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Church music and spiritual transformation in Ghana: A biblical and historical analysis

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ABSTRACT

Since its emergence, Church music has functioned as a powerful medium for worship, theological instruction, moral formation, and communal identity within both biblical and African indigenous traditions. However, in Ghana, a paradox has emerged: many Christians actively participate in gospel music while living in ways that contradict its teachings, resulting in limited evidence of corresponding spiritual and ethical transformation. This study examines the historical, biblical, and theological foundations of music and investigates the factors that contribute to this disconnect between musical participation and Christian discipleship. As a qualitative desk-based research design, the study draws on biblical texts, historical records, theological literature, and scholarly works on African music and Christianity. Data from these sources were analysed using historical-biblical, conceptual, thematic, comparative, and interpretive approaches. The study reveals that although church music remains an integral part of contemporary worship, its transformative effect is increasingly weakened by commercialisation, entertainment-driven practices, doctrinal inadequacies, and insufficient spiritual formation among both musicians and congregants. It further emphasizes that biblical and African conceptions of music consistently present it as an instrument of moral instruction, spiritual renewal, and communal transformation. The study contributes to scholarship by addressing the academic gap in existing literature, which has largely treated biblical theology, African musical traditions, and contemporary Ghanaian church practice as separate fields of inquiry. By integrating these areas, the study offers a coherent response to the resulting paradox. It recommends renewed theological formation for church musicians, greater doctrinal accountability, and a reorientation of church music toward its original spiritual and ethical purpose.

Keywords: Gospel music, transformation, lyrics, morality, and popularity.

INTRODUCTION

Music has a long-standing history in human civilisation from antiquity to the present, serving as a medium of communication, education, cultural preservation, worship, and social transformation. Across diverse cultures, it has served not only as entertainment but also as a means for transmitting moral and communal values, shaping identity, and reigniting moral consciousness. From the context of biblical tradition, music permeates both the Old and New Testaments, where it is associated with worship, thanksgiving, prophecy, lament, instruction, celebration, and spiritual formation (For

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example, Exod. 15; Ps. 150; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Similarly, African societies have historically regarded music as an indispensable component of religious life, oral tradition, moral education, and communal harmony. In addition to its autonomous artistic nature, music has traditionally functioned as a transformative social institution through which values, beliefs, and ethical expectations are communicated across generations.

In Ghanaian Christianity, the crucial role of church music cannot be overstated. From the inception of Christianity through missionary activity, church music has evolved from predominantly Western hymnody to a rich synthesis of biblical hymns, indigenous musical forms, gospel music, and contemporary worship styles. Today, music ranks high among the liturgical elements that require greater congregational participation. Choirs, praise teams, gospel concerts, choreography teams, revival meetings, and Christian media have significantly expanded the influence of church music beyond the sanctuary into everyday Ghanaian society.

Despite the centrality of church music in Ghanaian Christianity, increasing participation in worship has not translated into corresponding ethical transformation among many believers. Expressions of enthusiastic singing, dancing, and emotional participation frequently coexist with persistent social problems such as corruption, dishonesty, sexual immorality, materialism, and other forms of unethical behavior. This contradiction raises important theological and pastoral questions concerning the actual function of church music within contemporary Christianity.

Although scholars have explored the theological foundations of music in Scripture, the cultural, educational, and religious functions of African musical traditions, the historical development and liturgical significance of Christian music in Ghana, and the psychological, educational, therapeutic, and sociological effects of music, these dimensions have generally been treated as separate fields of inquiry. Consequently, an integrated approach that brings these perspectives together is still needed to explain the paradox surrounding the transformative role of church music in Ghana.

This study addresses this scholarly gap by integrating biblical theology, African musical thought, and contemporary Ghanaian church practice into a single analytical framework. The paper argues that recovering the original theological and ethical purpose of church music is necessary for music to fulfil its intended spiritual formation and societal transformation. Against this backdrop, the study contributes to scholarship by offering an interdisciplinary perspective that moves beyond historical description or musical analysis to a theological interpretation of the relationship between worship, discipleship and ethical living within the Ghanaian Christian context.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative library-based research design using documentary analysis. The appropriateness of this design lies in the quest to examine the theological, historical, and cultural dimensions of music in Christian worship through the interpretation of existing scholarly materials rather than primary field data. The use of secondary sources was justified by the study's focus on historical developments, theological reflections, and scholarly debates concerning biblical theology, African musical traditions, church music, liturgy, and Ghanaian Christianity. Such sources provide access to established academic discussions and historical evidence necessary for analysing the evolution and significance of Christian musical practices.

Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, academic books, biblical commentaries, and authoritative historical publications. Factors that guided the selection of sources include, but are not limited to, their relevance to the research objectives, scholarly credibility, methodological quality, and contribution to the subject area. Priority was, however, given to peer-reviewed and recognised academic works, while both foundational and recent publications were considered to provide historical depth and contemporary perspectives.

The study used four analytical approaches. The historical approach examined the development of music from biblical times through Christian history to contemporary Ghanaian church practice. The theological approach analysed biblical texts and theological scholarship on the nature, purpose, and functions of music in worship and Christian formation. The descriptive-analytical approach

synthesised and compared perspectives from biblical studies, African musicology, and church music studies to identify major themes and scholarly positions. Finally, thematic content analysis was used to code recurring concepts, organise them into thematic categories, and interpret their significance in relation to the research objectives.

DISCUSSION

Origins, Nature, and Meaning of Music: Global and African Perspectives

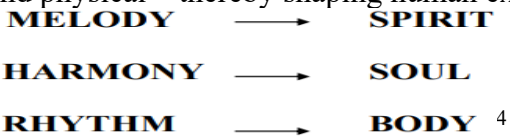
Origins of Music (Evolutionary and Linguistic Perspectives)

Many scholars have come up with evolutionary theories of music in an attempt to trace its origins. Rabinowitch identifies humanity's need for emotional communication as the genesis of music development.[1] This stage represents a transitional communicative system in which pitch, rhythm, and gesture were not yet functionally separated into distinct domains of speech and music.

Before the musilanguage stage, there existed what scholars describe as "referential emotive vocalisations," consisting of instinctive vocal calls that conveyed immediate emotional reactions to environmental stimuli.[2] These vocalisations functioned as biologically driven signals (e.g., fear, attraction, aggression), forming the evolutionary foundation upon which structured musical and linguistic systems were later built.

Nature of Music (Ontological And Structural Perspectives)

Lynch draws a parallel between the ontological composition of the human person and that of music, suggesting that both are fundamentally trichotomous in structure. In his view, the human being comprises spirit, soul, and body, while music consists of melody, harmony, and rhythm.[3] He further argues that each musical element corresponds to and influences a specific dimension of human nature—spiritual, intellectual, and physical—thereby shaping human experience holistically.



