

The Perceptions of Ghanaian Adventist Youth on the Use of Hymns in Worship

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ABSTRACT—This paper sought to find out the perception of Ghanaian Adventist Youth on the use of hymns in the church. The areas of concern were on what they think about the use of hymns at irregular times, their use at the Divine Service and their use during song services. With the views of a proportionate representation of age bracket, gender, ranking in the youth ministry, and district, a number of conclusions may be drawn from the responses to the questionnaire. The majority of the youth think that the singing of hymns between Sabbath School and Divine Service, while waiting for a preacher, while waiting for a technical problem to be resolved, and while waiting for Sabbath afternoon program to begin is very good. In addition, they think that it is good to sing hymns in the midst of an ongoing program. The study also revealed that a majority of the youth believe that the suggestions of organising a Divine Service made of hymns throughout, increasing the number of hymns in the Divine service, and maintaining the number of hymns in the Divine Service are very good. On the other hand, the suggestions of organising a Divine Service without hymns and reducing the number of hymns in the Divine Service were rated as very bad and bad respectively. Concerning the song services, the paper reveals that the majority of Ghanaian Adventist youth will strongly agree that members should be allowed to request for their favourite hymns to be sung. Many also agree that the leader in the song service should lead out with the singing of the hymns thematically. Conversely, the majority of the

Manuscript received Apr. 29, 2012; revised June 29, 2012; accepted Aug. 13, 2012

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youth strongly disagree with the suggestion that there should be no hymns in song services. The paper therefore postulates that hymns are very important to the youth of the church and hence should be made an integral part of the worship.

Keywords: Hymns, Youth, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Worship, Ghana

I. Introduction

In the worship of the Seventh-day Adventist church, music is used quiet often. The phrase, “Music is part of our worship” is very common in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From the time that I was young, I have heard this phrase repeated over and over by officiators at the Divine Service. Even I have used that phrase before. This is imitated by many young people in the church. Music involves several aspects. Some forms of Music in our worship services are solos, duets, quartets, choral ministrations, and others. However, the aspect of Music that one will find in any Seventh-day Adventist church worship service is the use of hymns. Hymns are found throughout the worship.

The popular internet site, Wikipedia, defines a hymn as “a type of song, usually religious, specifically written for the purpose of praise, adoration or prayer, and typically addressed to a deity or deities, or to a prominent figure or personification.” (Wikipedia, 2012.) *Encarta Encyclopaedia* also defines a Hymn as a “song with a text usually praising a deity or expressing thoughts of religious meditation or worship” (Encarta, 2009).

The Greek word from which it is derived, *hymnos*, was a song in praise of a god or hero after death. In its Christian usage, the word seeks to refer to “a direct address of praise and glory to God” (Webster, 1964, p. 235). Today, a lot of Hymn collections are put together into what is commonly referred to as Hymnals. Many orthodox churches make use of hymns in their worship. This includes the Seventh - day Adventist Church.

While the use of hymns in the Church is quiet rampant, one cannot be sure what members think about the way the hymns are used. This is because there is no reaction to whether members think the usage is appropriate or inappropriate. There is therefore the need for leaders to know what members think about the way hymns are used. There are different reactions to the way the Hymns are used by different groups

of persons in the church. A very important group that needs to be looked at is youth. This paper therefore seeks to find out what the youth think about the way hymns are used in the church. The central focus group in this paper is the Ghanaian Adventist youth.

A. Scope

The areas of emphasis in this paper are the use of hymns at irregular periods, the use at Divine Service, and their use during Song Services. The Divine service in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a part of the Saturday morning worship service in which worship practices such as prayer, preaching, tithing, and other elements are performed. During this session of the worship, the activities are mostly formal and highly revered. The entire Saturday (Sabbath) worship is mainly made up of two sections: The Sabbath School and the Divine Service. The Sabbath School involves Bible Study and discussion of lessons in groups. The Divine Service normally takes place after the Sabbath School session.

The group within the church that is under study is the youth. Thus, the paper is all about what the Ghanaian youths in the Adventist church think about the way hymns are used at irregular periods, divine services and song services. The focus of this paper is on only the use of hymns; hence no other alternatives such as choruses are presented. This researcher is aware that presenting an alternative to hymns might change the responses given. However, the results are presented as the youth respond without any alternatives.

