



# The Historical Development, Cultural and Aesthetic Significance of Akan Musical Art form (*Ebibindwom*) in the Liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author JKB did the conceptualization of the research idea and led the research group as the principal investigator for the study, collected data and wrote the paper. Author SK supervised the research, assisted in the further development of the research concept, data collection and wrote the manuscript. Author DA contributed to the supervision of the research, assisted in the development of the research methodology and wrote the manuscript. Authors EB and JA read and gave substantial inputs in the writing of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

The Methodist Church Ghana has been using different kinds of musical styles in its liturgy since its inception and notable amongst them is *Ebibindwom* (Akan musical art form). The objective of this ethnographic study was to ascertain the aesthetic and cultural significance of *Ebibindwom* in the liturgy of the church. Direct observation and interviews of qualitative research method were employed to elicit primary data from respondents such as Reverend Ministers, Directors of Music, and Christ Little Band members who are conversant with this musical tradition. Again, extensive literature was drawn on the subject matter relying upon secondary data from numerous documented sources relevant to the study. Findings indicated that during worship service, the texts seen in *Ebibindwom* were repeated and thus afforded those who could not read the opportunity to participate and memorise some of the words from the scripture. Also, *Ebibindwom*, since its

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introduction into the liturgy, was intended to allow the illiterates and the older generation to participate in the worship but the contemporary situation transcends participation to include extra-liturgical and social dimensions. It is recommended that the leadership of the church should encourage the Christ Little Band to intensify their activities and organise more singing competitions as a step in preserving the history of their music traditions rooted in the socio-cultural landscape of the Akan people.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics; canticles; Christ Little Band; *ebibindwom*; liturgy; musical art forms.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When the Methodist Church Ghana was established, the indigenous people made several attempts to find an everlasting solution to the problem in which Akan musical styles could be introduced into its liturgy (Agordoh, 2010). During the period, most of the Akan converts were illiterates and could not understand the Europeans and therefore unable to sing the hymns that were introduced in their worship service. The few Akans who were able to sing the hymns felt taken away from home because they did not understand the hymns they sang, and in any case, the English language was not their mother tongue [1-4]. Conscious efforts were made by Rev Joseph Rhodes Dunwell to introduce Ghanaian vernacular and indigenous music into the worship service [5]. Evidence in the literature proves that *Ebibindwom* provides and solidifies the liturgical culture and artistic practice of the Methodist Church to both members of the church and onlookers [6]. The Fantes had their music like *Asafo*, *Ompe*, *mmomome* and *Adenkum* which they were familiar with before the coming of the Western missionaries. The early musicians among them replaced the words of the indigenous music with the texts from Bible (Dor, 1992). [7] When the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman arrived at Cape Coast in 1838 to continue from where his predecessors ended, a centenary anniversary was held to mark the birth of Methodism in England by Rev. John Wesley. At that service in Cape Coast, several singing groups performed which included older women who sang in the Fante dialect of the Akan language with words taken from the Bible [8]. Their style of singing, which included the use of indigenous musical instruments like *donno*, *frikyiwa*, *pati* and rattles coupled with full participation of the indigenes caught the attention of Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman and other Europeans who were present (Amuah, 2016) [9,7]. These members were encouraged by Rev Freeman to embrace this musical type into the worship service in the Methodist Church Ghana which became known as *ebibindwom* (Kane, 2019; Amuah, 2013) [6].

In the 1950s, when the Church introduced camp meetings, it was the *ebibindwom* they used to evangelize to the people to enable the Church to spread Methodism.

