

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

MUSIC IN THE CATHOLIC LITURGICAL WORSHIP, AN AID TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Daniel E. Eduzor

Abstract

Liturgical worship in its nature is a public function that demands corporate prayer and active participation. Accordingly, it follows that all forms and parts of the liturgy should be reverently celebrated in such a manner that the faithful will actively participate in it. Hence, prayer, scriptural readings, music, thanksgiving and others should be done in such a way that active participation is encouraged. Whatever good that may promote active participation of the faithful in liturgical worship is highly encouraged without deliberations. Our attitudes therefore to prayer, scriptural readings, music and thanksgiving should be such that will ordinarily encourage active participation of members. Liturgical worship takes place within the context of the song, story and choreographed gesture and movement. For successful liturgical worship, therefore, all of such gestures and movements need to be communally inspiring. Music for example should be composed, taught and sung in such a manner that the entire assembly plays a major role in the singing. At present, one would ordinarily find out that songs used during liturgical ceremonies these days in many of the Catholic Churches in Nigeria do not meet up with the demands of what liturgical music portray. The paper proposes the need to re-orientate and awaken the consciousness of the people to what liturgical music stands for considering its aims and objectives so that our liturgy will be improved if the principles are upheld.

Keywords: Liturgy, Sacred Music, Liturgical Music, Liturgical worship

Introduction

In Catholic liturgical worship, music plays an important role which cannot be neglected in any form. The solemn nature of the Catholic liturgical hymns brings out the uniqueness that makes them what they are. One reason for this is that liturgical texts that are transformed into music for worship, in their theological nature, condition the nature of musical composition or compositions.

Liturgical music in the Catholic Church is meant to be solemn and lively. With the interest of the worshipping community at heart, liturgical hymns should ordinarily encourage the active participation of the people. Hence, songs that do not bear these qualities do not qualify to be termed liturgical music.

Efforts have been made to revitalize liturgical music to maintain the standard but still more things need to be done. This is as a result of the fact that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is witnessing a kind of unhealthy and unwarranted revolution today in the area of music meant for the liturgy. With the influence of modernity, composers forget to pay attention to, or even completely ignore

the solemn spirit inherent in the texts for liturgical compositions. The problem arises when composers ignore the known principles for liturgical music and end up creating songs that reflect their emotional desires to the detriment of what liturgical music is or should be.

The Meaning of Liturgy

Liturgy is the official public worship. As public worship, Komonchak, Collins and Lane (2006) stated that "liturgy is the activity of an assembly of believers visibly gathered and as worship, it is prayer" (p.592). It is therefore worthy to note that the word liturgy is derived from the Greek 'leitourgia' which is a combination of other two Greek words; 'Laos' (people) and 'ergon' (work). In its ordinary pre-Christian use, Komonochak et al (2006) maintained that "it referred to whatever public works were judged necessary to promote the public well-being". Eventually, Christians narrowed this term down to designate the 'public worship of the church'.

The second Vatican council's constitution on the sacred liturgy, *sacrosanctum Concilium* asserts that liturgy is an outstanding means where the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church (no. 2) In line with this, Komonchak et al in 2006 infers that "the liturgy is a Trinitarian, paschal, ecclesial, sacramental, ethically oriented, and eschatological way of Christian prayer" (p. 594). In other words, liturgy is the ritual prayer of the Church that expresses the Church's understanding of her relationship with Christ the Saviour. In all things, Liturgy is the customary public worship done by a specific religious group according to its particular tradition. In that sense, it can as well be regarded as a set of forms for public religious worship that is officially prescribed. That is why Leaver and Zimmerman rightly noted in 1998 that liturgy refers to those forms of public corporate worship which follow a set structure or series of rites. The same is the specific form or formularies used in public worship.