Other elements that the paper does not touch on are questions about whether there should be a song leader or not, the qualification of the song leader, the use of accompanying instruments, and whether there should be a censor committee that looks into the type of music being used during worships. While these could be added to the research questions, this researcher sought only to find out the perceptions of the youth on the use of hymns in worship.

B. Procedure

The data analysed in this paper were gathered from various youth from various places within the South Ghana Conference. This researcher visited Federation Youth Camps and distributed carefully-constructed questionnaires to the youth. Since the questionnaires were randomly distributed, there is no even representation of the various

districts, gender, age brackets, and rank in the Adventist Youth Ministry (Youth Department, 2004, p. 22). However, the representation is proportionate enough to represent the views of the youth in the church. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 103, which were all retrieved. The responses of the youth gathered on the questionnaires were analysed and the results presented. The paper therefore presents and interacts with the responses of these youth of the SDA Church. The rest of this paper presents the demographics of respondents and their responses regarding the use of hymns at irregular times, Divine Services and song services.

C. Demographics

In this section, the demographic information of the youth who responded to the questionnaire is presented. The areas covered within the section are: Age Group, Gender, rank in the Adventist Youth ministry, and the district.

Table 1: Age Bracket

	Frequency	Percent
Below 15	8	7.77
16-20	30	29.13
21-25	38	36.89
26-30	16	15.53
Above 30	11	10.68
Total	103	100.00

The Table above reveals that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 21 and 25, making up 36.89% of the respondents. This is a true representation of the age group of the majority of active youth in the church. The truth is that most of the youth of the Church today are mostly up-and-coming intellectuals. This intelligent nature of today's youth makes the responses to be quite reliable.

Table 2: Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Female	50	48.54
Male	53	51.46
Total	103	100.00

From the above table, it is clear that there is an almost equal proportion of male and female respondents. While the males are made up of 51% of the respondents, the females are made up of the

remaining 49%. These figures were realised from the random distribution of the questionnaires. This implies that there will not be a biased presentation of ideas from the standpoint of one gender. Both male and female ideas are represented in the responses.

Table 3: Adventist Youth Ranking

	Frequency	Percent
Friend	5	4.85
Companion	6	5.83
Explorer	7	6.80
Ranger	15	14.56
Guide	34	33.01
Master Guide	36	34.95
Total	103	100

Even though all the ranks within the Adventist Youth Ministry are represented in the distribution, the majority are those in the Senior Youth: Guides (33.01%) and Master Guides (34.95%). These are the older ones among the youth who are more discerning and more exposed to the world. They are the ones with the ability to give more speculative responses. That is not to say that the responses of respondents in the Junior Youth, which are the minority, are useless. Their responses are equally important and are needed for a balance of ideas.

Table 4: Name of District

	Frequency	Percent
Madina	36	34.95
Valley View	10	9.71
Accra East	4	3.88
Accra South East	4	3.88
Ashaiman	14	13.59
Tema	34	33.01
Prampram	1	0.97
Total	103	100

The districts where the respondents come from are indicated here to reveal the parts of South Ghana Conference where the study was undertaken. It is realised from the above that the majority of respondents are the ones from Madina (34.95%) and Tema (33.01%) districts while respondents from Prampram, Accra East, Accra South-East, Valley View and Ashiaman Districts are relatively few. These seemingly disproportionate figures are the proportionate representations from the various Youth Camps that the researcher

visited. Thus, though the figures seem disproportionate, they are fair and reliable, since each is fairly represented.

II. Findings

A. Hymns at Irregular Periods

This section analyses the responses of respondents on the use of hymns at irregular periods. The irregular periods from this context are periods apart from the normal Divine service hymns. These are periods that one is not normally expected to sing a hymn. At such periods, a hymn is introduced to make up for a vacancy in the worship or the program. The periods that the study included are between the Sabbath School and Divine Service, while waiting for a preacher, in the midst of an on-going program, while waiting for a technical problem to be resolved, and while waiting for Sabbath afternoon programs to begin.