[4]

Figure 1: Tripartite concordance between music and mankind

This analogy positions music not only as an aesthetic phenomenon but also as a multidimensional force that engages the totality of human existence, suggesting an integrated relationship between sound structure and human consciousness. Building on this, music may be understood as a structured sonic system whose internal organisation reflects both cognitive order and affective depth. Thus, its nature is simultaneously artistic, psychological, and experiential, operating across sensory and non-sensory dimensions of human life.

Meaning and Conceptual Definitions of Music

Music may be defined as the systematic organisation of the raw material of sound into formalised structural patterns that convey meaning and are broadly accepted within the sociocultural context in which they are produced.[5] According to Titus, music is the art through which a composer, mediated by a performer, communicates specific ideas, emotions, or states of mind to a listener.[6] Basically, music may be expressed through choral singing with or without accompaniment, instrumental performance, or a combination of vocal and instrumental elements. From the political standpoint, music is defined as a creative practice arising from human capacities, whose foundational elements of

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[1] Tal-Chen Rabinowitch, "The Potential of Music to Effect Social Change," *Music & Science* 3, (2020): 2.
[2] Rabinowitch, "The Potential of Music to Effect Social Change."
[3] Ken Lynch, *Biblical Music in a Contemporary World* (Ken Lynch, 1999), 21.
[4] Lynch, *Biblical Music in a Contemporary World, 22*.
[5] G.Nrenzah, "Invalidating Indigenous Religious Traditions via Christianity: Popular Ghanaian Gospel Songs/Music," *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission* 4 (2023): 41–60.
[6] Monday I. Titus, "Assessment of the Impact of Music on Human Brain," *Erudite Journal of Music and Performaing Arts* 2, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

rhythm and tone evoke political consciousness as well as religious, psychological, and sociocultural sensibilities.[7] This definition expands music beyond aesthetics into the realm of ideology, identity formation, and collective awareness.

Gyebi-Tweneboah also sees music as "the correct combination of sounds appealing to the ear and satisfactory to the heart, emphasising its affective and aesthetic dimensions.[8] Gleaning from these definitions, music may be conceptualised as an organised and expressive human activity that uses sound as a medium for communication, emotional articulation, and cultural representation. It simultaneously functions as an artistic system, a communicative tool, and a socially embedded practice shaped by context and interpretation.

Global and African Perspectives on Music (Cultural And Functional Dimensions)

Music has been integral to all human societies across time, with individuals worldwide demonstrating a shared, universal responsiveness to it. It permeates all facets of life, and as various African scholars, including John S. Mbiti, J.H. Kwabena Nketia, and Fela Sowande, have observed, it is so deeply embedded within the cultural fabric that it constitutes an integral and inseparable component of everyday existence.[9] Adeola Funmilayo Odunuga and Isaac Yekini-Ajenifuja have argued that music is a universal language, recognised and experienced across cultures, though shaped by environmental, historical, and sociocultural conditions unique to each society.[10] From a global perspective, this universality suggests that music is a shared human capacity, but its forms and meanings are culturally mediated, resulting in diverse musical systems across societies.

Some scholars contend that, perhaps more than any other continent, Africans exhibit a profound emotional sensitivity and responsiveness to music, a disposition reflected in the way musical expression permeates virtually all spheres of life, accompanying manual labor, leisure, and moments of suffering and joy.[11] This sensitivity is reflected in the widespread presence of music in African life, where it accompanies work, leisure, suffering, and joy. Music also plays a central role in marking significant life events such as birth, initiation, marriage, public celebrations, funerals, communal labor, warfare, and sporting activities. In this regard, music functions not as an isolated art form but as a social instrument embedded in ritual, identity formation, and communal participation. Thus, within African contexts, music is not merely performative but existential, shaping and reflecting the rhythms of communal life.

Philosophical Perspective on Music (Aesthetic and Moral Dimensions)

According to Plato, "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and everything."[12] Plato's view emphasises music as a formative moral and metaphysical force. It further suggests that music influences not only emotional states but also ethical orientation and intellectual imagination, thereby contributing to the cultivation of the human character, making it an indispensable part of moral formation.

Functions and Socio-Cultural Significance of Music: Global and African Perspectives

Human history is richly interwoven with music, and anthropological evidence suggests that music has been an integral part of human existence for thousands of years.[13] While earlier narratives sometimes attribute the origin of music to cosmological or mythical beginnings, contemporary scholarship situates music within the evolutionary and social development of human societies, emphasising its role as a

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[7] Titus, "Assessment of the Impact of Music on Human Brain," 2.
[8] Kwasi Gyebi-Tweneboah, *An Introduction to Music Theory* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2023), 1.
[9] Celestine Chukwuemeka Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," *Open Journal of Philosophy* 5, (2015):177.
[10] Adeola Funmilayo Odunuga and Isaac Yekini-Ajenifuja, "Social Transformation of Africa through Music: The Nigerian Experience," *Social Research* 8, no. 2 (2018): 109.
[11] Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," 177.
[12] Frank Fitzpatrick, "Why Music, Part 9: Music and Spirituality,"Accessed on May 13, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/music-spirituality_b_3203309.
[13] Herbert Lockyer, *All the Music of the Bible* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 3.

fundamental mode of human expression and interaction. Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists consistently affirm that music is universal and indispensable to human life.[14]

In contemporary society, diverse forms of sound and rhythm permeate everyday environments, including homes, vehicles, commercial spaces, elevators, offices, and public streets, demonstrating the pervasive nature of music in modern life. This ubiquity reflects the transformation of music from its primary communal and ritualistic practice in early societies to a technologically mediated and globally distributed phenomenon. In ancient societies, music and ritual were inextricably linked, serving essential roles in communal activities such as hunting, harvests, and rites of passage.[15] Therefore, in temporal and cultural contexts, music functions as both a social organizer and a symbolic system through which human beings interpret and engage with their world.

Functional Dimensions of Music

Music has long been associated with spirituality and religious practice. According to legends, music therapy dates back to ancient times, when magical powers were attributed to sounds because it was believed that the soul could be controlled by them and that life could be created and maintained through them.[16] This early perception laid the foundation for contemporary understandings of music as a medium of transcendence and spiritual communication. Emmanuel Olusola Fasipe observes that dynamic and progressive churches often owe their vitality to effective music ministries that actively engage congregants.[17] Similarly, Genevieve Nrenzah emphasizes that in African religiosity, music is central to worship, serving as a conduit for spiritual connection and divine encounter.[18] Research further indicates that music in ritual contexts enhances emotional engagement and deepens religious experience on individual and communal levels.[19] Ingalls adds that the above assertion holds at both the individual and congregation levels of worship.[20] This reveals that music operates not only as an accompaniment to worship but as an active agent in shaping religious consciousness and experience. For this reason, music plays a crucial role in religious practices.

