

**Rooting African Youth Ministry in a Theology of Joy: A Journey towards Contentment
through the Promotion of Indigenous Expressions, the Case of ‘Poetship’ and
Appellations in Ghana**

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Abstract:

Youth ministry’s zest to prepare the youth for a joyous future is saddled by a sense of hopelessness and identity crisis in Africa. If hope is anticipated joy as Jürgen Moltmann asserts then a ministry effort that offers hope by liberating from a colonial bondage mentality and inferiority is needed to forestall joy. This paper moves for such effort by advocating for the adoption of aspects of indigenous African traditions as effective tools for youth ministry. Through a qualitative case study of ‘poetship’ and appellations, the hybridization of African traditions with Western approaches for the building of youth ministries rooted in joy is advocated for in Africa.

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Introduction

Contemporary youth culture is a rapidly changing phenomenon, and ministries that seek to minister to the youth have no alternative than to respond to, or for the better of it, though it seldom happens, lead the change. Generations come and generations go but the Word of the Lord remains timeless and unchangeable. Christian ministry then has a biblical mandate to decode the timeless Word of God into the culture of each generation for their relevance and assimilation. As Richard Osmer and other theologians in the Paul Tilich tradition¹ maintain, a good practical theological approach to Christian ministry works with the understanding of the tasks of studying what is going on (the descriptive-empirical task), seeking to understand why it is going on (the interpretive task), trying to explore what ought to have gone on (the normative task), and finding out how to respond to the situation (the pragmatic task). That is, practical theological task starts with praxis and ends with praxis.² It is action-theory-action, so that for each generation, what is going on can be a doorway for Christian ministry. To wit, the evolving youth culture for each generation, and emerging phenomena that prove most attractive and workable to youth in various generations become good points of entry for Christian youth ministry. A good study of trends, emerging issues, and phenomena then becomes imperative for youth ministry as it helps to put the ministry at a cutting edge.

African youth ministry is faced with the task of getting young people settled and contented with their cultural identity. With the world fast becoming a global village who would have thought the question of cultural identity still remains non-ignorable? However the torrent of globalization is unable to stand an individual's desire to settle on the four basic questions of life: "Who am I?", "Where do I come from?", "What is my purpose?", and "Where am I going?" In a respective order, these questions border on personal identity, group identity, purpose identity, and destination identity, and finding the right answers is key to the realisation of joy and contentment. It is true that throughout life man is in search of answers to these questions but the search, and the anxiety that come with it, reaches its apex during the youthful

¹ Paul Tilich's correlation vision maintained that Christian truth responded to corresponding existential human questions and needs.

² Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 4.

ages. In a globalised environment such a search endeavour is even more complex and difficult, for though we may be seen as one, or for the better of it, we have to be seen as one, there is the insatiable desire to know who we are and to be settled in our group and personal identities in order to have the confidence to engage. This introduces a tension or a ‘clash of identities’ in the contemporary youth, a reality common to all young people.

The situation is however more precarious among contemporary African youth who are fast parting with their cultural identity under the influence of the Western youth culture. It is common knowledge that many young Africans have become copycats of everything from the West, whether good or bad. Thus whether at home or in the diaspora, Africa is fast losing its cultural identity, and the effect is the gradual erosion of its values, virtues and several precious cultural heritages among her younger ones. The resultant acculturation can be attributable to the acute identity crisis among contemporary African youth. When coupled with a past of colonization, and a background of a deliberate separation of culture from Christianity by the early missionaries on the continent, the situation becomes dire. As a result, themes such as inferiority complex, anxiety, colonial bondage mentality, hopelessness, and identity issues are crucial to youth ministry in Africa, and there is an obvious need to not only offer hope but to root youth ministry in Africa in a theology of joy. The question, ‘How can youth ministry help the young people in Africa to flourish in freedom, their ‘Africanness’, contemporaneousness, and Christianity as a means to making them become contented in joy?’ becomes impeccable since joy impinges on both faith and culture. It is this question that this paper seeks to address.

Such an endeavour is needful because as Westernization and globalization have their good sides, there is also the need not to overlook the fact that God created humans to be of different cultures, and for that matter He celebrates Africans for who they are. God is seen in Scripture as celebrating cultural distinctiveness, for it is He who “marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26) and also put in place an eschatological plan of celebrating the unique distinctiveness of all nations, peoples and tribes (Revelations 5:9; 7:9). The paper explores the possibility of a ‘glocalized’ youth ministry context that hybridizes African indigenous traditions with Western approaches and opportunities as a way of dealing with the identity crisis syndrome among contemporary African youth and by so doing giving them “a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3).