Table 5: Singing Hymns Between the Sabbath School and Divine Service

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	61	59.22
Good	36	34.95
Neither Good Nor Bad	5	4.85
Bad	1	0.97
Very Bad	0	-
Total	103	100

From the above table, it is quite clear that the youth (respondents) seem to have no problem with the singing of hymns in the period between the Sabbath School and Divine Service. The majority (59.22%) of them think it is very good, while 34.95% also think it is good. This makes a total of 94.17% who seem to encourage the singing of hymns between the Sabbath School and Divine Service, although such a time is considered irregular. While 4.85% are passive about the issue, only 0.97% seems to think that the practice is bad. It can therefore be concluded from the study that the youth would like to sing hymns in the period between the Sabbath School and Divine Service

Table 6: Singing Hymns While Waiting for a Preacher

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	64	62.14
Good	30	29.13
Neither Good Nor Bad	6	5.83
Bad	3	2.91
Very Bad	0	-
Total	103	100

Just like the singing of hymns between the Sabbath School and Divine Service, the respondents seem to have no problem with the singing of hymns while waiting for a preacher. It is interesting to note that 29.13% and 62.14% think the practice is good and very good. Though 2.91% responded that the practice was bad, the percentage that seems to endorse the practice overshadows the responses of the minority, which include the 2.91% and an additional 5.83% of indecisive respondents. This implies that the youth, while waiting for a preacher, will recommend the use of hymns, even though singing hymns at such a time seems improper.

Table 7: Singing Hymns In The Midst Of an On-Going Program

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	28	27.18
Good	35	33.98
Neither Good Nor Bad	17	16.50
Bad	16	15.53
Very Bad	7	6.80
Total	103	100

The issue of singing hymns in the midst of an on-going program revealed responses that looked quite different from the other irregular periods discussed earlier. Here the majority (33.98%) said the practice was good. Unlike the previous aspects, the majority said it was very good. Here, those who responded that the practice was very good were 27.18%. At least a minimum of 6.80% of the respondents said that it was very bad. Putting together respondents who said it was very bad (6.80%) and those who said it was bad (15.52%), it is quite clear that quite a number of the youth (22.33%) are not comfortable with the use of hymns in the midst of an on-going program. It is important that church leaders know the perception of the youth regarding the issue and try as much as possible to attend to such needs. They would have to attend to those who don't seem to like the idea without necessarily neglecting the views of the majority (61.16%) who think the practice is good and very good.

Table 8: Singing Hymns While Waiting For a Technical Problem to Be Resolved

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	41	39.81
Good	30	29.13
Neither Good Nor Bad	20	19.42
Bad	9	8.74
Very Bad	3	2.91
Total	103	100

Interesting responses were given to the issue of singing hymns while waiting for a technical problem to be resolved. The majority (39.81%) think it is very good, 29.13% of them think it is good, 19.42% think it is neither good nor bad, 8.74% think it is bad, and 2.91% think it is very bad. There is decline in number as the values reduce in quality. Thus, the highest figure thinks it is very good and the lowest figure thinks it is very bad. While the majority (68.94%) has no problem with the use of hymns while waiting for a technical problem to be resolved, it must be noted that some of the youth also think it is bad; hence their views should not necessarily be neglected because they are in the minority. While this research does not look at alternatives, it would be better for church leaders to take note of the fact that hymns at such times will not necessarily be enjoyed by all the members so they can offer alternatives if any technical problem arises.

Table 9: Singing Hymns While Waiting For Sabbath Afternoon Programs to Begin

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	59	57.28
Good	26	25.24
Neither Good Nor Bad	8	7.77
Bad	5	4.85
Very Bad	5	4.85
Total	103	100

The next area of concern in the aspect of hymns at irregular times is the singing of hymns while waiting for Sabbath afternoon programs to begin. The majority of respondents saw nothing wrong with this: 57.28% of respondents said it was very good, and another 25.24% rated it as good. These were very high when contrasted with the 4.85% who responded in each category of bad and very bad. The remaining 7.7% of respondents said it was neither good nor bad. Thus, apart from the few who were undecided and those who responded

that hymns sung while waiting for Sabbath Afternoon programs to begin was bad or very bad, the rest of the respondents actually do not see anything wrong with it.