The evolution of *Ebibindwom* has been traced to numerous sources of Akan beliefs. Essamuah [5] gives three bases of *Ebibindwom*:

- i. The *Anansesem* (Spiderman's stories): The Akan folktales are narrated and delivered, the audience exclaim, and the listeners may stop the narrator and ask for clarification, pass a comment, or make a positive gesture. The stories are vital foundations of entertainment, maintaining moral standards, and promoting religious beliefs.
- ii. The *Asafo* (songs of the old military enterprises): The *Asafo* was performed in wars, calamities, and on joyous occasions like the installation of chiefs. The songs for invocation, provocation, or jubilation are sung to invoke the ancestral spirits to assist in a military campaign.
- iii. The *Adenkum* (calabash music): This involves the Akan traditional festivals to mark the beginning of a New Year, planting, harvesting, reaping, and rites of passage where people give appreciation to the divinities for a successful life.

By bringing in *ebibindwom* from the background of Akan culture, the Methodist Churches in Ghana have produced a new kind of music from purely local resources. Through the use of *ebibindwom*, many people considered to be officially illiterates became scripturally literate because the people came to know the content of the stories. The research gap in the study of musical traditions of the Methodist Churches in Ghana that needed a thorough academic probe was why the *ebibindwom* musical style was interwoven as part of the hymns used at the time of the establishment of the church. Also, there was the need to find out the aesthetic and cultural relevance of the *ebibindwom* in the

activities of the Methodist Church Ghana. Thus, the overarching objective of the study was to ascertain the historical development and aesthetic and cultural significance of *ebibindwom* in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

This study was carried out using the ethnographic study design under the qualitative method [10] research approach with observation and interviews [11] as the main tools for data collection. The researchers carried out the study in five Dioceses in different parts of Ghana, namely, Kumasi, Obuasi, Fosu, Northern Accra, and Cape Coast. However, the researchers stayed in the Cape Coast Diocese for a year and a half studying the historical evolvement of the *ebibindwom* from the elderly members of the Methodist Church. The researchers also assumed both participant and non-participant observation positions at different phases of the study to be able to understand and appreciate the aesthetic and cultural relevance of the *ebibindwom* in tandem with the socio-cultural landscape of the Akan ethnic society. Extensive engagements with the study subjects (Fraenkel et al., 2012) during each service and various rehearsal meetings of Christ Little Band were important to understand the history, aesthetic and cultural significance of the Akan musical art form (*Ebibindwom*) in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana.

### 2.2 Sample Selection Procedure and Sample Size

The study subjects were selected from three regions in Ghana, which are Central, Ashanti, and Greater Accra regions. These regions were purposively selected because that is where the Methodist Church Ghana started with the *Ebibindwom* as the bedrock of its activities. The study subjects included elderly Reverend

Ministers, Laity, Christ Little Band members, and Methodist Church attendees. The elderly respondents from the age of 50 years were engaged because they were much knowledgeable in the historical development of the *Ebibindwom* (Table 2). The researchers were convinced that these people have in-depth knowledge and lived experiences on the topic under discussion [12]. The sample size for this study was 24. Recruitment of the study subjects was based on readiness and availability to take part in the study [13]. The 24 recruited study participants (Table 1) offered rich data that assisted in sufficiently answering the research questions set out for the study. Thus, the data saturation point was reached.

**Table 1. Sample categories of the study participants**

Sample category	Number recruited
Reverend Ministers	8
Laity	5
Christ Little Band	6
Methodist Church Members	5
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>24</b>

### 2.3 Data Collection Procedures

The researchers utilized varied forms of engagement based on the preferences of the study participants to solicit the data for the study. These included face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and video interviews [14,15]. The structured and unstructured methods were employed to elicit information from the study participants in their offices, homes, and worship places on the set dates. The moral principles in telephone and video interviews such as ensuring flexibility and openness in the behaviour and tone of the voice of the researchers as well as making the room quiet where the calls were placed from disturbances, were duly followed [15]. The semi-structured interview guide for the various subjects based on the research questions for the study was vetted