Youth Ministry and the Theology of Joy

In the book *Joy in the New Testament* William G. Morrice³ identifies varieties of joy as exultant joy, optimism, gladness or good cheer, pleasure, courage, hilarity, boasting, blessedness or happiness, leaping for joy, inward joy (contentment), shared joy among others. He takes time to examine the Greek etymology for these categories of joy and also traces the theology of joy in Jesus as well as all the writers of the New Testament. He ruminates on Matthew Arnold's⁴ concept of "conquering, new-born joy" as emanating from the birth of Jesus and filling the world. Such joy gets to the believer from the love character of the Father through the death and resurrection of Jesus Who is the personality of joy. The believer thus becomes a partaker by the born again experience, *koinonia* (fellowship with the faith community), and life in the Holy Spirit. Joy is noted to be firmly rooted in New Testament theology and showcased as being an essential element in the Christian faith. Morrice thus advocates, in line with Nel F. S. Ferré⁵, that the Christian life should be lived in joy and characterised by an identity of joy.

Karl Barth, himself described as a joyous person, is one of the sources Morrice draws from. Barth's theology of joy is traceable in his *Church Dogmatics*, and John Mark Capper's 1998 University of Cambridge PhD thesis on "Karl Barth's Theology of Joy" treats extensively what Barth offered theology on the subject of joy. Capper interprets Barth as offering that "lack of joy is a symptom of human sinfulness; gladness is a sign of humanity in which persons are truly free to be themselves."⁶ That is, like Morrice, Barth sees a life of joy as a possibility only through salvation and also sees freedom as giving joy. Barth's theology therefore sets the Easter event as the highest echelon in evoking joy: "The glory in which humanity participates through the act of God in Jesus Christ, known in the Easter event, is the basis for human joy."⁷ God is noted as a God of joy who offers his people joy through the Easter event.

Barth also maintained that in God and humanity, the fullness of being oneself (especially oneself with another) is the basis for joy. That is, joy is being truly oneself and finding contentment in oneself.⁸ This means there is joy and contentment when people settle in their identity. Such a discovery is crucial to ministering to young people who, by Eriksonian psychosocial theory, have identity as their main task. Erik Erikson has offered that the

³ William G. Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament* (Exeter, Devon: The Paternoster Press, 1984).

⁴ See Arnold Matthew, *Lyric, Dramatic and Elegiac Poems* (Macmillan, 1981), Vol. 2, 297ff.

⁵ Nels F. S. Ferré is noted to have remarked: "the Christian faith is not a dirge but a pain of joy." See Nels. F. S. Ferré, *God's New Age* (Na: Epworth Press, 1964), 56.

⁶ John Mark Capper, "Karl Barth's Theology of Joy", (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1998), 12, accessed September 13th, 2018, <https://www.pdfdrive.com/capper-1998-phd-karl-barths-theology-of-joy-e44730612.html>

⁷ Capper, "Karl Barth's Theology of Joy", 12.

⁸ Capper, "Karl Barth's Theology of Joy", 13.

development of the individual is in eight stages with each stage being both an opportunity for growth and a danger for failure. At adolescence, the human individual performs the developmental task of 'Identity versus Role Confusion'. Here, the person develops understanding regarding his role in society, and direction regarding interpersonal and occupational issues. Identity concerns, according to Erikson, therefore, are the main tasks facing adolescents,⁹ and the domains in the definition of identity that Erikson sees as paramount include occupation and ideology- religious, political, cultural, and other social beliefs.¹⁰ Erikson posits that as the adolescent's identity derives from these domains, it also directs their commitment to roles and values in these domains.

It stands to reason from the foregoing that an endeavour to help young people settle in their identities (be it personal, cultural, purpose, Christian identities, etc.) is one that is sure to offer them joy as Karl Barth is interpreted to have intimated. When youth ministries help in the identity discovery journey of young people they succeed in unleashing great joy for them. Since youth in crisis tend to depend on outside sources such as friends and family for approval on their identity, there exists an open door for youth ministry in this regard.

It is true that when young people rightly settle into their identities they are confident in themselves, become content with themselves and would normally not compare themselves with others. They appreciate their uniqueness, recognise what they have in common with others, and what they see in others that they do not have. That is, they know their strong and weak points and accept them. They do not also evaluate themselves in the judgment of others, and are able to fraternize with others.