In African traditional religions, music is not merely entertainment but a vital means of engaging with the sacred.[21] It facilitates communication between the human and spiritual realms, often inducing altered states of consciousness such as trance and possession of the spirit. In West Africa, people say each drum carries its own rhythm, and every rhythm brings its own dance. Drumming, in particular, holds symbolic and spiritual significance, often regarded as the "heartbeat" of African spirituality.[22] Its consecration before ritual use further underscores the sacred status of musical instruments within African cosmology. Albert Oikelome affirms the indispensable nature of music and dance within the framework of African culture, noting that these art forms are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of African societies.[23] Drawing on the above, the cultural significance of African music, particularly drumming and dance, demonstrates its role as a carrier of communal identity, ritual meaning, and spiritual expression.

Music serves as a powerful pedagogical tool, facilitating holistic learning by engaging cognitive, emotional, and social domains simultaneously. This is affirmed by scholars who highlight

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[14] Ian Cross, *The Nature of Music and Its Evolution*, ed. Susan Hallam, Ian Cross, and Michael Thaut (Oxford University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722946.013.5.

[15] Cross, *The Nature of Music and Its Evolution,* 3-18.

[16] Mehri Chogan, "The Effect of Music on Peoples Mental Health," *British Journal of Arts and Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2024): 134–37.

[17] Mawusi Foster Eddison and Klutse Eric Kwadzo, "The Church Music, Transition Fasipe, Emmanuel Olusola. "The Church and Music Ministry"," *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy* 8, no. 7 (2024): 447–52.

[18] Nrenzah, "Invalidating Indigenous Religious Traditions via Christianity: Popular Ghanaian Gospel Songs/Music, 42."

[19] Yoshija Walter and Andreas Altorfer, "The Psychological Role of Music and Attentional Control for Religious Experiences in Worship," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 75, no. 12 (2022): 2272–86.

[20] Walter and Altorfer, "The Psychological Role of Music and Attentional Control for Religious Experiences in Worship, 2274."

[21] Abayomi Ayoola Ikumapayi and Samuel Damilare Alao, "The Intersection of Music and Spirituality in African Traditional Religion," *LASU Journal of Religions & Peace Studies* 7, no. 4 (2025): 113.

[22] Ikumapayi and Alao, "The Intersection of Music and Spirituality in African Traditional Religion," 116.

[23] Albert Oikelome, "The Music of the Dance: A Study of Music and Dance in African Culture," *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts* 13, no. 1 (2019): 185.

its role in enhancing educational methodologies and promoting meaningful learning.[24] Unlike conventional teaching methods that often isolate cognitive processes, music-based learning integrates multiple dimensions of human development, thereby fostering creativity, memory retention, and critical thinking. Aside from what has been discussed, music serves as a powerful stimulus for children, fostering cognitive and emotional capacity while facilitating social interaction and enabling the expression and refinement of profound and meaningful emotional experiences.[25] A critical implication of this perspective is that music constitutes a particularly effective pedagogical medium, as it simultaneously engages cognitive, emotional, and social domains of learning, thereby offering a more holistic and integrative approach to teaching than methods that target these dimensions in isolation.

Music has a profound psychological and physiological effect on human beings. Research indicates that it influences emotional states, cognitive processes, and bodily functions such as heart rate and blood pressure.[26] Mishra and Shastri confirm that music affects both psychological well-being and physiological responses,[27] while Yoon emphasises its role in shaping mood and facilitating emotional expression. Yoon continues, "Music surpasses mere pleasure with its strong biological roots, its ability to foster brain growth and integrate the two hemispheres, and its crucial role in a child's neurological development.[28] Contemporary psychological and neuroscientific research consistently demonstrates that music exerts significant emotional, cognitive, and physiological effects. It influences memory, emotional regulation, stress reduction, and neurological development, thereby giving credence to earlier theological and anthropological understandings of music as a powerful agent capable of shaping human behaviour and experience. For instance, Victor points out the crucial role music plays in reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain and further asserts that "Certain types of music can trigger memories of joyful moments, offering hope and optimism even in challenging times, particularly for those who are grieving or suffering from trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[29] Overall, one can deduce that music serves multiple functions across African and human societies, including spiritual engagement, cultural expression, education, and psychological development, thereby underscoring its enduring significance in human life.

Tracing Music through the Old and New Testaments

The musical heritage of the Hebrews, according to Tony Kupinski, originates from the Ancient Near East, particularly Mesopotamia and Egypt, encompassing civilizations such as the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Chaldeans, serving as a background for early Hebrew musical practices.[30] The significance and centrality of music and musical instruments in Ancient Near Eastern culture are evidenced in artistic representations, including Babylonian and Assyrian works produced during the biblical period, approximately 1400–586 BCE.[31] The cultural setting within which Hebrew music developed indicates that there were influences from the music traditions of their neighbors.

Music in the Old Testament: Allusions to worship of God in song are found throughout the Old Testament, most frequently in the Book of Psalms. Asamoah and Agbenyo assert that although the Bible does not contain a specific chapter or treatise on music, it is an essential and inseparable element woven throughout Scripture.[32] Careful reading of Psalm 95:6 and Revelation 4:11 brings to mind that

[24] Eder José de Almeida Golvêa, "A Música Como Recurso Pedagógico No Processo de Ensino-Aprendizagem: Music as a Pedagogical Resource in the Teaching-Learning Process," *RCMOS-Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O Saber* 1, no. 1 (2025): 14.
[25] de Almeida Golvêa, "A Música Como Recurso Pedagógico No Processo de Ensino-Aprendizagem: Music as a Pedagogical Resource in the Teaching-Learning Process," 5.
[26] Thomas Schäfer et al., "The Psychological Functions of Music Listening," *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013): 511, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00511.
[27] Shveata Mishra and Ina Shastri, *Social Impact of Music* (Banasthali Vidyapith: Rajasthan., n.d.), 56-60.
[28] Jenny Nam Yoon, "Music in the Classroom: Its Influence on Children's Brain Development, Academic Performance, and Practical Life Skills.," 2000.
[29] David Victor, "How Music Helps People Heal: The Therapeutic Power of Music," Harmony and Healing, Accessed on June 19, 2024, https://www.harmonyandhealing.org/how-music-helps-people-heal/.
[30] Tony Kupinski, " Excursions – Ancient Music," (January 2023), 2.
[31] Kupinski, " Excursions – Ancient Music," 3.
[32] Emmanuel Foster Asamoah and Samuel Agbenyo, "The Bible and Music in African Christianity," *African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions* 7, no. 1 (2024): 52.

one principal reason for creating mankind was to worship God, with music being one of the key channels through which it is achieved.