Music and Liturgy

Liturgy is an act of public worship. To facilitate such public worship by way of active participation, therefore, liturgical worship in the Catholic Church upholds singing as one of its major parts. St. Augustine of Hippo rightly stated that singing well amounts to praying twice (*Qui benecantat bis orat*). This is another way of saying with Leaver and Zimmerman (1998) that "if liturgy is to praise God, then surely music amplifies that praise and, indeed, connects us with the whole heavenly choir constantly offering hymns of praise to God" (p.vii). Hence, in the constitution on the sacred liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, the fathers of the Church rightly pointed out that liturgical worship is perfected by being given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song and as such requires that the meaning and proper nature of each part and each song be carefully observed (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 113). Thus, they instructed that the musical tradition of the universal church being a treasure of inestimable value and a combination of sacred music and words should form a necessary and integral part of the solemn liturgy. As such, sacred music of all forms is by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action. In other words, they must aim at promoting active participation in a way that the faithful are encouraged to take part using acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* nos. 30 & 116).

Sacred Music and Liturgical Music

Sacred music is not necessarily at all times liturgical music. Some sacred music might due to the nature of its composition not be suitable for liturgical worship since liturgical songs must be acclamation of the entire assembly. Leaver in 1998 said that sacred music is usually restricted to mean either liturgical music per se or music that in some way explores sacred themes in the

general Judeo-Christian tradition. The ideal is that there should be a proper understanding of the fact that particular music might be good to be called sacred music but may not be accepted into the circles of hymns regarded as liturgical music. Hence, liturgical music as Leaver (1998), would have it covers the whole range of the worship music of Judeo-Christian music. This boils down to the fact that a song can be formally regarded as sacred music based on the nature of its derivation but may not be good enough to be regarded as liturgical music due to the nature and form of its composition. Therefore, all sacred songs are not liturgical but all liturgical songs are sacred.

A critical study of the songs used for the liturgy in Nigeria Catholic Churches today reveals a lot. It seems we are gradually running out of the track in so far as liturgical music is concerned. Some of the present-day composers miss out on spotting the difference between liturgical and sacred music. Even the community of worshipers in most cases, tend to align more to music that appeals to the senses as they want it rather than going for liturgical music. With this, the Catholic Church in Nigeria, in some places seems to be gradually drifting away from the standard which is geared towards the enhancement and encouragement of public worship aimed at promoting active participation of the faithful. The advent and influence of secular music have seriously affected us. Hence, the need to revitalize the Catholic liturgy in the area of music, seeking the proper realization of the mood of the text in liturgical compositions for the Nigeria Church, all aimed at encouraging active participation of the Catholic faithful in the liturgy.

Liturgical music is an organized sound pleasing to the ear which is specifically adapted for use in a liturgical setting. Achikeh (2001) in Uba (2014) highlighted that from the beginning, liturgy and music have been quite closely related. The liturgy has everywhere called upon the help of music and the voices of creation in the sounds of the instruments. With this, it became clear that men's interaction with God goes beyond the boundaries of human speech.

As an integral part of the liturgy, Deiss (1992) in Uba (2014) opined that music as a single act of worship is an element of solemnization which clothes the celebration of the Eucharist with beauty, expressing the unity of the celebrating community. Liturgical music taking up these qualities is seen therefore like that which is created for the liturgical celebration which helps to unfold the mystery of the liturgy by corresponding with the spirit of the liturgy and through which the celebrating community can understand the ritual action of the liturgy better.

Leaver (1998) noted that "liturgical music is the music of worship in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the functional music of the gathered congregation at worship" (p. 211). It is that music that is acceptable in the liturgy. Being acceptable music in the liturgy, Ukutegbe (2012), rightly pointed out that it harmonizes with the spirit of the liturgy and animates the ritual action of the church. Such music accompanies liturgical action and it is admitted by the church both as to law and practice to the liturgy. Hence, it is woven into and constitutes a vital part of the very matrix of the liturgical action.