Another important aspect of Barth's theology of joy is his proposition that that theologians have the noble task of promoting joy. They must themselves exude "the joy and confidence that overcome fear and influence their subjects to do same, for the theologian who has no joy in his work is not a theologian at all"¹¹. It stands true then that in order to promote a youth ministry of joy, youth ministry educators and practitioners must themselves experience joy, and as already discussed, this will come through an authentic experience of salvation, partaking in the *kononia*, and living in and by the Spirit. So-called experts who live outside the sphere of this experience cannot affect young people with joy.

Jürgen Moltmann's theology of joy shares a lot in common with that of Barth. For instance they agree on humanity partaking in joy through the Easter event. Moltmann however

⁹ Gary L. Creasey, *Research Methods in Lifespan Development* (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2006), 307.

¹⁰ Nancy J. Cobb, *The Child* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001), 579.

¹¹ Capper, "Karl Barth's Theology of Joy", 13, cited from *Church Dogmatics* CD I.2.85.

goes further to assert that “In faith we accept ourselves as we are and gain new confidence in ourselves because we have been trusted more than we deserve and ever thought possible.”¹² That is, for Moltmann faith gives the believer a new identity in which he prides himself for the honour done him and the trust reposed in him. Such honour produces joy in the believer.

Similarly both Barth and Moltmann link divine joy with divine beauty.¹³ God’s beauty is presented as exuding joy by both theologians. For Moltmann the desire for joy is universal to all humanity,¹⁴ and freedom is a prerequisite for joy. Moltmann’s political theology expounded in *Theology and Joy* therefore questions the possibility of living a joyous life in the absence of peace such that there could be joy in the midst of suffering, laughter in its tortured forms, and freedom in the midst of slavery. To him, joy is experienced in full when restrictions and burdens are removed and the human individual basks in the freedom with which he has been redeemed by Calvary. He therefore calls for liberation, arguing that freedom, joy and beauty go hand in hand in the divine will. For Moltmann “freedom needs more than to be realized, it must be celebrated.”¹⁵

Moltmann’s view of joy, for which freedom is part, is therefore that without fear and intimidation: “The mechanism of fear and of worry always keeps men down on the ground. Freedom begins when men suddenly find themselves to be without fear.”¹⁶ That is, freedom from fear, anxiety and other complexes is a key emphasis in Moltmannian joy which emphasises that humanity must be free to experience abounding joy.

Our End Product: Disciples of Joy

From Barth, Moltmann, and Morrice we get the sense that as evidence of being rooted in joy youth ministries must be seen to be producing disciples who have experienced salvation, live in *kononia*, and in step with the Holy Spirit. They must have the evidence of gladness, optimism, cheerfulness, courage, hilarity, blessedness, happiness and contentment. Like the Lord Jesus, and as Capper says of Barth, such youth must live in the daily experience of joy and be carriers of it so they radiate such joy that is nothing than the beauty and glory of God. Such people do not fall short of affecting other lives. Sin must be something they eschew, for as Barth intimated, lack of joy is indicative of sinfulness. The rootedness of youth ministries in

¹² Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, 53.

¹³ See for instance *Theology and Joy* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), 58.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, 26.

¹⁵ Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, 45.

¹⁶ Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, 37.

joy must also produce young people who are free in every aspect of the word since, as Moltmann asserts, there cannot be absolute joy without freedom.

With the impact of joy our youth must not live in fear, worry, inferiority complex, and anxiety because true joy comes with freedom from all these and more. From such joy-infested youth one can expect that they are truly responsible and accountable since they know they have been trusted more than they deserve and ever thought possible. Such youth of joy would have been raised by educators of joy who have themselves been transformed by the Easter event, are in the *kononia*, and are walking in step with the Holy Spirit.

Barth, Moltmann and Morrice also combine to reveal that the fecundity of such a theology in our youth ministries must as well be evident in the production of young people who are settled in their identity as joy is “being truly yourself and finding contentment in yourself.”¹⁷ It is from such a settled identity that contentment, confidence, appreciation of one’s uniqueness, and sociability flows. Such youth walk in the pride of their identity because they know they did not give themselves that identity but the Almighty One did, and He is pleased to see them in that identity. But more than that, they walk in the confidence of their new identity-the identity of joy that is sequel to their transformation experience.

Contentment in Identity

A worthy question at this point is how African youth ministries can produce youth of such calibre of joy. Well, it must start with dealing with the problem. First heal the sick and then he will work. Where is the dignified African identity, where did it go? The search for a historical insight into the dignified cultural identity of the African is often obstructed by the event of colonisation on the continent. The episode of colonisation is one major development that clouds the narration of the pre-colonial African cultural heritage and identity. This makes the search for the dignified African identity far-reached. Yet the restoration of such dignified identity is crucial to the African self-understanding, for though “(i)n Christ a person appears as God’s person, not as a Greek, a Scythian, a slave or a freeman,”¹⁸ and “(t)he social, historical, and natural identification recede and decay”¹⁹ so that we put on the identity of our transformation in Christ, it is in a settled identity that Africans can, out of satisfaction and contentment, offer

¹⁷ Capper, “Karl Barth’s Theology of Joy”, 13.

