomenon. It was as organic and dynamic as the culture of those who rendered it to God; we do observe changes that happened through time. The instruments listed for the first temple include the lyre, harp, cymbal, and trumpet. Studies describing the second temple service, however, also mention the flute and the tambourine among its instruments (Friedmann, 2007; St. Vincent, 2011). Similarly, as we move to the New Testament and observe the musical practices of the apostolic church, we notice that in addition to the “old” genres of music, the Psalms and Canticles, a “new” genre was also introduced, namely, the hymn (Eph. 5:19). A new experience in the history of sacred music often necessitates a new expression. The person and ministry of Christ brought about this new experience, laying the foundation for paradigm shifts as and when they become imperative.



IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

A cardinal essence of the Performing Arts strand in the Creative Arts curriculum is to enable the learner express their music and, subsequently, music and musical instruments of other cultures that are found in the learner's environment (NaCCa, 2019). Before that the teacher is specifically encouraged to employ indigenous musical materials and approaches to teach the learner. This is to ensure that the learner can appreciate and participate meaningfully in musical practices in their own cultures (MoE, 2009). Nketia (1999) emphasises the significance of providing learning experiences that enable African children to acquire knowledge and understanding of traditional music and dance in their environment. If children miss this formation, it becomes virtually impossible for them to participate fully in the lives of the communities to which they belong since musical performances characterise the life activities of the people.

Children acquire musical knowledge and skills by actively participating in musical situations created in the society in which they are absorbed (Adjepong, 2018; Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016). According to Dzansi (2004) and Amuah et al. (2014), children acquire musical knowledge and skills by observing, imitating, and eventually participating in the music of their culture. Nompula (2011) suggests that exposing children to cross-rhythms and syncopated rhythms, which are characteristic of African music, is the best way to develop their creative musical skills.

Furthermore, as an agent of the socialisation process, the school plays a vital role in helping children acquire their musical knowledge and skills. It prepares the younger generation to fit well and also become useful to the societies of which they are members, thereby guaranteeing the preservation and perpetuation of traditional musical culture from one generation to another. Aside from the school, another institution that has a pivotal stake in the development of the African child is the Christian church. The children's ministry has been an important facet of the church, and almost several denominations pay meticulous attention to it. It is necessary to acknowledge the efforts of some church denominations, including The Church of Pentecost (CoP), Methodist, Evangelical Presbyterian, Global Evangelical, and Mozama Disco Christo Churches, in inculcating African traditional music performance skills in their child congregations (Adjepong, 2018).

Noticing the level of enthusiasm that children attach to action songs and other musical activities in the classroom, in the church and on the playground, one could anticipate a phenomenal growth of African traditional music in school, in worship, and in the community if classroom teachers, Sunday school teachers, and parents could intentionally cultivate a collaborative relationship to compliment the efforts of one another.

It is, therefore, important for both the school and the church to consciously budget for music lessons and ministry, ensuring the provision of African traditional music instruments and related resources. Contrarily, some churches hardly prioritise musical resources in their annual scale of preference and budgets. Even those who do usually have their attention focused on Western musical inputs, a trajectory that requires pragmatic reconsideration in the interest of African music.



Finally, while mission scholars intensify studies on music in African Christian worship, church musicians, on their part, will do the church a great deal of good by learning to minister to their congregations in genres and styles that resonate with their indigenous cultures. Church leadership must be highly concerned about the percentage of congregants who either participate passively or stay aloof while we sing, drum, and dance in foreign or hybridised styles and try to compel them to get involved. The need to create the expected African indigenous musical atmosphere to help congregants ‘hear’ from or speak to God in their language (Acts 2:6), speak to one another in their songs (Eph. 5:19), play their instruments (Psa. 150), and exhibit their dance movements (Luke 15:21-29) is the best way to go if people must be active and fulfilled participants in their worship experiences.

CONCLUSION

Music as an art form has always connected deeply with people of all cultures and languages throughout human history. Making melodies with voices and instruments, whether solo or chorus, has been a key part of the expression of man’s experiences. When words fail us and the circumstances of our physical lives confine us, music is an outlet for hopes and dreams, passions and desires, tension and confusion, and even the transformation taking place within us. Music connects with us on a level nothing else does, and for that reason, people have always recognised a divine power and spirituality in music. The Bible is replete with music and its essence in the lives of God’s children. However, the African church has long grappled with questions and issues surrounding culture and music (King et al., 2008).

This study has revealed that music is a universal human invariant, and various societies have diverse musical meanings, expressions, manifestations, and ways of rendition. Music reflects the unique cultural preferences, values, and structure of any given society. The role of music in African cultures, which originally were participatory oral cultures, is fundamental to Christian worship. Aside from being an indispensable means of worshipping the Creator, music is part of one’s identity and general sense of belonging. Our membership in the family of God and our African identity must not be impeded by our musical choices in worship. This paper strongly advocates the need to foster intensively intentional collaborations among all stakeholders—classroom teachers, Sunday school teachers, parents, the clergy/theologians, and church musicians—to maximise the use of our (African) traditional music in our worship activities to win more souls for Christ and help deepen spirituality among church members. Let us end it with the comment of Thomas Long, who writes:

Part of the joy of worship is to know the song, know the words, know the motions. The vital congregations knew their order of worship and moved through it with deep familiarity. What is more, the worshippers had active roles – speaking, singing, moving (in Frishman, 2007, p. x).

Long reflects on past practice and suggests that much of what had been common in musical practice among the Old Testament worshippers and the first-century New Testament worshippers has largely been lost. We argue in this paper that through the dedicated collaboration of the entire Christian community, those past African indigenous musical practices can be re-learned and revitalized, and congregants can experience their sense of spirituality in their own cultures.



Nonetheless, to avoid contextual ambiguities, the selection and use of traditional music in Christian worship must not be done arbitrarily (Nketia, 2010). It must be guided by a critical understanding of the meaning and significance of particular aspects of the given musical culture, always critically bearing in mind the tenets and praxis of our Christian faith.

Further scholarly works on the subject matter will help enlighten the masses, especially the church populace, helping them unlearn the initial erroneous paganised perception of African traditional music—singing, instrumentation, costumes, and dance styles. Such missiological findings are crucial to appreciating the indispensable role of African music in Christian worship.

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