**Table 2. Age and regional distribution of the study participants**

Age distribution of the study participants		Regional distribution of study participants	
Age range	Number	Location in Ghana	Number
50-59	4	Central Region (Fosu and Cape Coast Dioceses)	11
60-69	3	Ashanti Region (Obuasi and Kumasi Dioceses)	7
70-79	9	Greater Accra (Northern-Accra Diocese)	6
80-89	6	<b>Total= 24</b>	
90-99	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>		

by four skilled ethnographic researchers. The researchers used English, Twi, and Fante dialects to interact with the study participants. The responses received were recorded on tape recorders and mobile phones after permission was sought from the respondents and were played back at home. The responses were critically studied, compared, and contrasted with the existing documented information for similarities and differences using the procedural steps in the qualitative thematic analysis.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Historical Development of *Ebibindwom* in the Liturgy of the Methodist Church

It was revealed from the responses that when the Methodist Church Ghana was established in the early 1830s, the indigenous people made several attempts to find an everlasting solution to the problem in which Akan musical types could be introduced into the liturgy of the church. The Wesleyan missionaries saw the need to include local songs into its worship because they realized that the indigenes already had their music traditions. The Reverend Joseph Rhodes Dunwell also realized the importance of the local language as well as the indigenous music and encouraged the indigenes to incorporate them during worship service starting from the Cape Coast Diocese in 1838. One of the study participants disclosed:

*'Ebibindwom was first accepted in the Methodist Church by the missionaries and the reverend ministers as a form of negotiation to win the indigenous people to embrace the Christian Church'* (RM-4, Personal Communication, 4/5/2019).

Again, at the centenary service to mark the birth of Methodism in Cape Coast, several singing groups performed and they included illiterate women who sang in the Fante dialect of the Akan language with words taken from the Bible. It was mentioned by the respondents that their style of singing which included the use of indigenous musical instruments like *donno*, *frikyiwa*, *pati* and rattles coupled with full participation of the indigenes caught the attention of Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman and other Europeans who were present and they were encouraged by Rev Freeman to embrace this musical type into the worship service. The *Ebibindwom* is said to be a

positive response received from the management of the Church to meet the requirements of some of the followers who, as indicated earlier, had challenges with spoken English. One of the elderly Methodist Church members at Cape Coast told the researchers:

*'Freeman realized that the non-literate members of the church did not participate in the singing of the English hymns. Therefore, he encouraged the members to sing the Biblical text in their Fante traditional tunes giving way to the birth of Ebibindwom'* (MCM-3, Personal Communication, 14/6/2019).

In the 1950s, when the Church introduced Camp Meetings, *ebibindwom* was used to evangelize to the people to enable the Church to spread Methodism. The introduction of *ebibindwom* was an upright attempt to inspire the adult non-literate to join fully in singing in the church which was enjoyed and appreciated by all and sundry because of the addition of hand-clapping, drumming, and dancing. The prominence of *ebibindwom* for feeding and satisfying members in the Methodist Church Ghana competes favourably with Western hymns, particularly among countryside parishioners. What makes this musical variety important is its wholly local heritage. Through the use of *ebibindwom*, many people considered to be officially illiterate became scripturally literate because the people came to know the content of the stories. The Methodist Church Ghana's practice of *Ebibindwom* in her outreach assignment reflected the belief of the Wesley brothers in which Methodism was realized as a singing movement.

#### 3.2 The Historical Use of the Biblical Scripture in *Ebibindwom* in the Liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana

The singing of *Ebibindwom* is a form of Word ministration or preaching the word of God to the congregants. The Methodist Church Ghana affirms the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and practice. For this reason, *Ebibindwom* composed with the word of God becomes a way of spreading the Word of God. The singing of *Ebibindwom* thus is an extremely significant and exceptionally influential form of Word ministration. The Word of God is ministered through songs as one sings *Ebibindwom*. One of the interviewees indicated that:

'As Methodists, we sing our faith because the words that are used in the Bible are used to compose the music and if you lose your Bible and have your hymn book, you still have the Bible, this is because the Bible is what we read and hymn book comes to compliment it. He continued; instead of reading it, we sing it and that, one makes it all meaningful as you walk around, as you go to bed, as you rise, and as you listen to the sermon being preached, a hymn just comes up and it confirms what is being preached or what you are reading. He concluded that the Bible is Supreme and the rule of faith' (L-2, Personal Communication, 12/3/2019).