¹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Translated by Margaret Kohl (Tottenham, London: SCM Press, 1989), 292.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 292.

worship and service to their Maker, for how can Africans “sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

The case of a settled identity is a central point for African Christian theology and many of the soil’s illustrious sons have laboured to emphasise it. Hans Visser and Gillian Bediako posit that the major concern for most of Kwame Bediako’s scholarly and pastoral ministry was to help make clear the ‘gospel’ that God “speaks into the African context with an African idiom, and that it is through hearing in the African mother-tongues ‘the great things that God has done’ (Acts2:11), that African theology emerges to edify not only the African Church but the Church world-wide.”²⁰ Kwame Bediako’s passion was to uncover the truth that God is happy to relate with the African the African way, and by so doing minister the contentment of joy to Africans. The question is if this is true why can’t the African relate with God the African way? God celebrates Africans for who they are and loves to see their culture in expression in their worship of Him as well as their ministry execution. To this end the African cultural identity must be celebrated and given a place in Christian worship and ministry.

Local Theology and Indigenous Expressions of Christianity

Theology is not new to Africa because Africans had heard of God, described Him most eloquently, and maintained towards Him proper attitudes of reverence, worship and sacrifice before the arrival of the missionaries. In the words of Emmanuel Lartey, a leading Ghanaian pastoral theologian with mastery in inter-cultural studies, “God cannot be confined in any way. His realm is the whole universe. All people are his concern and there is evidence that he has revealed himself primarily to all people, each apprehending as much of this revelation as it can.”²¹ Traditionally, Africans have related to God and reflected on Him through such means as legends, myths, songs, artefacts, poems, appellations, and proverbs. For instance it has been said that “proverbs are a reflection of the religious ideas of Akans.”²² Lartey cites Akan proverbs such as: *Nsém nyinaa ne Nyame* (God is the source of all things or all wisdom) and *Aboa a onni dua Onyame na ópra ne ho* (It is God who takes care of the animal without a tail by driving away the flies from it) among others as Akans theologizing through proverbs. Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, a Ghanaian Pentecostal scholar who has researched into how the Akan

²⁰ Hans Visser and Gillian Bediako, “Introduction,” in Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Yaounde’ & Akropong-Akuapim: Editions Cle’ & Regnum Africa, 2000), vii.

²¹ Emmanuel Y Lartey, *Pastoral Counselling in Intercultural Perspective: A Study of Some African (Ghanaian) and Anglo-American views on Human Existence and Counselling* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1987), 47.

²² Lartey, *Pastoral Counselling in Intercultural Perspective*, 34.

traditional worldview influences Ghanaian Pentecostal Christology corroborates Lartey in his observation: “the goodness of God cannot be taken for granted but must be celebrated in songs and dance. With such theologizing, Ghanaian Pentecostals reveal how they appropriate biblical notions of God’s goodness.”²³ Thus both Lartey and Quayesi-Amakye give credence to the existence of local African theologies or what some, including Kwame Bediako, have called grassroots theology. Visser and Gillian Bediako also describe the theology emerging from one’s daily experience with life and its attendant struggles with the devil and the victory Jesus offers as grassroots theology. To them such spontaneous theology of the open air, the market, and the home is what must precede and under-girth academic theology.²⁴

A conscious promotion of the indigenous cultural forms of theology or what Kwame Bediako calls grassroots theology is a vital key to the restoration of the African identity among Africa’s young. After all, this was the approach used in the traditional African society to pass on values and virtues to the younger generation-deliberate efforts through oration and other indigenous knowledge systems to pass on knowledge and wisdom.

