

The Place And Proper Use Of Musical Instruments In The Liturgy

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ABSTRACT

This reflection explores the rightful place and proper use of musical instruments in Catholic liturgical worship. Anchored on Article 120 of Sacrosanctum Concilium and key ecclesiastical documents like Musicam Sacram and Tra le Sollecitudini, it defines sacred instrumental music as that which is created for worship and is characterized by holiness, artistic value, and universality. It critiques contemporary liturgical practices in Nigeria, especially the frequent misuse of secular and banal instrumental styles under the guise of inculturation. It emphasizes the organ as the preeminent instrument in the Latin Church, extolling its capacity to sacralize worship space and elevate the minds of the faithful. Forms of instrumental arrangements such as the organ, gospel bands, native instruments and orchestras are discussed, with a call for all to conform to the sacred nature of liturgy. The essay concludes with practical guidelines on the use of musical instruments during different liturgical seasons and underscores the instrument's supporting—not overwhelming—role in worship.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A reflection on the locus of musical instruments within Catholic liturgical worship in

Nigeria is timely. This is because the role of musical instruments in the Catholic liturgy is one that can very easily and often be overlooked, or not given sufficient attention by

curators of liturgical ceremonies with the consequence that sometimes, there are either flamboyant exaggerations or pernicious minimalism in matter of such crucial liturgical importance.

This reflection kicks off on the basis of an analysis of article 120 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy quoted verbatim in the post-Vatican II Instruction on Music in the Liturgy: "In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things. But other instruments also may be admitted for use in divine worship, with the knowledge and consent of the competent territorial authority.... This may be done, however, only on condition that the instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use, accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful."¹

It is quite technically and critically curious that the theme of sacred instrumental music is abruptly introduced in the art. 120 of *Sacrosanctum concilium* without any prior warning, after the discourse about the functionality of sacred music in mission territories. Perhaps, the Council Fathers simply assumed a *prima facie* relevance of sacred instrumental music in the liturgy, such that it does not need any prefatory statement or argument. Hence in *Musicam sacram* (* 4), there is a simple—almost tautological—definition of sacred music as embracing "sacred music for the organ and other approved instruments." Similarly, in the 62nd paragraph of the same document, cited above, there is the plain acknowledgement that "musical instruments can be very useful in sacred celebrations, whether they accompany the singing or whether they are played as solo

instruments."

The idea that the organ "adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things" serves to give an immediate indication that, as far as sacred instrumental music and the liturgical use of musical instruments is concerned, the Church is not musing about an optional extra, but practically and concretely dealing with an item that is crucial and integral to the liturgy in its mission of leading the faithful to experience "a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem."² But the question is: what does the Church mean when it speaks of sacred instrumental music?

II. DEFINITION OF SACRED INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The Instruction on Music in the Liturgy gives a classical definition of sacred music as follows: "By sacred music is understood that which, being created for the celebration of divine worship, is endowed with a certain holy sincerity of form."³ The document—in the same paragraph—lists the following as various forms of sacred music: "Gregorian chant, sacred polyphony in its various forms both ancient and modern, sacred music for the organ and other approved instruments, and sacred popular music, be it liturgical or simply religious."

Our concern in the above definition is the phrase: sacred music for the organ and other approved instruments. But before proceeding, it is important that one notes immediately that the definition in *Musicam sacram* contains an idea paraphrased from an original statement of St. Pius X who in the document *Tra le sollecitudini*, insisted that sacred music must possess "the qualities proper to the liturgy, and in particular sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the

final quality of universality.”⁴ Thus, we have the three normative features of sacred music, namely holiness, goodness of form and universality. We need to—and so, let us—examine the implications of these three characteristics in order to properly understand what qualifies as sacred music for the organ and other approved musical instruments and what does not.