The first mention of music appears in Genesis 4:21, where Jubal is described as the progenitor of harp and flute players. In Exodus, Moses and the Israelites sing a song of victory, with Miriam leading the singing and dancing, accompanied by tambourines. Similarly, David's triumph is celebrated with songs (1 Sam.18), and a substantial body of musical compositions attributed to him appears in the psalms.

Franklin Hutabarat notes that synagogue worship incorporated structured musical elements, including prayers, responsive psalms, and doxologies, employing both syllabic and melismatic singing styles.[33] However, the historical development of these styles remains debated, and their precise forms in ancient practice are not fully reconstructable**.**

The New Testament also records several instances of music, including the singing of a hymn by Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30), Paul and Silas singing in prison (Acts 16:25), and the songs of victory in Revelation (chapters 5, 7, and 15). The Apostle Paul admonished believers to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" and to "sing and make music from the heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). These references indicate continuity between Old Testament traditions and early Christian worship practices. Music also occupied a significant place in Israelite worship and daily life, as instruments were used in diverse contexts, including festive celebrations, royal coronations, idolatrous rituals, public mourning, and military engagements.

In his 2018 publication, Amponsah-Gyan submits that in Christendom, music serves as a central ritual of worship, symbolising the believer's gratitude for God's gift of Christ.[34] Recognition of God's greatness often generates responses such as praise, thanksgiving, and prayer, frequently expressed through music. Lockyer Jr. argues that music, both vocal and instrumental, has been highly developed among the Hebrews, early Christians, and throughout Church history,[35] while Theodore Burgh emphasises that biblical cultures were deeply immersed in music as part of daily life.[36] Collectively, these perspectives reinforce the idea that music was not peripheral but integral to religious and communal identity.

Music plays diverse roles in the Old Testament. Music also functioned as a medium within the prophetic experience, as illustrated in 2 Kings 3:15, where Elisha called for a harpist, and as the music was played, "the hand of the LORD came upon. Music also functioned within prophetic experience, as seen in 2 Kings 3:15, where Elisha called for a harpist and, as music was played, "the hand of the LORD came upon him."

Music also appears in contexts of mourning, funerary rites, and burial practices, possibly to ward off malevolent spirits, as in 1 Samuel 16:23, where David's harp playing brought Saul relief and caused the distressing spirit afflicting him to depart. Psalm 137 further illustrates music's role in emotional expression and resilience among exiles in Babylon. In this sense, music functioned both as a lament and as a means of preserving identity in distress.

Introduction of Music in Ghanaian Christian Church Liturgy

The formalized style of worship of early missionaries, including the use of Western-translated hymns, primarily catered to the small, educated elite. Consequently, the largely illiterate majority found such services less engaging and culturally distant. The only audible forms of music were the tolling of church bells, the singing of Western hymns, and, on rare occasions, piano melodies. This limited musical expression restricted broader participation within the congregation**.**

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[33] Franklin Hutabarat, "History of Church Music: A General Overview," *Jurnal Koinonia: Fakultas Filsafat Universitas Advent Indonesia* 15, no. 1 (2023): 58.

[34] Evans Amponsah-Gyan, "Biblical Perspective of Music and Worship: Implications for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church," *World Wide Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development* 12 (2018), 74.

[35] Herbert Jr. Lockyer, *All The Music of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_music_in_the_biblical. accessed December 25, 2024.

[36] Theodore W Burgh, *Listening to the Artifacts: Music Culture in Ancient Palestine* (A&C Black, 2006), 1.

Historically, Christian churches of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often opposed certain forms of dance. Figures such as C.F.W. Walther and other American Lutherans explicitly prohibited dances involving close physical contact, suggestive movements, or music deemed capable of arousing excessive passions or music deemed capable of arousing excessive passions, with reflections of these worldviews observed outside their jurisdiction and extending to Africa.[37] Although these views originated in Western contexts, missionary activity similarly transmitted attitudes to African settings, including Ghana.

The limited incorporation of indigenous Ghanaian worship styles by Western missionaries was influenced by the misconception that regarded local instruments as fetish objects.[38]This perception reflected broader cultural and theological biases of the time rather than an objective assessment of Indigenous musical traditions. Consequently, the early converts were segregated from their families into designated settlements known as "missions."

Even those who were literate to a large extent did not fully enjoy services with hymn singing as a result of cultural undertones of the hymns, which differed from the African worldview. In support of this, A. A. Agordoh observes that the largely illiterate majority perceived missionary worship as lacking vitality and emotional depth, finding greater spiritual fulfillment in traditional practices characterised by spontaneous prayer, singing, and dancing.[39] The resulting marginalization of illiterate and semi-literate members created a cultural gap that contributed to the rise of African independent religious movements.[40]

Due to the perceived inadequacies of Western liturgy, a fertile environment emerged in the early twentieth century for developing independent churches with distinct musical cultures.[41] These were characterised by the composition of Ghanaian spirituals and the incorporation of handclapping and traditional instruments. This development challenged the long-standing dominance of orthodox churches by offering alternative forms of worship that were more aligned with the spiritual and social needs of local communities. Such creativity made worship more participatory and culturally relevant.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Ghanaian intellectuals in music, theology, and sociology, including figures such as Casely Hayford, Aggrey, Danquah, Nkrumah, Busia, Amu, and Nketia, challenged missionary notions of cultural superiority.[42] Their efforts played key roles in redefining the relationship between Christianity and African cultural identity. Their critiques created space for the integration of indigenous traditions into Christian worship, including "gospel music", thereby legitimising local contributions and shaping a distinctly Ghanaian Christian identity.

Polarisation within older mission churches, which drew marginalised groups toward emerging denominations, compelled mainline churches to adapt. This led to the gradual incorporation of clapping, indigenous singing styles, and dance into orthodox worship, contributing to the evolution of gospel music in Ghana.[43]

In the context of the Methodist Church Ghana, an offshoot of the British Methodist tradition, hymn singing remains central to worship and continues to play a significant role in its liturgical identity**.** In addition to hymns, African-developed *Ebibindwom* ("Akan sacred lyrics") is an integral part of Methodist liturgy. These songs often reflect scriptural themes and reinforce the message of the sermon.