Afua Kuma, a Model of Indigenous Postcolonial African Christianity

Though scant, indigenous African theology is gradually assuming its proper place in academia. Kwame Bediako for instance has done extensive academic study on Afua Kuma’s grassroots theology. In his book *Jesus in Africa* Bediako treats extensively the prayers and praise of Afua Kuma, an indigenous Christian from the Church of Pentecost in Ghana who reflects on her faith and walk with Jesus Christ in the daily experiences of life. Afua Kuma’s appellations and prayers were said to have been recorded on tapes and later printed out as a book in the Akan language. It was later translated into English by Reverend Jon Kirby.²⁵ Other works on Afua Kuma’s grassroots theology include Philip Laryea’s “Mother Tongue Theology: Reflections on Images of Jesus in the Poetry of Afua Kuma”²⁶ and Darren J. N. Middleton’s *Jesus of Nazareth in Ghana’s Deep Forest: The Africanization of Christianity in Madam Afua Kuma’s Poetry*. Afua Kuma is an example of the many African Christians who demonstrate the African Christian identity. For instance J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, a leading Pentecostal scholar in Africa remarks that “Afua Kumah’s ministry was similar to those of the women in the traditional

²³ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Christology and Evil in Ghana: Towards a Pentecostal Public Theology* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2013), 131.

²⁴ Visser and Bediako, “Introduction” to *Jesus in Africa*, x.

²⁵ See Afua Kuma, *Jesus in the Deep Forest*, translated by Fr. Jon Kirby, S.V.D. (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981).

²⁶ See Philip T. Laryea, “Mother Tongue Theology: Reflections on Images of Jesus in the Poetry of Afua Kuma,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 3.1 (2000): 50-60.

churches who use *ebibidwom* (African lyrics) to recount the mighty deeds of God as outlined in the Scriptures and experienced in the daily life of the African Christian.”²⁷

Indigenous Expressions in Contemporary African Christianity

Currently in Africa there is a ‘remix’ culture that is opening the door for a hybridised ministry context. It is a trendy recreation or remoulding of almost everything. The old is creatively joined to the new to give it a contemporary appeal. In Ghana for instance, high life music which has become a thing of the past is ‘remixed’ with rap to produce a new genre of music that catches fire with the current generation. This trend is discernible in almost all areas. For instance the Guaranteed Trust Print (GTP), a leading fabric (cloth) producing company in Ghana is recording huge sales among the youth as a result of the creative reinvention of an old fashioned formula for cloth making in the home (normally made by grandmothers). It is actually a ‘patchment’ of different pieces of cloth, usually drawn from old women’s relics, into a single piece. It is called *asasaaba* among the Fantes of Ghana. These, among other examples, demonstrate how hybridization has come to be an important development in the African life.

Such a prevailing ‘remix’ culture presents a viable opportunity for Christian youth ministry on the continent. ‘Poetship’, a creative mix of poetry and music in a template of a ‘hybridized’ indigenous African traditions and Western influence, for example, is one ministry that fits so well into such a context. Since postcolonial pluralism promotes the mixing of genres and creating hybrid subject matter, ‘poetship’ can interact with postcolonial thought without fail. No wonder it really catches fire with the young people in Ghana. Similarly the knowledge that “(p)ostmodernism has a hybridizing intent, tearing out the threads of knowing and its cultural context and continually reweaving the threads—a garment being woven, constructed, and “de-woven”, deconstructed, and rewoven and reconstructed”²⁸ is an open door for a ministry approach like ‘poetship’. This is a reality that ‘poetship’ demonstrates, and its spiritual and ‘prophetic’ nature reveals that God is speaking to an audience in a context they can relate to. Such good news applies to the appellations ministry approach which this paper studies as well.

²⁷ J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Signs and Sighs of the Spirit* (Akropong:-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2015), 146.

²⁸ Charles Jencks, ed., *The Post-Modern Reader* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992).

The Case of ‘Poetship’ and Appellations for Contemporary Youth Ministry

Notwithstanding the fact that the contemporary generation of Africans may display an open dislike for some forms of the African tradition, the current trendy ‘poetship’ and appellations have succeeded in picking from the same ‘old basket’ to touch young people in a most unique way. These forms of youth ministry combine music, worship, appellations, poetry, and ‘stagematics’²⁹ in an amazing manner.

Poetship

Christiana Attafuah is twenty-six years of age and hails from the Assin tribe of Ghana. She attended the University of Ghana where she studied History, English Language and also took a short course in Music. In her second cycle education she studied Government, Christian Religious Studies and Literature as her elective subjects. Christiana, fondly called Christie, is a member of the Church of Pentecost.³⁰