III. QUALITIES OF SACRED MUSIC

In discussing the qualities of sacred music, the author confesses, in all truth and honesty, that this matter had already been dealt with in a presentation made to the National Catholic Liturgical Music Council of Nigeria (NACALIMCON) at Gboko, Nigeria, in 2018. But there is a real need to present them here again in summary. And this is for a reason. Pope St. Pius X in the document, *Tra le sollecitudini*, argues that “the sound of the organ as an accompaniment to the chant in preludes, interludes, and the like must be not only governed by the special nature of the instrument, but must participate in all the qualities proper to sacred music....”⁵

This, of course, will apply to other musical instruments admitted for use in the liturgy, whether these instruments are native or foreign, traditional or modern.

And so, the first quality of liturgical music we shall deal with is holiness. It means that such music should be truly holy and have nothing to do with profanity or anything in common with the ethos of secular music. This quality must inhere in the music itself as well as in the manner of its execution.⁶ Further, Pope St. John Paul II teaches that this holiness is achieved only to the extent the music in question is organically joined to the liturgical action.⁷ Citing the magisterium of Blessed Pope Paul VI, he argues that “not all without distinction that is outside the temple (profanum) is fit to cross its threshold.”⁸ Therefore, in line with the tradition

of the Church, “the entry into the sphere of the sacred and the religious” of any form of “music – instrumental and vocal – [that] does not possess at the same time the sense of prayer, dignity and beauty...”⁹ is—in principle—both ruled out and summarily forbidden.

Let us apply this to the much that can be perceived and experienced about instrumental music in contemporary Nigerian liturgies. In Nigeria, there are all kinds of musical instruments in churches. Chief among them is the keyboard. As a matter of fact, many Catholic churches in Nigeria do not have what qualifies to be called a liturgical organ. I am personally interested to know the name of any Catholic church in Nigeria that uses pipe organ. At an even lower level, only very few Catholic churches in Nigeria would boast of or go for a giant-size electric organ like the Allen digital organ in the Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos. There is also one in the Cathedral of the new Aguleri diocese in Anambra State; it has such an incredibly perfect imitation of the sound of the pipe organ. However, vast majority of Catholic churches will make do with a table keyboard, maybe, the Yamaha or Casio brand. On the other hand, many of the Catholic churches have what is presently known as the gospel band. Then, there is the arrangement for an orchestral ensemble of purely native African instruments (the so-called *nkwa* group).

But the problem begins when the choir director, the organist, or the leader of the band group or *nkwa* group forgets that the liturgy is not for entertainment and one starts to listen to tunes that remind people of what they hear or see in the theater, in the market, in Nigerian films, in profane African traditional dance music. Then, the band begins to play and the worshippers get to have a reminiscence of the afrobeat of Femi Kuti, the highlife of Osita Osadebe or even the Rastafarian reggae styles of Ras Kimono. Now, in order to secure the

quality of holiness of liturgical music, it is important to note that all such performances and indeed any musical usage that invokes the sentimental spirit of modern pop music must have no foothold in the liturgy. One fears that the ethos of secular pop, profane traditional dance and minstrel music often creeps into our liturgy, especially when our zeal for inculturation runs amok.

Next is the quality of goodness of form. This important characteristic demands that music in the liturgy must be truly artistic. In the words of Pius X: "it must be true art, for otherwise it will be impossible for it to exercise on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the Church aims at obtaining in admitting into her liturgy the art of musical sounds."¹⁰ The efficacy aimed at by the Church is rooted in that experience of a metaphysical beauty that becomes a participation in the divine beauty itself. For this reason, Pope St. John Paul II recognizes the urgent "need to 'purify worship [music] from ugliness of style, from distasteful forms of expression... which are not worthy of the great act that is being celebrated.'"¹¹ The demand for a high artistic quality of sacred music serves as a perfect guarantee of the beauty of the liturgy, whereby "prayer is expressed in a more attractive way... minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites."¹²