*Ebibindwom* is said to be a visual extension of Biblical poetry adding beauty to the church's liturgy. Good music is a recipe for the soul which uplifts and blesses the inner being and is a language and food for the soul [1], (Agordoh, 2003). *Ebibindwom* offers new ways of explaining the Word of God for a better understanding of biblical truth and one can recollect the story easily as the song is remembered. The singing of *Ebibindwom* based on the preacher's sermon is one way to affirm that some members of the congregation have understood the message.

An example of text used in *Ebibindwom* is recorded in Matthew 25:14-30, where Jesus is stressing the importance of a person using the God-given skills assigned to him or her. In the parable, three servants were given the talents: one had five; the second had two and the third had one. This means that everyone was treated differently and was expected to work with what had been given. In the parable, God wants every Christian to attach importance to their talents and use them for humanity. Those who put their talents to good use will be rewarded while those who allow their talents to lie unused will not enjoy any benefit.

### **3.3 The Cultural Relevance of *Ebibindwom* in the Liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana**

The ideas of Akan popular culture are used to cover Akan cultural activities in which relatively large numbers of people in our communities are involved in one way or another (Bame, 1991). The emphasis lies in the participatory nature of activities like dance, drama, festivals, music, and funerals. *Ebibindwom*, which is a cultural heritage of the Methodist Church Ghana, cannot

be divorced from its cultural relevance in Christian worship. *Ebibindwom* has contributed to shaping the Christian church to promote the Akan content of worship while promoting cultural unity that could have been hampered by the imposition of the English language. This was evident in the views expressed by some of the study participants:

*'The performance of Ebibindwom bridges the gap between literate and illiterate members of the church and the activities of the church has become an all-inclusive rite as all the people do engage in the singing and other activities of the church whole-souled (CLB-2, Personal Communication, 9/2/2019).*

For example, the activities and practices are not restricted but open to every member of the church who wished to participate in them. This means that such public events are owned by the whole community. Turkson [16] views *Ebibindwom* as an art form and cultural activity whose medium is founded on the traditions of the Akan people. *Ebibindwom* serves as an important part to display the cultural way of life of the indigenes in the community where a church is located and depicting the people's heritage as Methodists. Songs have physical and structural shapes that help to indicate identity. Thus, the nature of a song succinctly expresses the cultural values of the people from which the musical beat originates from. *Ebibindwom*, thus reveals the church's identity of the people as Akans and as Methodists to the entire world. This is because *Ebibindwom* started with the Methodist Church Ghana and all who sing are displaying what they have learned from the Methodists. Although the Methodist Church has its style of singing *Ebibindwom*, one cannot take the credit away that *Ebibindwom* reflects the identity of the people called Methodists. Again, the *Ebibindwom* sung in the church reflects Akan society and highlights the high moral standards and values of the people. It is sung to bring about transformation in the life of the individuals. Furthermore, while the present generation is moving away from traditional music such as *asafo*, *apirede*, *asaadua*, *ompe*, *apatampa*, *Ebibindwom* may serve as the hope to preserve the Ghanaian culture.

Historically and culturally, *Ebibindwom* has become part of the Methodist heritage through which one can trace unique factors that continually help shape the church's liturgical practices in general and musical expression in

particular. Out of the Ghanaian cultural background has come the natural propensity for a people called Methodists to create a new form of singing *Ebibindwom* in the worship liturgy of the church which goes, comparatively, deeper into the hearts of the people.