B. Hymns in the Divine Service

In this section, the responses of respondents regarding the use of hymns in the Divine Service are analysed. The various categories that the questionnaire covered were their feelings about certain suggestions about how hymns should be used in the Divine Service. Some of the suggestions responded to were organising a Divine Service made of hymns throughout; Organising a Divine Service without hymns; increasing the number of hymns in the Divine Service; reducing the number of hymns in the Divine Service; and maintaining the number of Hymns in the Divine Service.

Table 10: Organising a Divine Service Made Of Hymns Throughout

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	46	44.66
Good	20	19.42
Neither Good Nor Bad	15	14.56
Bad	15	14.56
Very Bad	7	6.80
Total	103	100.00

The majority of the youth seemed to like the idea of organizing a Divine service that is made of hymns throughout. Only a few of the youth see this option to be bad or very bad. This implies that the youth enjoy the hymns of the church and will have no problem if the hymns are used entirely during the divine service.

Table 11: Organising a Divine Service without Hymns

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	3	2.91
Good	9	8.74
Neither Good Nor Bad	6	5.83
Bad	16	15.53
Very Bad	69	66.99
Total	103	100.00

Confirming the earlier data, the responses concerning organising a divine service without hymns reveal a massive refutation. As much as 66.99% of the respondents responded that a divine service without hymns is very bad and only 2.91% think it is very good. The views

and responses reveal that the youth actually have a positive attitude toward the use of the hymns in worship.

Table 12: Increasing the Number of Hymns in the Divine Service

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	32	31.07
Good	30	29.13
Neither Good Nor Bad	28	27.18
Bad	9	8.74
Very Bad	4	3.88
Total	103	100.00

The table above also reveals that the youth have a positive attitude toward the use of hymns in the Divine Service. Though some respondents do not agree with increasing the number of hymns in the Divine Service, the majority, consisting of 31.07% of them, see the idea to be very good.

Table 13: Reducing the number of Hymns in the Divine Service

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	2	1.94
Good	10	9.71
Neither Good Nor Bad	19	18.45
Bad	46	44.66
Very Bad	26	25.24
Total	103	100.00

A similar attitude is revealed in the responses to the question of reducing the number of hymns in the divine service. A majority of 44.66% think this is bad, with another 25.24% rating the idea as very bad. Only two people (1.94%) think it is a very good idea. This further reveals that the youth do not wish to reduce the number of hymns in the divine service.

Table 14: Maintaining the Number of Hymns in the Divine Service

	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	33	32.04
Good	33	32.04
Neither Good Nor Bad	25	24.27
Bad	7	6.80
Very Bad	5	4.85
Total	103	100.00

While the youth responded positively regarding increasing the number of hymns in the Divine Service and negatively regarding reducing the number of hymns, the majority also think that it will be

very good to maintain the number of hymns in the church. This implies that the youth wish to increase the number of hymns in the Divine Service, but given an option of reducing them, they will rather want to maintain the number of hymns that we have in the divine service. This further confirms a positive attitude toward the use of hymns in the Divine Service.

C. Hymns in Song Services

In this section, the responses of the youth on some suggestions about the use of hymns in the song Service are discussed. The suggestions that respondents were to respond to relate with members being allowed to give their favourite hymns, allowing the leader to lead out in the hymns thematically, and taking hymns out of the song services altogether.

Table 15: People Should Be Allowed to Give Their Favourite Hymns

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	48	46.60
Agree	33	32.04
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	8	7.77
Disagree	9	8.74
Strongly Disagree	5	4.85
Total	103	100.00

The majority of the youth (about 46.60%) strongly agree that people should be allowed to request for their favourite hymns during song services. This seems to imply that during song services, they will prefer to sing songs that they enjoy instead of any hymn at all. This is because out of the 103 respondents only a total of 14 disagree or strongly disagree with the arrangement for the singing of favourite hymns during song services. Thus, it is clear that though the youth enjoy our hymns in worship services, they would prefer to sing their favourite hymns.