In my opinion, much of the instrumental music in the liturgy as witnessed in many of our churches are superficial, trite and banal. Very often what one hears in Catholic churches in Nigeria are "simple, at times simplistic melodies and harmonies [that] express a narrow emotional range."¹³ Come to think of it, my dear friends, does it not beat your imagination that our so-called Catholic gospel bands often runs only on the three primary chords—tonic, subdominant and dominant (do—fa—sol—do),

that is, if they manage to be playing in the same key as the lead singers themselves. Let's get it right! The author is not totally against the use of gospel band, that is, if it is well tuned and adapted to the sacrality of the liturgy. After all, much of African American church music involves the use of guitar, band set, piano or Hammond organ and it really sounds fine especially in the manner of the harmonic variation. But what one gets often in Nigerian churches are predictable sentimental melodies from the guitarists and organists that often come with a nauseating dance rhythm. Fact is: it can and should get better. The last feature of sacred music is universality. On this St. Pius X teaches that sacred music, "must, at the same time, be universal in the sense that while every nation is permitted to admit into its ecclesiastical compositions those special forms which may be said to constitute its native music, still these forms must be subordinated in such a manner to the general characteristics of sacred music that nobody of any nation may receive an impression other than good on hearing them."¹⁴

St. Pius X is precisely saying that sacred music in a given culture must be quickly recognizable by people from different cultural backgrounds as something that is set apart for Catholic liturgical worship. So, whether it is in the northern part of Nigeria or in the south, the musical instrumentation used in the liturgy should lend credence to the sacredness and authenticity of the sacred event—that is—as it is celebrated every and elsewhere. Therefore, no one is permitted to introduce any musical form or musical instrument in the liturgy that would or could create a bewilderment and confusion in the wider body of the Church—not even in the name or in the guise of inculturation!

It is quite interesting to note that the question of universality came up during the Special

Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in Vatican in 1994. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II,¹⁵ gives the principles for a genuine inculturation of worship [and this includes sacred music], among which are compatibility with Christian message and fellowship with the universal Church. The criterion of communion with the universal church, which implies universality, is based on the acceptance of the multiplicity of cultures inasmuch as Christianity is not meant for one culture alone.¹⁶ By serving as an instrument of fostering communion in the global Church, the task of inculturating African worship music does not end up becoming an instrument of isolating of African Catholics from the entire Catholic Christendom. Rather, the project of liturgico-musical interculturality demands that inculturation places “emphasis on the accurate communication of meaning in a given culture [while considering] the wider Christian community and its teaching.”¹⁷

IV. CATEGORIES OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTATION IN THE LITURGY

In this section, we will itemize different types of musical accompaniments that are obtainable in various churches in Nigeria. In Nigeria, there is the organ or keyboard used alone or in combination with other instruments. In some locales, only native instruments are used. One can define them collectively as nkwa beat. Then, there is the gospel band set-up. Recently, there is also the growing possibility of the usage of a chamber orchestra. Let us look at the four types of instrumental set up.

V. THE ORGAN

As already indicated, the organ is the only instrument emphasized by the church in speaking about options for instrumental music accompaniment of the liturgy. In a sequel to the teaching of Pope St. Pius X, who acknowledged “the prevalence of the pipe

organ and establishe[d] appropriate norms for its use”¹⁸ *Sacrosanctum concilium* gives the following indication on the pipe organ, as a prime musical instrument of the Latin Church: “In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things.”¹⁹ In saying that the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, the Church is acknowledging the capacity of this “queen of the instruments”²⁰ for a creating a wide range of emotions that are beneficial to a more interior or spiritual participation of the faithful in the liturgy. Such emotions correspond to the inner impulse which can lead the worshipping faithful

in that direction which the liturgy itself indicates... at the beginning of the Preface: *sursum corda*—the heart, that is, the inner person, the entirety of the self, lifted up into the height of God, to that height which is God and which in Christ touches the earth, draws it to itself and pulls it up to itself.²¹

The use of organ, whether as an instrumental accompaniment or as solo instrument is therefore not an added extra to the liturgy. It is integral to the liturgy itself.