Dancing does an imperative part in the cultural expression of Akans. Dancing permeates all their social and cultural activities; apparently, dance is life, a way of thinking, living, and communicating (Bame, 1991). The singing of *Ebibindwom* always results in bodily movements. Anytime *Ebibindwom* is sung in the church, the congregation has to stand up. The Cantor usually does not stand in one position. He or she will move to and fro, to capture the people's emotions. That alone brings about natural body movement unlike what Westerners may do when singing in the church like toe-tapping music or standing straight without any body movement. *Ebibindwom* is simply a song that naturally invokes a physical response as seen in other Akan songs. It thus builds self-esteem since an adept dancer is admired by onlookers. Also, the gestures accompanying the singing communicate thoughts of love, geniality, goodwill, group solidarity, and security. The dances are an integral part of worship in the Methodist Church Ghana and have a curative as well as a cathartic effect on the supplicant and other participants who are revitalized through the worship service. More importantly, the dances are recreational and they heighten group identity as well as social cohesiveness in the entire community. The rigorous nature of most dances promotes personal aerobic movements that culminate in healthy living.

In Akan culture, dancing cannot be over-emphasized as far as instrument playing, singing and handclapping are concerned. Akans dance for joy, love, hatred, and to bring prosperity [17]. On the important role dance plays in Christianity, Amuah [6] posits that music covers the composer's behaviour and viewpoint of purposefulness, deliberately rhythmical, culturally patterned sequences of non-verbal body movements, and the motion of having interest and aesthetic value. With such conceptualization, the *Ebibindwom* must meet each of these criteria to be danceable. That is to say, dancing is a dialogical activity between the dancer and the music using the cultural tools of the dancer to communicate a message. Dance must communicate some kind of message which include the performer's intention to communicate

and also the performer's transfer of information to the audience (Bame, 1991). We can therefore affirm that the dance that accompanies the *Ebibindwom* in Christian worship communicates a message to worshippers, one of which is to show appreciation to God.

Singing in the Akan context is not conceivable without simultaneous dancing. As the dance is an integral part of Akan cultures, one may not leave unconsidered the possibility that it could form part of the liturgical gesture and actions. It is unwise to pronounce music and dance categorically as irrelevant in Christian culture [18]. Their inseparability and appropriateness should not be under-estimated, for the practice of dancing and singing *Ebibindwom* can be a constructive contribution to liturgical celebrations. On the other hand, *Ebibindwom* is considered to be one of the focal points for shaping rituals that can be viewed as pertinent to the shaping of the Christian liturgy and must be seen through the lens of worship in invisible institutions. Singing of *Ebibindwom* is a form of "enculturation," that is interpreting the Christian declaration in a procedure suitable for specific cultures. Jenkins [19] opines that the indication of becoming accustomed to religious exercise in an indigenous state of affairs sounds at worst inoffensive and, at best, critical for any evangelistic attempt. He argues that individuals vary in their cultural appearance, and what works in one cultural setting would not work in another. Thus, enculturation and contextualization happen as Christians sing *Ebibindwom*. *Ebibindwom*, as a traditional music type in Christian worship, helps in the direction of raising the inner self of believers to a place high enough to help interact with the Supreme Being and with one another. It has also executed the role of disseminating the principles of morals of the Church. In this regard, *Ebibindwom* has been capable enough to provide Christians with indigenous worship songs to promote home-grown religion.

Generally, music is an action that consists of numerous societal functions or roles. Since its inception, *Ebibindwom* has taken an essential role in the evolution of the church, particularly in the areas of ethical development and social functions of the church. The social functions here include the main congregational worship, naming ceremonies, marriages (both customary and Christian weddings), and funeral celebrations. The capacity and the requirement to participate in these social roles constitute what makes us human, and the expressive effects of appealing

in these roles include experiences of reward, fun, joy, and happiness. The pattern of singing is such that every member of the congregation feels part of the worship. As a result, *Ebibindwom* serves as one of the major tools that create socialization in a cultural environment. As the singing goes on, the entire congregation stands making all feel part of the service [18]. Traditional Ghanaian marriages and outdoorings are social functions that provide avenues for showcasing Ghanaian culture and so much may be used. At a customary marriage, for example, an *Ebibindwom* singer may be invited to feature as a linguist in the celebration. At every stage in the course of the rite, *ebibindwom* may be sung to address or honour the bride for waiting patiently for someone to ask her hand in marriage. For example, a song entitled “*εγε σε γερετween*” meaning “it pays to wait” can be performed. This is a song with a strong moral accent against teenage pregnancy.