Christie is a ‘poetship’ minister, and manages to make time from her busy schedule as a worker with Ghana’s Ministry of Trade and Industry for her ‘poetship’ ministrations. She is a regular invitee to programmes of the youth where she uses ‘poetship’ to minister to them in diverse ways –to exhort, lead worship, revive, remind, comfort, correct, warn, edify, etc. Her messages are delivered in very persuasive ways to the youth. From Christie “‘Poetship’ is a combined word for poetry and worship. It is a deliberate, delicate, and beautiful mix of songs, poetry, adoration, sound, and actions purposely to worship God and minister to people.” In a typical ‘poetship’ piece Christie would start with songs of adoration intended to pull her audience into worship. As the intensity rises she would normally break in with a poem. What would normally follow is a series of songs, poems and actions artistically dovetailed into each other as a complementarity continuum for bringing out the beauty and the punch of the piece. ‘Poetship’ has a lot of semblance with traditional poetry but at the same time differs from it in many ways. Similarly it differs from traditional worship because it is more intentional. It allows for the artistic creation of certain effects to enhance the worship experience. This is one of the excitements afforded by ‘poetship’ that excites young people. It helps them have an intense yet diversified worship experience that is not ‘boring’.

²⁹ A personally coined term for the stage manoeuvres that go with ‘poetship’ and appellations.

³⁰ The Church of Pentecost is a leading classical Pentecostal church in Ghana with presence in 100 countries as of the middle of the year 2018. Though started by an Irish Apostolic missionary, James McKeown, the Church has succeeded in maintaining an indigenous outlook and appeal in Ghana and currently accounts for close to 10% Ghana’s population. See The Church of Pentecost, Chairman’s State of the Church Address for the year 2017.

Christie's giftedness in music and her depth of Bible knowledge as well as her Literature, English Language and Christian Religious Studies background equips her to pick the appropriate content and the right literary devices, genres and style that will best bring out the import of her message. As she confirms, in 'poetship' music is used to treat the poem in worship as well as the message to the people. This is an attribute shared with the African tradition of storytelling. Traditionally the African comes from a story telling background. As stories are told, normally around the night fire in the neighbourhood common places, they are artfully interlaced with *mboguo* (traditional accompanying songs that further help to push down the import of the story). Hence in traditional Africa stories call for some 'break-and-join' treatment with music. This is the pattern Christie's 'poetship' follows. "The break songs make the poetry gain a better understanding and impact among the people. It also helps to arrest and sustain the attention and interest of the audience and also helps to draw music lovers into the message being conveyed through the poem."³¹

Christie's goal, on a ministration platform, is to carry the young people to God in worship. "I aim at God but I go with the people. So I give them a reason to join in."³² In that case she finds herself in the multiple task of worshipping God, leading others to worship Him, and carrying God's message to the people in a culturally relevant way. "In a ministration I may tell you that God is greater and there is no one like Him, and that He is deserving of our bow in worship. After I have said that I do as the people to join me bow before Him. Rather I raise my song that says 'bow before God' and because I have already explained it, my audience has the urge to join me in worship."³³ As a minister her preparations include prayer, waiting to hear from God, getting her old pieces together, arranging the lines, and putting herself in the frame of mind for the ministration.

Another unique characteristic of Christie's ministry is the side of divine inspiration. She confirms having received a good part of her messages inspirationally. This may happen right on the platform during the ministration or prior to her ministrations. "I have received lead lines to great 'poetship' pieces by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For instance I received the piece: 'Don't forget to be present in His Presence' by inspiration during a prayer session." This piece is a call on the need to pay absolute attention whenever one comes into the Presence of God in order not to become distracted and lose what God may have for him or her. Christie also narrates how sometimes she may receive a seed of a thought or an impression in heart

³¹ Interview with Christiana Attafuah at the Pentecost Convention Centre, Accra, 05.01.2018.

³² Interview with Christiana Attafuah at the Pentecost Convention Centre, Accra, 05.01.2018.

³³ Interview with Christiana Attafuah at the Pentecost Convention Centre, Accra, 05.01.2018.

during her time of devotion. She would go on to read about it only for it to turn out to be another piece of poetry. For instance the piece, “This mortal design must not resign to what he has been assigned,” a poetry piece that advocates for commitment, was received in bits during the devotion hour.

Another evidence of inspiration in Christie’s ministry is the sudden control she gains over the use of language when ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit, her English Literature background notwithstanding. For instance though naturally she is not too fluent in the Twi language, she achieves fluency par excellence with the Twi language through inspiration on the platform. “*Kamkam Bi Ho Asem*,” literally “The Story of One Mr. Kankam”, is a typical ‘poetship’ piece received by inspiration, and one par excellence in her use of the Twi language. It begins with a Twi song: *Meye adwuma ama Awurade* which is a personal pledge to avail oneself for the Lord’s work unconditionally and wholeheartedly in order to merit His blessing. In the ‘highs’ of the song the poem flows (as translated into English):³⁴