Aside from lifting men's hearts to transcendental realities, another important capacity of the liturgical organ is that of sacralizing the sacred space. I am aware that many of us will find the claim here bewildering and perhaps, unbelievable. But the sacralizing capacity of the pipe organ was strongly emphasized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty when he refers to even the rehearsal activities of organists as containing “gestures of consecration” in which “they put forth affective vectors, ...discover emotional sources, and ...create an expressive space, just as the gestures of the augur define the *templum*.”²² In essence, Merleau-Ponty argues vigorously that

"that musical performance consecrates a particular place and time."²³ Of course, I am certain that we are very far from realizing this ideal because in Nigeria, there are very few really trained Catholic organists and even if they were many, there are so few liturgical organs to play. But there is no harm in upholding and going for the ideal.

Going back to the memory lane, I have never forgotten my experience of the sacralizing power of the pipe organ at one of the colloquia of the Church Music Association of America I attended in the United States between 2017 and 2019. The strange sound coming from the organ in the gallery sent a clear signal to the worshippers, namely, the church building here has become and is presently a sacred space and every thinking about the world should cease. It produced a feeling of "terribilis est iste locus," or in the words of Rudolf Otto, an experience of "mysterium tremendum."²⁴ Thus, "through the organist, the... space and time of... a [liturgical] service becomes sacred space and time."²⁵ The urge to withdraw and cease from worldly thinking felt like a deep spiritual experience of the *Asperges*, that is, sprinkling the church worshippers with holy water before Mass begins.

With regard to its practical functions, the post-conciliar Instruction on Sacred Music indicates that "the organ, or other instrument legitimately admitted, can be used to accompany the singing of the choir and the people; it can also be played solo at the beginning before the priest reaches the altar, at the Offertory, at the Communion, and at the end of Mass."²⁶ In other words, the principal function of the organ is to accompany the liturgical singing of both the choir and the congregation. As such, "the church organ serves as a support and encouragement to strong congregational singing—the ensemble of natural organs of praise, human voices, which it

can only imperfectly imitate"²⁷ But, the organ can also be played as a solo instrument. In this case, the organ "withdraws [the minds of the worshippers] from conscious perception into the dialogic fabric of worship,"²⁸ a sort of experience of altered state of consciousness.

Now, it is important to lay emphasis on the supporting role of the organ and indeed of any other instruments admitted into the liturgy. On this, the Instruction on Sacred Music, while acknowledging that "the use of musical instruments to accompany the singing can act as a support to the voices, render participation easier, and achieve a deeper union in the assembly," insists that "their sound should not so overwhelm the voices that it is difficult to make out the text." It further states that "when some part is proclaimed aloud by the priest or a minister by virtue of his role, they should be silent."²⁹ We are aware that sometimes in our churches, the sound of the Casio or Yamaha keyboard plugged to the amplifier overwhelms the voices. But the Church wants the organ or the keyboard to really "support" the singing, and not overwhelm it.

The last point of discourse about the organ concerns its use during the Advent and Lenten seasons. Some individuals quickly assume that the organ is not to be used during Lent and the Triduum. From all the searches I made, I do not find any basis for this mistaken assumption. The Church only instructs that "the playing of these same instruments as solos is not permitted in Advent, Lent, during the Sacred Triduum and in the Offices and Masses of the Dead."³⁰ This implies that the instruments cannot just be played solely on their own and alone to generate musical preludes, interludes and postludes. Therefore, only the use of the approved musical instruments—including the organ—for solo performance during Advent or Lent (and of course, during funerals) is

forbidden. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal has precise directives on the use of the organ during the so-called *tempo forte*.