Aside from the hymns, African-developed *Ebibindwom* ("Akan sacred lyrics") form a distinct part of Methodist church worship liturgy, where the song basically reflects on portions of scripture to buttress the point made by the preacher for the day.

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[37] Mawusi Foster Eddison and Klutse Eric Kwadzo, "The Church Music, Transition and Reforms in the Ghanaian Christian Church," *International Journal of Culture and Religious Studies* 4, no. 1 (2023): 51.
[38] Eddison and Klutse, "The Church Music, Transition and Reforms in the Ghanaian Christian Church," 51.
[39] Alexander A Agordoh, "The Present State of Church Music in Ghana," *Research Review* 16, no. 1 (2000): 32.
[40] Agordoh," The Present State of Church Music in Ghana," 32.
[41] Agordoh," The Present State of Church Music in Ghana," 32.
[42] Eddison and Klutse, "The Church Music, Transition and Reforms in the Ghanaian Christian Church," 33.
[43] Eddison and Klutse, "The Church Music, Transition and Reforms in the Ghanaian Christian Church," 54.

Paradoxically, it was through the initiatives of Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman, a Methodist (Wesleyan) missionary, that *ebibindwom* (Akan church lyric) gained acceptance within Christian worship, illustrating that not all missionaries resisted cultural adaptation; some actively facilitated the integration of indigenous elements.[44] This development laid a foundation for incorporating local musical traditions into Ghanaian Christian worship.

Beyond the Methodist Church of Ghana, various mainline churches have contributed in different ways to the development of church music in Ghana. Each denomination has adapted musical elements in response to its theological orientation and congregational needs.

Among Christian churches in Ghana, there is a growing trend of interdenominational exchange in musical practices. Western hymns, once largely confined to mainline denominations, are now incorporated into newer Christian movements. At the same time, indigenous musical expressions, including local hymns, traditional instruments, and handclapping, are increasingly embraced in both historic mission churches and contemporary Christian groups. This convergence reflects an ongoing process of liturgical negotiation and cultural synthesis within Ghanaian Christianity.

The Role of Church Music in Church Services and the Response by Congregants

From the Bible, Church music, also known as liturgical music, encompasses traditional sacred choral forms such as masses, motets, anthems, and cantatas, and is characterised by a reverential quality that exalts the name of Christ in a manner intended to draw all people toward him (John 12:32). Hustad additionally defines church music as music composed or performed by human beings for the purpose of serving divine intent, and is typically manifested within the contexts of worship, communal fellowship, and mission-oriented activity.[45] James White clearly outlines three main types of music typically found in worship: congregational music sung by all participants, choral music performed by a select group, and instrumental music, which may be accompanied by movement.[46]

Music plays a pervasive role in the church because it actively shapes many aspects of church life. The primary purpose of music in the church is worship; according to Kraeuter, the worship of God constitutes the fundamental purpose of human existence, and as such, a life of worship should permeate all aspects of human thought, speech, and action.[47] Kibor also corroboratively observes that music plays a vital role in church worship, as it allows people to lift their voices and hearts to God.[48] She explicates her point by quoting Terry Wardle, who avers that music intertwines sermons and prayers, transforming worship into a joyful celebration of God's self-giving, where Christians passionately proclaim His worthiness.[49] To this end, Method Moyo posits that God, the central figure in worship and creator of life, gifted humanity with the skill of music to glorify His name and enrich lives, but its purpose is fulfilled only when offered sincerely, as tarnished music loses its impact and fails to honor Him.[50] Gleaning from the above, music serves as a unifying element in worship, seamlessly integrating sermons and prayers to create a dynamic and heartfelt expression of God's worthiness.

Ristua and Yustinus Polhaupessy emphasise that church music has a profound transformative role in shaping the character of the congregation, not only enriching the spiritual experience through worship, but also touching the emotional, social, and moral dimensions of their lives.[51] This is achieved through music's teaching function in the church, where it is used to convey Christian values, reinforce doctrinal beliefs, and meet the social and recreational needs of the congregation.

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[44] Agordoh, "The Present State of Church Music in Ghana," 32.
[45] D. P. Hustad, *Jubilation II: Church Music in Worship Renewal* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 22.
[46] James F White, *Introduction to Christian Worship Third Edition: Revised and Expanded* (Abingdon Press, 2010), 100-102.
[47] T. K George Janvier, Leading the Church in Music and Worship, second ed. (Jos: ACTS, 2007),1 aeuter. Keys to becoming an Effective Worship Leader (Hillsboro: Training Resources, 1991), 6.
[48] Esther J Kibor, "Music in Worship Service," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 25, no. 2 (2006): 131.
[49] Kibor, "Music in Worship Service,"131.
[50] Method Moyo, "The Role of Music in Church Development: A Case of Highfield Church of Christ " (Bear Valley Bible Institute, 2022), 1.
[51] Yohanna Ristua and Yustinus Polhaupessy, "Character Transformation through Music: An Analysis of the Role of Music in Character Building of the Congregation and Music Accompaniment at GKI Solafide Sereh," *Jurnal Pendidikan Mandala* 10, no. 1 (2025): 259.

The evangelistic role of Church music is highlighted by Makwenda, as cited by Moyo, who affirms that hymns played a central role in converting local people to Christianity, as repeated singing helped them better understand the new religion.[52] Moyo further contends that when performed well, church music transcends its role as a worship aid, serving as a powerful tool for teaching, evangelism, edification, nurturing, spiritual growth, and healing. [53]The symbiotic relationship between Christians and music has led people to describe Christianity as "the singing faith" or "the singing religion."[54] Aniadze et. al. further quote C. Nwekwa, who describes the close association between music and religion in the following words: Music and religion are intertwined, with music in religious practices acting as a healing force that resonates with the emotional aspects of an individual.[55] The above assertions bring to the fore the central position of church music in mission.

In commenting on the significance of congregational music, Kibor quotes Carol M. Noren, who submits that congregational music is significant in worship as it fosters participation, reinforces faith through biblical truths set to music, connects attendees with familiar and engaging songs, and serves as both a spiritual practice rooted in Christian tradition and an evangelistic tool to reach non-believers.[56] The significance of instrumental music cannot be underestimated against the backdrop of the euphoria that accompanies it, leading worshippers to their Maker.