Do not lazy around what you can accomplish in no time
For we shall be judged for all we shall do
Kaakaaku left a letter behind with the following words:
‘That’s Onokwaa for you! He spent his time talking, cracking jokes, and
slandering
With this all his mates have gone ahead of him in life’
Actually I do not talk about you but of one Mr. Kankam
‘I was looking for one young person who has taken the cross of Christ upon
himself and is driven by its passion to spread the gospel
It is a difficult task but if one had a hindsight of the tears of the Son of God
and remembered the whip-inflicted cracks at His back on way to Calvary one
hot afternoon, he could afford to do it!’
I have a short message: The end is almost at hand
Remember love is also by action
Be committed to the work of God so you will receive your reward someday”
That’s it! I have read it to you, I have told you what is good, O man!
Remember your Creator in the days of your youth so you don’t become
pitable some day

³⁴ Translated from the original poem in the Twi language accessed from www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_AZ2wHYbHo on 24th July, 2018. Other ministrations of hers can be accessed from <https://youtu.be/5C9RNhBjT84>, <https://youtu.be/49hCk3FWTFg>, and from her Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com.christiana.atafuah>.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth so you don't become
pitiable some day
Good bye.

In this peace Christie ministers to the youth to avoid sluggishness and procrastination and to choose to immerse themselves in the work of evangelism to merit an eternal reward. She draws on the sacrifice of the Christ to motivate them to demonstrate their love for God by action. The supposed letter is meant to have been dropped by a fictional Kaakaaku for everyone's lesson. The letter draws attention to how one figurative Mr. Kankam wasted his time and days by becoming a busy body in other people's affairs and through aimless living (it was by this lifestyle that he won for himself the name *Onokwaa* (one whose negative approach to life is common knowledge to the entire society)) and by so doing lagged behind in life. Such ministrations help the youth to aim high in life as well as avail themselves of the work of the Lord, a central role youth ministry must play.

Christ is the centrality of the ministrations of Christie. "My pieces centre on Christ-His death, blood, salvation, and our authority in Christ. They also touch on Christian service, adoration, and praise, and I do this with the youth in mind."³⁵ Sometimes she ends her ministration with an altar call.³⁶ Her pieces such as: "This Jesus is the main deal so do not delay when he bids you come," are normally used for such calls.

Appellations

Based on experiential theology³⁷ God has been given many names and titles among Africans. In Ghana, and among the Akans especially, God is given such names and titles based on people's experience of Him by way of His acts of providence, deliverance, and protection among others. Such names become means by which God is celebrated for what He has done and who He has been to people. God's names and titles such as *Ototorobonsu* (The Great One who creates the rain), *Onyankopon* (The Only God, the Greatest among the rest), *Twereduampon* (The Dependable One), *Bore-bore* (The First, the Creator of all things), *Otumfo* (the Powerful One) among others point to how He has been experienced in Africa. Appellations help to preserve such names and attributes of God among Africans and help to appreciate how

³⁵ Interview with Christiana Attafuah at the Pentecost Convention Centre, Accra, 05.01.2018.

³⁶ This is an invitation to accept Christ. It is a regular part of Pentecostal services.

³⁷ Experiential theology, also referred to as grassroots theology has to do with people's reflections on God as they experience Him in the daily routine of their lives.

the religious and social worlds depend on the remembrance of God's name.³⁸ Traditionally in Africa, appellations are offered to chiefs to praise them for their mighty deeds for the communities they lead such as bravery and victory at battles, demonstration of uncommon wisdom such as can preserve the lives of their subjects in times of adversity, or even the possession of uncommon dispositions. God being the King of Kings (Malachi 1:14c), being superior to all, and having done mightier things is deserving of grander appellations, and this is the notion behind the place of appellations in African Christian worship.

Gideon Osei Quainoo, popularly known as "*Braa Kwaku*" is a 'poetship' and appellations minister. The name B-R-A-A is a self-coined acronym which represents everything he does: BR - Branding, A - Arts, and A- Advertising). He is a Ghanaian, a Fante by birth, holds a diploma in Public Administration from the University of Ghana, and a degree in Marketing from the University of Professional Studies, Accra. While at the University of Ghana Braa Kwaku became part of a literary group on campus through which his talent, which had become quite pronounced during his second cycle education days, was further developed.

Braa Kwaku is now a well celebrated 'poetship' and appellation minister in Ghana. He explains appellation as "giving accolades to someone or a divine being" and adds that in the case of God it is more of "using His characteristics and qualities to worship Him." Gideon Quainoo is very fluent in the Akan language and is very creative and gifted in music. He has the ambition to learn the French language so he can minister to a wider audience. Growing up with his grandmother and uncles, he learnt a lot about the African culture through story-telling, music, and the giving of appellations. He confirms having adopted some of these traditions and modified them as a means of worshipping God. "I always seek to bring the African culture in worship,"³⁹ he reveals.