Funeral celebrations also differ from society to society and individual to individual depending on the social relationships and circumstances of death. The funerals of kings or royals are different from that of the masses. During funeral celebrations, *Ebibindwom* features prominently and provides messages for emotions, and encourages people when they are bereaved. This indicates that *Ebibindwom* plays an indispensable role in the totality of the way of life of a people.

### **3.4 The Cultural Setting of *Ebibindwom* and its Performance in the Methodist Church Ghana**

At the time the traditional method of making music became part of the official life of the public, and the physical venue for concerts could be any part appropriate for communal activity. It could be an unrestricted place or secluded space to which only those very well familiar with the event are given admission [20] (Agordoh, 2003). A regular place of worship like the shrine, groove, mausoleum, and courtyard of a house was where traditional music could be performed. *Ebibindwom*, as a musical style or art form, is performed in the Methodist Church Ghana during worship service. Aside from the worship service, it can be performed during other important occasions in the life of the individual. The major occasions are birth, puberty, marriage, and death. History has it that, puberty (for girls) and death were the occasions that called for musical performance. In the present-day environment, for

example, all four life cycle events call for the use of music. In the Methodist Church Ghana, the Church Choirs lead the flock to sing hymns, and responses, either in English or vernacular, singing anthems as well as chanting the canticles. The *Ebibindwom*, on the other hand, is introduced into the sermon by the Christ Little Band or individuals when the soloists are motivated or led by the Holy Spirit for the congregation to join in singing the responses. The Christ Little Band does not feature at puberty, but it features conspicuously in the remaining life cycle events.

#### **3.4.1 Outdoorings (Naming ceremony)**

During outdoorings, a musical performance is held on the day of birth of the individual because a newly born child is considered an alien and is numbered an associate of the family if it stays alive on the eighth day. On that day, outdoorings and christening rites are organized deprived of music. To the Methodist blood relations, however, every single child needs to be baptized and given Christian and or native names to show his or her acceptance into the family. At the naming ceremony which is usually held in the chapel, the Western hymns are prominently used. The Christ Little Band positions themselves in a semi-circle or horseshoe formation. The virtuoso or the soloist stands in front of them and sings from their repertory pieces that communicate messages of “welcome”, “good conduct”, “long life” and “wealth”. During this event, relatives, friends, and well-wishers of parents are asked to join a party to make merry and dine together. Even though hymns and popular musical tunes are executed, *Ebibindwom* from the Christ Little Band or some individuals is heard as well.

#### **3.4.2 Wedding/Marriage**

In Ghana, a traditional wedding is more or less an agreement between the families of the imminent couple than a party. Oladele (2018) states that at present, marriages could be contracted under three different statutes, namely; Customary Marriage, Marriage of Mohamedans (Cap.129), and Marriage Ordinance (Cap.127). All of the above-mentioned statutes make provision for the registration of the following three types of marriage recognized by the laws of this country respectively: Marriage under Customary Law, Marriage accordingly to Islamic Law, and Christian or Civil marriage. During the celebration, or at the close of any of these, some

musical performances are not left out. Concerning the customary marriage, the music features prominently when the lady comes from her family to set up permanently with the husband. At the event, there is an extensive meal at which traditional recreational bands are called to offer music that can be danced to.