Role of Music in African Life and Thought

African culture, along with the historical struggles that have shaped its societies, is deeply embedded in its musical traditions. Music in African societies is not simply an artistic form but a multidimensional cultural practice whose functions vary according to context, particularly within religious, social, and political spheres. In traditional African society, music is a communal practice involving individuals of all ages, and it is so deeply integrated into work, social, and religious activities that it cannot be meaningfully separated from the broader fabric of everyday life.[57]

African religious hymns serve a tripartite function of reparation, thanksgiving, and petition, and, beyond these roles, they also function as moral didactic tools that emphasise virtuous conduct while condemning unethical behavior.[58] Inherently, African music promotes moral virtues while simultaneously condemning immoral conduct. Deductively, one of the cultural mechanisms that subtly and often unconsciously encourages African peoples to adhere to ethical norms and avoid wrongdoing is African music.

African music is inherently value-laden, as it variously extols, exonerates, or justifies positive qualities while condemning or attributing blame to negative ones, and in certain instances, it also renders moral judgments by identifying and critiquing ethical transgressions and social injustices across different African contexts.[59] Corroboratively, Asigbo argues that, for Africans, music-making transcends mere displays of artistic virtuosity, functioning instead as a medium for moral instruction as well as a means of spiritual connection with the transcendent realm.[60] Basically, Africans regard music as a tool for correcting moral deviance and as a medium through which a wayward society may be revitalised, such that certain forms of African traditional music may be seen as harbingers of moral transformation, given that folk musicians deliberately employ their art to influence social behavior.

Traditionally, song lyrics have played a central role in African cultural expression, serving as a vital medium to convey the richness of African heritage and reflecting its significance across multiple

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[52] Moyo, *The Role of Music in Church Development*, 2.
[53] Moyo, *The Role of Music in Church Development,* 2.
[54] Janvier, "Leading the Church in Music and Worship, 1."
[55] Samuel Aniadze et al., "Music in Christian Religious Worship in Ghana: Hohoe Municipality in Focus," *American Research Journal of Humanities Social Science* 6, no. 6 (2023): 90–100.
[56] Kibor, "Music in Worship Service, 132-133."
[57]Laura C. Boulton, *African Music* (USA: Folkways Records and Service Corp, 1957), 5.
[58] Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa,"180.
[59] Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," 180.
[60] A. Asigbo, "Re-Inventing the Wisdom of the Ancients: Moral Signposts in Mike Ejiagh's *Akuko N'Egwu*," in *A Bountiful Harvest: Festschrift in Honour of Very Rev. Msgr. Prof. J. P. C. Nzomiwu*, ed. A. B. C. Chiegboka, I. Okodo, and I. L. Umeanoluue (Nimo: Rex Charles and Patrick, 2012), 690.

dimensions of cultural life.[61] Tailored to the Ghanaian communities, music goes beyond mere entertainment, acting as a medium for communicating diverse messages to the public. The lyrical content often embodies meanings that are readily understood within the indigenous cultural context but remain obscure to those outside the community.[62] Apoɔ Festival songs, celebrated across the Bono and Bono East Regions, serve as a medium for critiquing social ills and encouraging behavioral change within the Bono society of Ghana.[63] The Apoɔ festival permits the use of "insult songs" as a form of emotional release, enabling the purging of resentment and ill will while symbolically cleansing the soul.[64] Giving credence to the above, Rattray's point is echoed by Nyarko-Takyi, who argues that the lyrics of songs performed during the Apoɔ Festival among the people of Techiman function as a medium for publicly exposing or denouncing the misconduct of community members, particularly that of the chief.[65] Similarly, *Adowa,* a traditional music and dance form of the Akan people performed at ceremonial occasions in Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire, functions not merely as entertainment but also as a significant medium of communication.[66]

This implies that music functions as a vital medium of communication among diverse ethnic groups. It serves as a means through which communities preserve and protect their histories and customs, while also providing a channel for concealing sensitive knowledge, including their strengths and vulnerabilities, particularly from rival groups.

Paradox between High Participation in Church Music and High Rate of Societal Evil

From both biblical and African perspectives, music is widely understood to possess an inherently transformative power. It is not merely aesthetic or recreational; rather, it serves as a medium through which moral, spiritual, and communal values are communicated and internalised. Consequently, engaging in music, whether through singing or dancing, without embodying the ethical and spiritual messages it conveys undermines the very purpose for which such music is composed. This paradox is particularly evident in many church settings across the country during Sunday and mid-week services, where participation in music is high, yet observable transformation in behaviour remains limited.

Over the years, it has been consistently observed that while congregants, especially young people, actively respond to the rhythm, lyrics, and emotional appeal of gospel music, the expected moral and spiritual transformation is often absent. Many individuals enthusiastically dance and sing along to gospel songs, displaying outward expressions of joy and devotion, yet continue to adhere to behaviours they ostensibly renounced upon their professed encounter with Christ. This pattern is not confined to church services alone but is also evident in various public and social gatherings, including funerals, outdooring ceremonies, marriage celebrations, birthday parties, and other communal events where gospel music is prominently featured. The excesses in dancing to songs in church form the background for Reverend Joseph K. Gyimah, Leader of the True Light of Christ Church, assertion that the church is fundamentally a house of prayer and a space for solemn reflection, rather than a venue for entertaining or suggestive forms of dancing.[67]

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[61] Gertrude Nyarko-Takyi, *Our Past, Our Guide: A Study of The Performance of Apoɔ Festival Songs of the People of Techiman in the Bono East Region of Ghana* (Master's Thesis: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2023), 31.

[62] Nyarko-Takyi, *Our Past, Our Guide: A Study of The Performance of Apoɔ Festival Songs of the People of Techiman in the Bono East Region of Ghana*, 26.

[63] Nyarko-Takyi, *Our Past, Our Guide: A Study of The Performance of Apoɔ Festival Songs of the People of Techiman in the Bono East Region of Ghana*, 33.

[64] E. Victor Ashihene, *Apoo Festival* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1980), 15.

[65] Nyarko-Takyi, *Our Guide: A Study of The Performance of Apoɔ Festival Songs of the People of Techiman in the Bono East Region of Ghana*, 28.

[66] Nyarko-Takyi, *Our Guide: A Study of The Performance of Apoɔ Festival Songs of the People of Techiman in the Bono East Region of Ghana*, 29.

[67] Reverend Joseph K. Gyimah, available at: https://www.modernghana.com/news/61315/clergyman-cautions-against-provocative-dancing-in-church.html/ as accessed on 21st April,2026.