In Advent the use of the organ and other musical instruments should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this time of year, without expressing in anticipation the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. In Lent the playing of the organ and musical instruments is allowed only in order to support the singing. Exceptions, however, are *Laetare* Sunday... Solemnities, and Feasts.³¹

Again, the above quotation implies that on Gaudete and Laetare Sundays (Third Sunday of Advent and Fourth Sunday of Lent respectively) as well as on solemnities and feasts falling within the *tempo forte*, the organ can also be played as a solo instrument. Even during the Triduum, "the organ and other musical instruments may be used only for the purpose of supporting the singing,"³² but only to support or sustain the singing. Let us not forget the operative word "support," and, that is, in lieu of overwhelming the singing. Let us now examine other typologies of liturgical instrumentation.

VI. NKWA BEAT (ACCOMPANIMENT BASED ON NATIVE INSTRUMENTS)

Under this rubric falls all approach to instrumental accompaniment of singing that incorporates musical instruments of our various local cultures in Nigeria. The use of native Nigerian musical instruments in our liturgical celebration is thoroughly justified by both *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Musicam Sacram*. Emphasizing the importance of local musical cultures and forms in mission lands, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy instructs:

In certain parts of the world, especially mission lands... peoples... have their own musical traditions, and these play a great part in their religious and social life. For this reason due importance is to be attached to their music, and a suitable place is to be given to it, not

only in forming their attitude toward religion, but also in adapting worship to their native genius.³³

Going along the same line and citing the second paragraph of article 120 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Instruction on Music in the Liturgy declares: 'The use of other instruments may also be admitted in divine worship, given the decision and consent of the competent territorial authority, provided that the instruments are suitable for sacred use, or can be adapted to it, that they are in keeping with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful.' In permitting and using musical instruments, the culture and traditions of individual peoples must be taken into account.³⁴

So, the issue facing us here is not whether local instruments may be used in the liturgy or not. The Church declares expressly that it can and should be used. Indeed, I will personally prefer the use of these local instruments to the use of modern pop band instruments because they are eloquent cultural symbols with deep cultural significance. When a Yoruba person plays any of the different species of *dundun* or talking drums in the liturgy, he is not just merely playing a membranophone musical instrument. He is actually talking, speaking or even praying with the drum. That is cultural. That is native to Yoruba. In Igbo culture, the notched flute (*oja*) is not just played, it can be used for 'making [religious] statements.'

Naturally, every rule that governs the use of the organ will apply to the native instruments. But some adaptation is obviously needed because local or native Nigerian cultural music instrumentation can be quite heavy and highly percussive. It must be emphasized that the admittance of local or native instruments into the liturgy must take cognizance of the important clause used in the text of

Sacrosanctum Concilium cited above, namely: "The use of other instruments may also be admitted in divine worship... provided that the instruments are suitable for sacred use, or can be adapted to it (emphasis mine), that they are in keeping with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful." So, the instruments must be adapted to the spirit and ethos of the liturgy. Their use in the liturgy must never resemble or imitate the sound of our local cultural dances that are characterized by fast-paced, densely percussive and loud polyrhythmic instrumentation, in which the movement of the body would be rather quite energetic, if not outright sensuous.

Obviously, because of the tendency of nkwa beat (native instruments) to produce some slight body (or micro-dance) movement like swaying (and, not to talk of full-scale dancing, especially, in occasions where exaggerations take upper hand), the author would strongly recommend that it be kept absolutely and totally silent during the Triduum. Even during Advent and Lent—and this would depend on the local culture and musical resources available—churches, although not strictly obliged by the provisions of the Church's liturgical law, may decide to reduce the number of local instruments or even avoid using it altogether in order to create a contrast between the strictly penitential seasons and more joyful periods of the liturgical year. Again, exceptions must be made for the Gaudete and Laetare Sundays. Those are days of sober joy, as the Church clearly indicates.