The wedding celebrated in the church is a musical event just as one finds in a worship service; hymns, danceable tunes, praises, and worship songs as well as anthems are sung by the various singing groups and the congregation (Essandoh, 1990). *Ebibindwom* which is usually performed by the Christ Little Band would be heard. During the performance of *Ebibindwom*, the cantor or the soloist does the recitation as he or she stands in front or at the back for the members and the congregation to join in at the chorus. The themes that are selected from the repertoire are usually based on peace, love, understanding, and happy marriage.

### 3.4.3 Funeral / Death

The funeral celebrations of individuals differ greatly depending upon the social class or relationships and circumstances leading to one's death. It is believed that the funeral of kings or royals differs from that of the masses. Premature deaths like accidents, suicide, and a host of others are distinguished from natural death through normal illness or old age. There are generally three stages of an everyday funeral that are open to the community. They include [21]:

- i. Pre-burial funeral rite which includes wake-keeping
- ii. Burial rites
- iii. After-burial funeral rites celebration which consists of:
  - Family gathering or final funeral rites
  - Memorial service or Thanksgiving

It is observed that, before the burial, the Christ Little Band, in a procession with a wooden rod which is painted black and white stripes in their hands, visit the dead body where it is laid. The cantor who stands at one end of the lifeless body commences with one of their songs and other participants sing the chorus part and move around the dead body three times. They give their last respect and prayers are said to serve as a farewell message to the member. The performers generally position themselves where

the dead body is laid. The members of the group step up and down, flanked by some members of the lineage, associates, and supporters who are seated on benches or plastic and metallic chairs.

At the funeral service, the theme for the occasion has been on death, so the hymns, *Ebibindwom*, danceable tunes, and the homily, all reside in the life hereafter. As the homily progresses, the cantor stands in front of the members and walks to and fro, and relates the text of the songs to the life history of the dead member. Sutherland-Addy [22] indicates that at a funeral, the entire congregation may join the chorus part of *Ebibindwom* as the lead singers may walk slowly up and down. After the funeral service, another procession follows to the cemetery, but the singing aspect is done by the church choir to lead until the grave-side service is over. The group would go on and perform rites to the deceased to lead him or her into the ancestral world. These rituals play an important role in establishing the dead person as an ancestor in the direction to keep decent relations with those who are still alive. The subsequent action after the burial is a family gathering or the final funeral rites whereby popular live bands typically provide music to entertain mourners, sympathizers, well-wishers, and the general public. The memorial or thanksgiving service comes after the family gathering where the usual worship service with its hymns, praises and worship, chants, and danceable tunes are offered and *Ebibindwom* is sung during the homily. To re-assert life even in the face of death, *Ebibindwom*, usually performed during the funeral celebration, is lively and danceable.

### 3.5 The Aesthetics in the Song Texts Used in the Liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana during the Performance of *Ebibindwom*

Among indigenous Akans, and for that matter Akans, passion for *Ebibindwom* is based on several satisfying sensations, such as music appreciation and activation of distinct feelings, and aesthetic music judgments (e.g., beauty) [23]. The use of aesthetic terms such as beauty or ugliness is an element of artistic experiences in general and of *Ebibindwom* in particular as it is used in the liturgy.

It was observed during data collection that most of the *Ebibindwom* performers in the Methodist Church Ghana make use of imagery and symbols in their music to communicate to their



audience [24-26]. In some of their music, the congregants are usually reminded about their responsibilities towards God, the community, and their fellow human beings most especially children, women, the poor as well as other dependents or wards. In some of their music, for example, emphasis is placed on how to achieve success through proper training of their children for everybody in the community to benefit. The ability to do this successfully is considered to be "good", "delightful", "pleasurable", etc. as far as the "beautiful" character of those children is concerned. These are the aesthetic attributes highlighted in most *Ebibindwom* sung in the liturgy [27,28].