Figure 2: Congregants dancing during a church worship service in Ghana.[68]



Figure 3: Contemporary expressive worship practices among Ghanaian Christians.[69]

In this context, the renowned Hiplife artist Kofi Kinaata, in his popular song Things Fall Apart, critically highlights the phenomenon of moral inconsistency among many Christians. His work exposes the apparent disjunction between professed beliefs and lived realities, suggesting that for many, the transformative potential of music has been diminished to mere entertainment. As a result, individuals who sing about moral virtues such as chastity, honesty, and integrity often do so without any corresponding commitment to practicing these values in their daily lives.

This contradiction is particularly striking when one considers the range of social vices explicitly condemned in gospel music. Issues such as fornication, adultery, theft, bribery and corruption, envy, hatred, selfishness, involvement in "get-rich-quick" schemes, marital infidelity, prostitution, backbiting, gossip, malice, unforgiveness, and even themes of witchcraft accusations or spiritual manipulation are frequently addressed in song lyrics. Yet, paradoxically, the same individuals who fervently participate in singing and dancing to these messages during religious gatherings are often implicated in these very practices during the week. This pattern underscores a troubling disconnection between musical participation and ethical transformation.

[68] Available at: Funny Dance in church Ghana - YouTube/ as accessed on 21st April, 2026.
[69] Available at: maxresdefault.jpg (1280×720)/ as retrieved on 21st April, 2026.

The situation thus brings to the fore a significant gap between church music and social transformation among contemporary Ghanaian Christians. While music continues to occupy a central place in worship and communal life, its intended role as a catalyst for moral renewal appears to be compromised. From the standpoint of the philosophical principle of cause and effect, this persistent disconnect suggests the presence of underlying factors that inhibit the realisation of music's transformative purpose. Therefore, addressing this issue requires a critical examination of these factors and the implementation of deliberate interventions aimed at restoring the integrity and efficacy of church music as a tool for genuine spiritual and social transformation in the lives of believers.

Factors Contributing to the Paradox

Commercialization of Gospel Music

The transformation of gospel music from a predominantly ministerial vocation into a commercial enterprise has generated both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, commercialisation has improved production quality, broadened audience engagement, and increased the visibility of gospel artists through digital platforms and other media. On the other hand, it has contributed to a discernible shift in the motivation underlying musical composition, with evangelistic and spiritual objectives increasingly being overshadowed by commercial interests and profit-oriented considerations. Consequently, gospel music, which has traditionally served as a vehicle for evangelism and spiritual formation, is increasingly susceptible to market-driven influences that may compromise its theological and ministerial integrity. Closely related to this development is the growing tendency for the social recognition and influence of gospel musicians to be determined by their commercial success, celebrity status, and financial achievements rather than by the extent to which their ministry glorifies God and fosters spiritual growth. Consequently, costumes and visual elements used in gospel music videos are, in some instances, selected primarily for their potential to enhance the song's popularity and commercial appeal rather than to reinforce and faithfully communicate its theological message. This shift in emphasis increasingly commodifies worship, transforming it into a marketable product instead of preserving its primary purpose as an expression of reverence for God and a means of nurturing the spiritual formation of believers.

Weak Theological Formation

The influential nature of music in human life necessitates that songs convey sound and accurate theological messages, since many listeners may accept their content uncritically. Regrettably, many contemporary Ghanaian gospel songs promote an unbalanced theology by emphasising personal prosperity, miracles, and material blessings while giving limited attention to essential Christian doctrines such as repentance, holiness, endurance, faith, love, discipleship, the cross, and sanctification. In some instances, gospel songwriters and performers possess a limited theological and hermeneutical framework, and this inadequacy is inevitably reflected in the lyrical content of their compositions. In other instances, although the composers may have a sound theological foundation, the desire to produce commercially successful songs that gain widespread public acceptance and viral attention on social media platforms often takes precedence over theological accuracy and doctrinal integrity. Consequently, this imbalance may lead some believers to assume that the Christian journey is free from trials, a position that is inconsistent with sound biblical teaching. By presenting a balanced theology, gospel music can effectively prepare believers for both the privileges and challenges of the Christian faith, thus fostering spiritual maturity and resilience.

Performance Culture

The use of stage performances as a teaching medium enhances communication and audience engagement. However, the professionalisation of church music has sometimes encouraged a performance-oriented culture where technical excellence and entertainment overshadow the spiritual purpose of worship. Consequently, choirs and worship teams may prioritise stage presentation, audience approval, and musical perfection over facilitating genuine encounters with God. The biblical

message communicated through gospel songs, which is intended to rebuke, edify, correct, convict, transform, instruct, train, cleanse, and comfort believers, is increasingly reduced to a source of rhythmic entertainment, with little opportunity for theological reflection or spiritual formation. This reduces spiritual encounters to rehearsed performances. When performance replaces ministry, worship risks becoming a spectacle rather than an act of devotion and spiritual edification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The persistent concern that church music is increasingly failing to fulfil its theological and liturgical purpose requires a critical reassessment of stakeholder attitudes toward this central component of Christian worship. The following reflections reorganise the author's concerns into coherent thematic areas, with corresponding recommendations aimed at addressing the identified distortions.

Reclaiming the Theology of Calling and Spiritual Formation

At the core of gospel music practice lies the need to recover its understanding as a divine vocation rather than a mere artistic enterprise. Gospel musicians, composers, singers, and instrumentalists must recognise their role as participants in the prophetic ministry, particularly in its *forthtelling* dimension. This implies that the creation and performance of gospel music should emerge from sustained spiritual disciplines such as prayer, scriptural study, fasting, and meditation.

Song composition, therefore, ought not to be driven by personal ambition or commercial considerations, but by discernment of divine revelation. In the same vein, instrumentalists and church singers, who function as mediators of these musical messages within congregational settings, must engage in both spiritual and technical preparation analogous to that o f preachers. Their effectiveness as ministers depends on an intimate relationship with God, through which their service becomes a conduit for divine purpose.

Church music is a ministry to God and His people, not a talent show or a form of entertainment or a business venture. Church musicians are ministers who lead people in worship and should be discipled in righteousness, humility, sacrifice, punctuality, commitment, and similar virtues to ensure excellent delivery of their ministry.

Ethical Integrity and the Witness of Lifestyle

Inconsistencies between message and lifestyle undermine the credibility of gospel music as a medium of transformation. The principle that *"action speaks louder than words"* is particularly relevant in this context. Instances where gospel musicians promote holiness in their lyrics while simultaneously projecting indecent or morally questionable images, especially in music videos and public performances, create a disjunction that weakens their spiritual authority.

These contradictions are often rationalised by the perceived need to attract public attention or achieve commercial success. However, this tendency represents a troubling prioritisation of fame and financial gain over integrity and holiness. Moreover, the replication of such practices by church-based singers further entrenches the problem within worship contexts. To restore credibility, gospel musicians must embody the very values they proclaim, since many serve as role models to their followers. Ethical consistency between faith and practice is indispensable if their music is to effect genuine spiritual transformation among listeners.