The Role of Music in Liturgical Worship

The primary aim and objective of music in the liturgy are to glorify God. It is therefore carefully noted by the Church that the true purpose of worship is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 112). Sacred liturgical music qualifies as one to the extent that it leads the liturgical assembly to the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful. Therefore, any music that does not meet up with the above-mentioned principle fails to be primarily included in the repertoire of sacred liturgical music. Pius X (1903), had already affirmed such earlier when he stated that sacred music is understood to be music created for the

celebration of divine worship and which is endowed with a certain holy sincerity of form (Tra Le Sollecitudini no. 2).

Liturgical songs therefore should carry a kind of aura that disposes the worshipping assembly to the absolute reverence of the divine. With liturgical songs, therefore, prayer is expressed more attractively and the mystery of the liturgy becomes clearer to the worshipping community. Such cannot be experienced when music draws the people's attention away from the divine. The Sacred Congregation of Rites (1967) forthwith declared that with good liturgical songs, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures the heavenly liturgy, (Instruction on Music In the Sacred Liturgy, no. 5).

Liturgical music at times is meant to support the prayer of the worshipping community. At such times, especially when a ritual action requires a longer period or when the action is to be repeated several times, United States Bishop's conference (1982), stated that liturgical music does not depend but supports the prayer of the assembly. By this very fact, they continued, saying that at such times, liturgical music becomes a constituent element of the rite since it is on its own, taken as prayer. This goes a long way to affirm the famous saying ascribed to St Augustine which has it that 'singing well, amounts to praying twice'. Hence, when songs turn out to become an object of distraction from the solemn mood of prayer, it turns out to fall short of what liturgical songs aim at and as such, cannot be regarded as one. The real idea is that liturgical music does not serve as a mere accompaniment but as an integral mode by which the mystery is proclaimed and presented for the edification of the liturgical assembly. In all things, the spiritual enlightenment of the faithful is favourably considered in seeking for aims and objectives of liturgical music. Hence, it should be noted that liturgical music serves to gather and unite the assembly and set the tone for the celebration as well as assist the faithful in the realization and achievement of joy and fulfillment in the liturgy. For Pius X (1903), the principal office of music is to clothe the liturgical text proposed for the understanding of the faithful with a suitable melody. It, therefore, aims at adding greater efficacy to the text so that through it the faithful may be more easily moved to devotion and better disposed for the reception of the fruits of grace belonging to the celebration of the holiest mysteries.

Having taken into consideration the facts mentioned above, it becomes clear that sacred liturgical music holds a prime position in the solemn liturgy whose purpose is the sanctification and edification of members. As such, it aims at interpreting the sacred text to its fullest, possessing the qualities proper to the liturgy, especially sanctity and universality excluding profanity. In her words, Anumba (2019) summarized the aims and functions of sacred music as follows:

1. To beautify and embellish the voices of the priests and faithful praising God in the Eucharistic celebration.
2. To lift to God, the minds of the people taking part and increase the fruits of the faithful harvest of the liturgy.
3. To make the liturgical prayer more active and increase the honour given to God.

Proper Interpretation of Texts Set for the Composition of Liturgical Hymns

In the composition of liturgical music, texts set for such, demand proper and solemn interpretation. When this is properly done, it brings out the real meaning of the text, if not the reverse becomes the case. In no doubt, the major problem the faithful encounter in the liturgy is that of being taken away from the solemn nature of the liturgy due to the distraction that goes with the melody emanating from a wrong interpretation of liturgical texts. As this is turning out to be the order of the day, a call for proper interpretation of text set for liturgical music by composers