Inspiration has been part of Braa Kwaku's ministry which has witnessed the outpour of the Holy Spirit on the audience in an amazing manner. This has included *glossolalia*, impartations of the Holy Spirit, people falling under the anointing, etc. For instance he relates: "I was ministering once at Dubai and there was this Philippine in the service who received the baptism of the Holy Ghost when I was singing in Twi. What amazes me is the fact that she was blessed though she did not understand my language."⁴⁰ Braa Kwaku's ministry has made a great impact on the youth who are his target audience. "My passion is to minister to the youth. I use the youth culture as a means of evangelizing them," he reveals. It is also his hope to be

³⁸ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 218.

³⁹ Interview with Gideon Osei Quainoo at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra, 18.03.2018.

⁴⁰ Interview with Gideon Osei Quainoo at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra, 18.03.2018.

able to nurture some of his youthful ‘followers’ in the ‘poetship’ and appellations ministry.”⁴¹ Occasionally he would intentionally create his own jargons as a bait to attract the youth. Gideon believes he is called to communicate the depth of God’s grace to the youth so they do not take it for granted. He makes an extensive use of social media to reach his audience. He is particularly biased to Facebook⁴² and YouTube and would occasionally host his programmes on Facebook live. “Some of the videos I put out there draw a viewership of over a 40,000. Social media helps me to reach a wider audience. According to Braa Kweku a number of his online audience make contact with him to show how his ministrations bless them. People have called him from countries including United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia among others. He also recounts how in the year 2015 two Ghanaian soldiers who had gone for peacekeeping in Lebanon called to thank him for how a video ministration he hosted on YouTube had been a blessing to them. Apparently, being Christians, those two soldiers were starving in what is otherwise an Islamic environment. They chanced upon the ‘poetship’/appellation video in their internet surf and ‘feasted upon it.’ Braa Kweku’s has also received a number of testimonies about people receiving their healing through his ministrations.

He has the passion to go beyond the Ghanaian tradition to borrow other music traditions from other parts of Africa. He also indicated that there are some African instruments that are not used in Ghana that he is trying to explore with the ambition to “assembling indigenous musical instrumentation from every part of Africa in one set to accompany our appellations and ‘poetship’ to give it a combined African colour.”⁴³ George Osei Quainoo also hopes to transcend beyond the ballad kind of worship to the production of ‘poetship’ and appellation with distinct African rhythms such as the *adowa*, the *kete*, and the *fontomfrom*.⁴⁴

Christiana Attafuah and Gideon Osei Quainoo are obviously doing youth ministry, and their individual approaches and styles make use of both the African indigenous tradition and Western aspects of youth ministry. Their proficient use of social media to reach their youthful fans, their flow in the Western youth culture which gives them a ‘swag’ for the admiration of the youth, their acquisition of formal education, their grasp and accurate employ of the indigenous African tradition, their demonstrable lives of joy (evident in their salvation experience, their commitment to the *kononia*, and life in the Spirit) combine to make their

⁴¹ Interview with Gideon Osei Quainoo at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra, 18.03.2018.

⁴² His Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/braa.kwaku1>, gives a lot of information about him and his ministrations. His videos are accessible through his YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg4_VPpEsplKPa_OLJkQRYw, and others such as youtu.be/6AMVshGJDa0

⁴³ Interview with Gideon Osei Quainoo at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra, 18.03.2018.

⁴⁴ These are different genres of music as made by particular drums.

ministries worthy examples of a contextualised youth ministry form that issues forth joy by the promotion of African indigenous expressions in contemporary youth ministry. The careful promotion of such ministry approaches can help to produce young people who are in touch with their African roots yet are contemporary, Christian, and are full of joy. This is a commendable approach to giving the youth in Africa “the oil of joy instead of mourning” for their much lamented identity crisis.

Conclusion

The way forward for an African youth ministry that must minister hope, joy, and contentment to its members; that is being overtaken by models from the West with no sensitivity to the local context; and that is saddled with youth whose cultural identity is unsettled in the face of globalisation and a very influential Western youth culture, is a Spirit-led culturally relevant strategy that carefully incorporates acceptable aspects of the indigenous African tradition with effective Western approaches and opportunities. By so doing a hybridized context, which by the way has proven very attractive to the contemporary youth, is created for ministry. God is already touching people in this new dynamic, and the earlier African youth ministries and their partners joined Him the better. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

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