VII. GOSPEL BAND

The use of the gospel band—guitars, band set, cymbals and other instruments of modern pop music—has come to stay in our country. This is a fact staring us in the face. It cannot be wished away. One can only sympathize with liturgists who feel uncomfortable about it. The

author also sometimes feel same discomfiture especially when gospel band instrumentalists become over enthusiastic and fill the church with a huge volume or high decibel of sound that makes it really difficult for someone to pray or/and meditate. Maybe one can take some little consolation from the statement of Cardinal Arinze who—concerning the use of guitar music in the liturgy—reasoned thus: "I will not now pronounce and say never guitar. That would be rather severe." But he gives a caveat: "...much of guitar music may not be suitable at all for the Mass. Yet, it is possible to think of some guitar music that would be suitable, not as the ordinary one we get every time...."³⁵

Truly, the use of the gospel band in the liturgy is not an ideal but—given that it has inescapably become part of our religious musical culture—we have gotten the challenging task of creatively finding ways of making it adapted or adaptable to Catholic liturgy. And the adaptation must be to Catholic, but not to any other denominational or type of liturgy! I emphasize adaptation to specifically Catholic liturgy because Catholic liturgy is normatively a public worship—as well known, whereas some species of non-Catholic liturgy, for instance, the Pentecostal "liturgy"³⁶, is not a public worship but a private worship exercised in a public place. Consequently, as a matter of principle, music in the Catholic liturgy must play the role of a handmaid—*ancilla liturgiae*, as we normally say. In a typical Pentecostal "liturgy," music does not function as a handmaid of the liturgy, but the liturgy is subject to the domination of the music. As a proof of this, acute observers will notice that in the Pentecostal setting, the real leader of the worship is not the pastor but the worship leader in the person of the principal singer.

In adapting the gospel band to the liturgy, we

may begin by accepting the gospel band music as—probably—being included in that branch of sacred music designated by the Church as “sacred popular music... [that is] simply religious.”³⁷ Perhaps, it can even be argued that the Instruction on the Music in the Liturgy has a provision with regard to—at least, the remote— possibility of use of instrumentation like the gospel band in our local Nigerian culture when it talks of the instruments being “suitable for sacred use, or can be adapted to it... and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful.”

In a deepened and critical assessment of the above cited text, it is obligatory that we take note of the indication that followed immediately: “those instruments which are, by common opinion and use, suitable for secular music only, are to be altogether prohibited from every liturgical celebration and from popular devotion.”³⁸ And this is where the problem lies: that some of the instruments used in gospel band are also used in regular Afro-pop music. But even with regard to this problem, it could be helpful to remember—from the perspective of ethnomusicology—that there is a regularly normal “blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular in African and African derived musical cultures.”³⁹ In the final analysis, I would argue that if in any way the gospel band—within our local cultural context—can be genuinely made to become an instrument of fostering “the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful”⁴⁰ even as it “truly contribute to the edification of the faithful,”⁴¹ then one would probably not have objection to its moderate and adapted use in the church, especially during offertory procession, (but not during the minor elevations/incensation) and perhaps as prelude to and postlude after the liturgy. But, the gospel band music should in no way replace the introit which ideally should come from the Missal or the Gradual. Obviously, one would not recommend its use during the distribution of Holy Eucharist since it would

most likely disrupt the solemnity of the communion procession.

Now, having enunciated the foregoing, we need to examine practical ways of making the gospel band adapted to the liturgy. First of all, there must be the insistence—by liturgists—that they accompany the singing instead of overwhelming it. When the sound becomes extreme in volume, the psychological tendency is for worshippers to keep quiet because either they sense that the band is already doing the job of singing for them or they have the instinctive feeling that they cannot measure up to the high decibel of the loudspeakers of the noisy gospel band. Sometimes, the high volume is caused by the use of an excessive number of instruments and amplifiers. Imagine what would happen in a cathedral or a church in which five lead singers are performing with high-powered microphones, accompanied by three electric guitars playing with two keyboards and a large band set with four different sizes of loud cymbals. Then, there are congas or bongos with three talking drums. Next, let us imagine that all these instruments are connected to a high-tech amplification system that resembles the sound system that was once used for Umbria Jazz in 2003 at the Piazza Novembre XX of the Perugia Cathedral in Italy, or to the kind of amplification usually used for the now famous annual Lekki-Lagos sponsored “Unusual Praise” Gospel music concert. In such circumstances, the liturgical worship simply gets blocked up and cannot proceed. It is therefore important to reiterate what I already said above, namely, that the sound of any musical instrumentation in the liturgy “should not so overwhelm the voices that it is difficult to make out the text,”⁴² or create a worship scenario in which it becomes impossible for the worshippers to think, reflect or meditate.