becomes pertinent. Part of the explanations given to the meaning of scripture as Flynn (1998) noted, is that "it is a communication about God that has been and continues to be especially efficacious" (p. 257). By this very fact, any form of human communication that is efficacious in the sense that God is made present through it can be admitted into worship. Music is the food of the soul. When music is potentially efficacious, making God present through it, it plays the same role as the scripture does. With this, one can confidently say that singing is an exalted form of prayer when it is properly done. Good music, therefore, is potentially efficacious to the extent it makes God present through it. For music to be therefore admitted into the liturgical worship, its efficacy has to be tested and can only be properly done by making sure that the tune of the music surely represents the spirit of the text for the liturgical composition. To this, the need for proper interpretation of the text is emphatically stressed. For instance, the kind or form of a melody that should be assigned to the 'Kyrie' (Lord have mercy), used during the penitential rite in the mass needs to be calm, solemn and appealing to the senses since it is a supplication for mercy. When such tunes become flamboyant and theatrical, it loses the sense of what it portrays. In no doubt, a child who pleads for the forgiveness of the father does not dance around or play with his or her words. If he or she does so, there is no other sign to show that seriousness is lacking in the process and as such, not being forgiven becomes the most likely thing that will happen. Therefore, being reverent and respectful with calmness becomes a sure tool to making a way forward in such an issue. While referring to this Flynn (1998) rightly pointed out that "human words and human music play a role in expressing and representing the word of God made known and offered to us through Christ" (p. 256). Hence, music must function as some kind of mediation of Christ to the extent that it can represent the word. Proper care should therefore be taken to avoid the tendency of such musical ornamentation hindering one's understanding and appropriation of a word's meaning.

Leaver and Zimmerman (1998), quoted St Augustine to have analyzed the mutual compatibility of music and words noting that, to the extent that the music supported the words, it was judged effective and to the extent, it drew attention to itself or even to the extent that some might sin by paying more attention to it than the words, it could be detrimental. In giving a hymn tune to a hymn text, it must necessarily centre on the need to help the congregation proclaim the word effectively. By way of insisting on this, the Sacred Congregation of rites (1967), maintained that "proper arrangement of a liturgical celebration requires that the meaning and proper nature of each part and each song be carefully observed and the parts to be sung should be sung using the kind and form of music which is proper to their character" (Instruction on the music of the sacred liturgy, no. 6, p.7). In that case, the laws of sacred music must be carefully considered by musicians in preparation for the new melodies, especially for the vernacular. They should be carefully scrutinized before they are approved to be used in the liturgical assembly. If in any way at all it is discovered to be unbecoming to the holiness of the place, the dignity of the liturgy and the devotion of the faithful, as the Sacred Congregation of Rites (1967) instructed, it should be avoided (Instruction on the music of the sacred liturgy, no. 60).

When giving melodies to theological texts, care should be taken to reflect the true meaning embedded in the words. Akpunonu (2015) had to advise and encourage composers to draw inspiration from the Gospels but should consult with the scripture specialist to give the correct interpretation so that the composer with his work may worship God in spirit and truth. As a result, the real meaning of the mystery being celebrated should be practically deduced from the rendition of the musical texts. To do this well, one needs to properly study the text, reflect on them and digest them to bring out its real meaning in music. When this is not done, giving a proper interpretation to liturgical texts becomes apparently possible but practically impossible. Nnam (2015) noted that composers and sometimes responsorial psalm cantors do not care where

a tune is taken from. As long as it is sweet, beautiful and appealing to them, they use it. Sad enough, these days responsorial psalmists make use of secular melodies of known secular songs in taking the psalm at the liturgical gathering. The tendency is that the good number of faithful gathered for the liturgical worship and who are familiar with such secular songs may fall into the dilemma of reflecting on the idea of the secular song or songs in question than the scriptural text or texts. When it happens this way, the aim is defeated.

Active Participation, the Goal of the Liturgy

The primary goal of liturgy is active participation and the Church seriously encourages such. The Church, therefore, solidly desires that the faithful whenever they gather for a liturgical ceremony, should participate actively. Hence, whatever that will positively help the people of God gathered for Eucharistic celebration to participate actively is encouraged. Flannery (2001), while stressing the importance of active participation in the liturgy, maintained that such is the first to be considered in the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy. All the faithful should therefore be led to that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebration which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy itself and to which Christian people have a right and obligation because of their baptism (Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 14). When this is properly done, the liturgy will be able to produce its full effects in the faithful.