Doctrinal Soundness and Theological Accountability

A significant proportion of contemporary gospel music, when subjected to rigorous hermeneutical analysis, reveals deficiencies in doctrinal accuracy. Of particular concern is the proliferation of prosperity-oriented themes that present an overly simplistic and unbalanced portrayal of the Christian life—often suggesting that faith guarantees material success and freedom from suffering.

In socio-economic contexts such as Ghana, where poverty is widespread, these messages are easily embraced but ultimately detrimental. They foster shallow spiritual formation and contribute to disillusionment and backsliding when believers encounter adversity.

To address this, there is a pressing need for structured theological engagement between gospel musicians and major stakeholders such as the Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Ghana, in collaboration with the Musicians Union of Ghana. This collaboration could take the form of seminars, workshops, and theological training platforms designed to equip songwriters with sound biblical frameworks. This would improve the production of music that is contextually relevant and doctrinally faithful, thus strengthening its transformative impact.

In addition to theological engagement, just as regulatory authorities subject food and pharmaceutical products to rigorous testing before certifying them as safe for public consumption, the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) could institute a formal review and certification process for songs, including gospel music, before their release into the public domain. Such a mechanism would promote higher standards of quality and accountability, as artists would be less inclined to produce substandard work if there is a risk of failing to meet established criteria and consequently having their music rejected. This certification system would ensure that gospel music adheres not only to artistic standards but also to sound theological principles. To facilitate the effective implementation of this policy, the regional offices of MUSIGA should be adequately resourced and empowered to carry out the certification process within their respective jurisdictions, thus decentralising the review system and reducing the administrative burden on the national office. By introducing this formal review process in collaboration with relevant Christian bodies, MUSIGA could safeguard the integrity of gospel music, encouraging musicians to engage more critically with both scripture and doctrine before disseminating their work. This proactive approach would enhance the doctrinal depth of gospel music, fostering a greater alignment between faith and practice in the public sphere.

Reorienting Success: Faithfulness over Popularity

The prevailing assumption that sensational or theologically weak content is more marketable than biblically sound music poses a serious challenge. While it may be true that certain forms of content gain rapid popularity, gospel musicians are called to a higher standard of stewardship. Faithfulness to scriptural truth and divine instruction must take precedence over public appeal. In this regard, success should be redefined not in terms of visibility or commercial gain, but in terms of spiritual authenticity and alignment with God's word.

Institutional and Governmental Support for the Creative Arts

Beyond ecclesiastical concerns, there is a broader structural issue relating to the development of the creative arts sector. The Ghanaian government must recognise the economic and cultural potential of this industry, particularly its capacity for job creation and foreign exchange generation.

Investment in infrastructure, such as accessible recording studios, performance spaces/theatres, and training institutions, would enable the discovery and development of talent, especially in underserved regions. Democratising access to such resources would ensure that gifted individuals are not hindered by geographical or economic limitations, thereby enriching the gospel music landscape.

Liturgical Balance and Generational Inclusivity

Finally, attention must be paid to the aesthetic and pastoral dimensions of church music. Although music offers numerous psychological and spiritual benefits, excesses in volume, tempo, or stylistic preference accompany its effectiveness. A generational divide is evident: younger congregants often prefer high-energy, fast-tempo music, whereas older members tend to favour slower, more contemplative forms such as hymns. A deliberate effort to balance these preferences within worship services can foster inclusivity and unity across age groups. One possible approach to addressing this challenge is to organise dedicated music services that accommodate the energetic and contemporary preferences of younger congregants while exercising careful discernment in song selection during general worship services, where members of diverse age groups participate.

Rewarding Theological Excellence in Gospel Music

A key motivator for elevating theological integrity in gospel music is the introduction of an award category by the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) that recognises gospel musicians whose work demonstrates sound theological depth, regardless of public popularity or social media metrics. This initiative would encourage artists to prioritise doctrinal soundness over mere commercial success. The award should focus solely on the theological integrity of the music, with voting participation from both the general public and theological experts. A portion of the total points could be allocated for public voting, while a more significant portion would be determined by a panel of seasoned theologians and music professionals. This approach would incentivise gospel musicians to produce songs that are not only spiritually rich but also engage critically with Scripture, offering a counterbalance to the trend of chasing popularity. By elevating such works, the union can help cultivate a culture where theological depth is cherished as much as commercial success, ensuring that faithfulness to biblical truth becomes a hallmark of gospel music.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that music has occupied a central place in human society from antiquity, functioning not only as an artistic expression but also as a powerful instrument of communication, education, cultural preservation, spiritual formation, and moral transformation. Drawing from biblical, historical, and African perspectives, the study established that music has consistently served as a medium through which individuals and communities express their relationship with God, preserve collective memory, transmit values, and shape ethical conduct. Both the Old and New Testaments present music as an indispensable component of worship and devotion, while African societies similarly employ music as a vehicle for communal identity, moral instruction, and social cohesion. The study further traced the historical development of church music in Ghana, demonstrating how integrating indigenous musical traditions into Christian worship enriched congregational participation and strengthened the contextual expression of the Christian faith. Notwithstanding this rich theological and cultural heritage, the study identified a significant paradox within contemporary Ghanaian Christianity: Although participation in church music has become increasingly vibrant and widespread, this enthusiasm has not consistently translated into corresponding spiritual maturity, ethical transformation, and Christlike living. In many instances, gospel music has gradually shifted from its formative and transformative role toward entertainment and emotional satisfaction, weakening its capacity to inspire genuine repentance and moral renewal.

In light of these findings, the study argues that reclaiming the transformative purpose of church music requires deliberate and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders, including church leaders, theologians, gospel musicians, worship teams, Christian institutions, and policymakers. Greater emphasis must be placed on theological soundness, spiritual formation, ethical integrity, and the intentional use of music as a ministry of discipleship rather than merely as a performance or commercial enterprise. Equally important is the need to preserve the richness of Ghana's indigenous musical heritage while ensuring that contemporary musical expressions remain firmly grounded in biblical truth and sound Christian doctrine. Ultimately, church music should not merely entertain, excite emotions, or attract large audiences; rather, it should function as a powerful instrument through which God transforms lives, nurtures authentic Christian discipleship, strengthens the witness of the Church, and contributes meaningfully to the moral, spiritual, and social renewal of Ghanaian society. Only when music faithfully fulfils this divine purpose will it truly become a catalyst for lasting personal transformation and communal flourishing.

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