Table 16: The Leader Should Lead the Hymns Thematically

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	28	27.18
Agree	37	35.92
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	25	24.27
Disagree	12	11.65
Strongly Disagree	1	0.97
Total	103	100.00

Though the majority agrees with the fact that people should be allowed to sing their favourite hymns during song services, they also seem to agree with the suggestion that the leaders in song services should lead the hymns thematically: 35.92% of the respondents agree to this suggestion and 27.18% strongly agree. On the other hand, only 0.97% strongly disagrees and 11.65% disagree. It is therefore clear that inasmuch as the youth would prefer to sing their favourite songs during song services, they also wish for an orderly and thematic approach of singing the hymns.

Table 17: There Should Be No Hymns in Song Services

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	5.83
Agree	3	2.91
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	6	5.83
Disagree	10	9.71
Strongly Disagree	78	75.73
Total	103	100.00

Though some people believe that the youth find our hymns boring and that they would prefer to do without singing them, it was clear from the data that the youth love the hymns. This is seen in the table above in which 75.73% of them strongly disagree with the suggestion that there should be no hymns in song services. The nature of the responses reveals a sharp disagreement to the suggestion. It is however noteworthy that 5.83% strongly agree and 2.91% also agree to the suggestion. This indicates that though the data generally reveals a positive attitude toward the use of hymns in worship services, there are still some young people who do not like the hymns.

III. Discussion of Data

The data that the research brought to bear tells the researcher a lot of issues about the attitudes and perceptions of Adventist youth on the use of hymns in worship services. These perceptions are revealed in the responses on the use of hymns at irregular times, during the Divine Services and during song services.

It is revealed that with the youth of Ghana, there is no problem with the use of hymns at irregular times. This is clear because the majority of them agree with the use of hymns in the midst of an on-going program, between Sabbath School and the Divine Service, while waiting for a preacher, while waiting for a technical problem to be

resolved, and while waiting for Sabbath afternoon programs to begin. This may probably be because they are used to such interruptions and so they do not see anything wrong with them or they really enjoy the hymns and do not see them as “interruptions” or as a nuisance. Later responses seem to reveal the latter.

The responses reveal that the youth like hymns and they agree with suggestions to increase the number of hymns in the divine service. Also, they agree with the suggestion to maintain the number of hymns in the divine service as opposed to reducing them. A majority of the youth will also like a Divine Service made up of only hymns but dislike a divine service without hymns. These attitudes and perceptions seem to be compatible with the views regarding the use of hymns at irregular times. Hence there is a strong conclusion that the youth like the hymns and are very comfortable with them.

Regarding the use of hymns in song services, it is clear that the youth like to use hymns but they would prefer an organised way of singing them. They would also prefer that their favourite hymns be sung during song services. Their responses reveal that they will not like the hymns to be out of the song services. Overall, one can conclude that the youth exhibit a positive attitude toward singing hymns.

VI. Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from the perceptions that are revealed in the views of Seventh-day Adventist youth regarding the use of hymns in worship services is that hymns are a very important part of our worship. From the research, it is clear that the majority of the youth think the singing of hymns between Sabbath School and Divine Service, while waiting for a preacher, while waiting for a technical problem to be resolved, and while waiting for Sabbath afternoon program to begin is very good. They also do not see anything wrong with the singing of hymns in the midst of an on-going program. In addition, suggestions of organising a Divine Service made of hymns throughout, increasing the number of hymns in the Divine service, and maintaining the number of hymns in the Divine Service were greeted with approval on the part of the youth of the Adventist Church in Ghana. These young people’s rates do not seem to agree with suggestions of organising a Divine Service without hymns and reducing the number of hymns in the Divine Service. It was also revealed that the majority of Ghanaian Adventist

youth prefer for members to be allowed to request the singing of their favourite hymns and that the leader in the song service should lead out with the singing of the hymns thematically. They also strongly disagree with the suggestion that there should be no hymns in song services. Because of these perceptions that have been gathered from the youth in the church, hymns should be made an integral part of all worship services. It is very clear from their responses that the youth, who constitute a great majority of members in the church, like the hymns and they enjoy them. Hence, it will be good to put variety in their usages and make the youth happy.

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