In a liturgical assembly, therefore, the faithful gathered for the celebration should in no way at all be there as strangers or mere spectators. Not being strangers or mere spectators entail that instead of remaining passive like the audience at the theatre or cinema, they should have a good understanding of the rites, prayers and hymns of the liturgy and be able to fully take part in them. Thus, songs in so far as they are not able to encourage active participation of the faithful are not qualified to be regarded as liturgical music. To this, Flannery (2001) noted; "to promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part through acclamation, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes and at a proper time, a reverent silence should be observed" (p. 30). The liturgy, especially the mass is in no way at all a gathering where the choir entertains the rest of the faithful gathered for the Eucharistic assembly with their songs. Such can be allowed in the concert hall, not in the mass. When such is done, the faithful gathered for the Eucharistic celebration are denied of their right which is active participation. The full, conscious and active response of the participants in worship is by right required. The real function of the choir is to help the faithful participate actively in singing, not to entertain or distract them. When the time for entertainment comes, opera, oratorios and others of the line can perfectly feature. Psalmists and other leaders in responsorial singing as the Sacred Congregation of rites (1967) instructed, should also make their responses easy and comprehensible (Instruction on music in the sacred liturgy no. 26).

Liturgical compositions should ordinarily encourage active participation. Umezina (2012) noted that Ezenduka did not write for the theatre, he rather wrote for the liturgy, the worshipping community and as such his works bear the marks of simplicity and solemnity, bearing in mind that the faithful will find it easy to internalize them and thus participate actively in the liturgy. Aiming therefore at the active participation of the faithful, the Sacred Congregation of rites (1967) rightly pointed out that in extreme cases, the sensitive and difficult parts of the liturgy which should ordinarily be sung can be skipped but not skipped for the convenience of the minister (Instruction on music in the sacred liturgy no. 8). This is a way of stressing that every piece of music must correspond to the spirit of the liturgical celebration and as such, must not hinder the active participation of the people.

Finally, it must be noted in the words of Anyanwu (2015) that liturgical music is not meant to entertain or keep the congregation lively but to enhance their participation and express in words, the rite being celebrated. Good liturgical music leads the congregation towards even greater participation in the singing.

In an interview with a sacred music scholar; Anumba B., she reiterated the fact that the spirituality of Gregorian chant, its exclusive nature of being very liturgical cannot be overemphasized. Hence, the church emphasizes and holds the Gregorian chant in high esteem and she recognized in it the highest model of what the church wants which are holiness, artful beauty and universality. With the efforts made by Gregory VIII in reviewing the glory of the chant, it worked till the recent Vatican II council legislation on music came up and still recognized it as the most suitable and appropriate for the Catholic Church. The adequacy of the chant is not just because of its “songfulness” but because of its prayerful nature.

The summary of all that the Catholic Church desires to get in a sacred song that qualifies such as liturgical music can be deduced from the instruction on sacred music given by Pope Pius X as arranged by Hayburn (1979). There, the mind of the church was spelt out. Hence, the Church recognizing and encouraging good music gave room for modern music to be allowed in Churches since it has produced compositions good, serious and dignified enough to be worthy of liturgical use. In admitting modern music for liturgical use, care should be taken so that nothing profane, vulgar or theatrical is allowed. If this is not carefully done, we may run the risk of turning the liturgical environment into a dancing hall or theatre.

The choice of instruments and the way we handle them during liturgical ceremonies, especially the mass go a long way to determining the texture of the music to be produced. Experience has proved that on several occasions, the choice of instruments used by the choir and the instrumentation itself ends up disfiguring good liturgical music. When such happens, it is a clear sign that the choir director involved has failed in his or her duty. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, therefore, instructed as Flannery (1967) recorded that the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem in the Latin Church, for it is the traditional musical instrument, the sound of which can add a wonderful splendour to the church's ceremonies and powerfully lift men's minds to God and higher things (Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 120). They however stated that other instruments may be admitted for use since they are suitable or can be made suitable for sacred use. Hence, any musical instrument allowed to be used in the Catholic liturgy should be reverently and solemnly used in such a way that it meets with the needs of the liturgical celebration, which is the glory of God and sanctification of the faithful.