Music, whether creating it or listening to it, is connected to their feelings and experiences. Such events include special events such as births, marriages, and funerals. Listening to and reacting to *Ebibindwom* can improve aesthetic enjoyment. Listening requires either inciting a visual, verbal, emotional, or mental reaction. The aesthetic standards (prettiness, ugliness) to judge music are therefore derived from both the words of the song as well as how the entire congregation reacts to the song texts. In the *Ebibindwom* song texts, the performers make it clear that no good thing comes on a silver platter. It involves hard work, good planning, strategizing, and careful execution of the plans and strategies. For example, in pounding *fufu*, one needs extra energy to pound it, and for one to succeed, one needs some amount of effort to put in to achieve what one wants and in order to help the vulnerable in society, one needs extra sacrifice. The singers use the *ahenkyew* or *nkonim abotire* (crown) as some of the imageries to communicate to their audience.

Aesthetic discusses what is beautiful, interesting, exciting, uplifting, and entertaining in such art forms as music, painting, drama, sculpture, literature, and dance, among others. In a general way, depending on the nature of the art forms, the "beautiful" is experienced through any one, two, or more of the five senses of perception [29]. In *Ebibindwon*, the aesthetic is experienced directly through, primarily, the sense of hearing and, at most, the sense of sight, in a disinterested contemplative manner as the singers display their skill.

This emotional state expressed through these musical art forms, according to the theory, is experienced as "beautiful." The experience of "prettiness," which can also be translated as

"aesthetic consciousness," "feeling par excellence," or "sublimated emotion," is different from one's daily experiences of emotions such as anger, love, compassion, joy, and sorrow. The essence of singing *Ebibindwom* is enjoyment and such enjoyment is experienced as long as its stimuli continue. Such an experience of delight, which cannot be expressed in words or grasped by the mind, comes in a flash and is akin to the delight of knowing or experiencing God [27]. Apart from using imagery and symbols, the singers use philosophical words in their music. Philosophical words or music as used in this work refer to music or songs that have been written about a certain belief or underlying principle, or critical mindedness. They are written or composed to carry a definite proverbial thought which is understood in the work. The anticipated message is not open to the average mind or at first hearing; it is understood in a way that calls for a certain amount of intelligence before establishing the intended message.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the historical development, and aesthetic and cultural significance of *Ebibindwom* in the liturgy of the Methodist Church Ghana. The key findings revealed that when the Methodist church was founded in Gold Coast now Ghana, hymn singing tradition was part its liturgy. To satisfy the musical needs of all the indigenous people especially, the illiterates and the older women, the church allowed the local people to introduce the musical style which came to be known as *Ebibindwom*. Familiarity of language in music made the worship more impressive and more effective, thus, *Ebibindwom* performance continues to bridge the gap between the illiterates and the literate members of the Methodist Church Ghana. With the singing of *Ebibindwom*, worship life becomes an all-inclusive rite as the people in the congregation participate in the singing. While most of the members who were illiterates could not sing the hymns written in English, both the literate and illiterate could sing *Ebibindwom*. The worship embraces everybody as all congregants experience the same music and are familiar with the genre. There is no distinction between the young and the old and the literate and the illiterate when *Ebibindwom* is sung. *Ebibindwom* which makes good use of the scripture has seen lots of repetition of the texts. The repetition of the words afforded those who could not read the opportunity to participate and memorize some of

the words from the scripture before, during, and after the worship service. The pivotal roles of the Ebibindwom that ensure cultural unity among the church congregants are highly commendable. The precept should be followed by the various religious denominations in Ghana to strategically put up measures to use the activities, especially their songs and doctrine in inciting cultural unity and harmony amongst their members. This can only be achieved when religious groups tactfully incorporate the elements in the cultures of the ethnic societies in the activities of the church. Due to the significant contributions of singing groups in the activities of the Methodist Church, future researchers must investigate their roles and how they impact the cultural unity and cohesion of the congregants.

## CONSENT

Informed consent forms were signed or thumb printed by all the study participants to voluntarily partake in the study.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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