Summary and Conclusion

It can be said at this point that a little time has been spent trying to study music as an aid to active participation in the liturgy. Studies have shown that the music of the liturgy is primarily meant to promote active participation of the faithful in the liturgy so that the goal of the liturgy which is the glory of God and sanctification of the faithful will be achieved. Hence, the objective reason why the liturgy, which is an act of public action is celebrated, is to lead the worshipers to glorify God and in turn, be sanctified. This is exactly what liturgy should do.

Now the problem arises when it is noticed that Catholic Christians are gradually shifting away from the standard due to the kind of music employed in the worship of God, especially in the mass. Thus, instead of being led to the glory of God through good liturgical music, the faithful in some cases end up being spectators in liturgical gatherings and in the worst cases go through a series of entertainments when the liturgy is meant to be solemn. Sadly, the possibility of many Catholics not knowing the real nature of good liturgical music or even enjoying those that get

them entertained is on the increase. One thing clear is that the real liturgical decorum of the church should always be maintained for in her wisdom the legislation of the church has made it so. In the Nigeria church, the standard is to be maintained. However, with enculturation, there is always a better way of bringing liveliness in the Eucharistic celebration without destroying the mood of the liturgy. In no doubt, if the liturgical texts laid down for liturgical compositions are properly interpreted, the best will be achieved. Therefore, composers of liturgical music have a great task to accomplish. The music and liturgy commissions have a great role to play so that the best will be achieved.

References

- Akpunonu, P.D. (2015, April). *Using the scripture as source for liturgical music text*. Paper presented at Archbishop Obiefuna retreat and pastoral centre Awka, in a conference on Catholic liturgical music, in Nigeria, Anambra.
- Anumba, B. (2019). *Gregorian chant*. Unpublished lecture note, Mater Christi Academy of Music, Amawbia.
- Anyanwu, D. (2015, April). *A response to the paper: Music in service of the sacred rites for the deepening of the mysteries*. Paper presented at Archbishop Obiefuna retreat and pastoral centre, Awka, during a conference on Catholic liturgical music in Anambra.
- Benedict XVI. (2007). *Apostolic exhortation: Sacramentum caritatis*. Nairobi: Pauline publications.
- Flannery, A. (Ed.) (2001). *Vatican II council: The conciliar and post conciliar documents*. Mumbai: Rekha printers.
- Hayburn, R. (Ed.) (1979). *Papal legislation on sacred music*. Collegeville: Liturgical press.
- Kominchak, J.A., Collins, M. & Lane D. A. (Ed.) (2006). *The new dictionary of theology*. Bangalore: Theological press.
- Leaver, R.A. & Zimmerman, J.A. (Ed.) (1998). *Liturgy and music: lifetime learning*. Collegeville: Liturgical press.
- Nnam, J. (2015, April). *Critique of indigenous contemporary music composition for the sacred liturgy and their performance*. Paper presented at Archbishop Obiefuna retreat and pastoral centre, Awka, during a conference on Catholic liturgical music in Anambra.
- Pius, X. (1903, November). *Motuproprio; Tra le sollecitudini*. *Acta apostolicae sedis* (AAS 36, no. 2).
- The sacred congregation of rites. (1967). *Instruction on music of the sacred liturgy*. London: Catholic truth society.
- The sacred congregation of rites. (1858). *Instruction on sacred music and sacred liturgy*. *Acta apostolicae sedis* (AAS 50, p. 652).
- Uba, C. (2014). *Conducting Catholic liturgical music: Challenges and prospects*. Unpublished research project, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- Ukutegebe, B. E. (2012). *Liturgical music and inculturation in the light of new evangelization*. A paper presented at the second diocesan music seminar organized by the music commission of Warri diocese.
- Umezina, E. (2012). *Lee nnukwuukochukwu, Ezenduka musical experiments and tradition*. Nimo: Rex Charles and Patrick.
- United States catholic conference of bishops. (1982). *Liturgical music today; Guidelines for the Catholic liturgical musicians*. Washington: USCCB.