Another important area of adaptation of the gospel band is the avoidance of replication of

instrumentation patterns of secular music. I am aware that this will require lots of creativity and great effort at being original. But it is not impossible. Although—as I have said above—there is a very thin boundary between sacred and secular music in African music, yet it amounts to sheer banality and unjustified cheapness coming into the church just to reproduce the musical patterns of known Nigerian pop musicians. We can all remember the musical group known as “The Voice of the Cross.” Quite aside from the fact that they are not concerned with liturgical music, each of their musical numbers is always original and soul-lifting. The height of their achievement was in 1991 when they released the album that begins with the track: “In the morning, I will rise and praise the Lord.” It is an indication that we can help our gospel bands to create an original sound that is in consonance with the spirit and ethos of the liturgy instead of simply imitating Nigerian “highlife,” “reggae,” “juju” and even perhaps, “disco” sounds in our liturgy.

Next, it is important for us to resolve to discourage our gospel band musicians from creating some parody or adaptation of secular music within the sacred space. Permit me to cite an example from one Igbo secular song some of us are familiar with. I am referring to Onyeka Onwenu’s “Onye ga-agba egwu?” (Who will dance?) track. Now, it is grossly offensive to turn this piece into a song for liturgical celebration just by adding the religious lyrics: “Umu Chukwu ga-agba egwu” (The Children of God will dance). Similarly, it is awful to introduce into the liturgy such cheap pieces like “Anyi abịago imata Chi ahu sikariri ike” (We’ve come to know the God that is most powerful) which is an adaptation of an original folk song that says: “Anyị abịago imata ndị akwa siri ike n’ukwu” (We’ve come to see those whose loincloth are well secured on their waists).

I would immediately imagine that many liturgists and music directors may not be clearly aware of the option of using a chamber orchestra in the liturgy. But this option really exists. Probably, that would have been what was primarily going on in the mind of those who drafted the Sacrosanctum concilium and Musicam sacram while thinking about the possibility of the use of other instruments in the liturgy. But the option of use of chamber orchestra did not begin with Vatican II. Already in his seminal instruction on liturgical music, Pope St. Pius X admitted that “in some special cases, within due limits and with proper safeguards, other instruments may be allowed....”⁴³ He also indicated that only in special cases with the consent of the Ordinary will it be permissible to admit wind instruments, limited in number, judiciously used, and proportioned to the size of the place provided the composition and accompaniment be written in grave and suitable style, and conform in all respects to that proper to the organ.⁴⁴

Further, Pope Pius XII declared that “other instruments can be called upon to give great help in attaining the lofty purpose of sacred music, so long as they play nothing profane, nothing clamorous or strident and nothing at variance with the sacred services or the dignity of the place. Among these the violin and other musical instruments that use the bow are outstanding because, when they are played by themselves or with other stringed instruments or with the organ, they express the joyous and sad sentiments of the soul with an indescribable power.”⁴⁵

The implication of the foregoing is the clear admissibility of the use of some limited number of wind and string instruments in the liturgy. That is what I defined as a chamber orchestra.

VIII. CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

But it would be equally an awful exaggeration to use an excessively heavy orchestral accompaniment in the liturgy. Such would be the case if there is a resorting to use of a full symphony orchestra. Let us always remember that the sound of any musical accompaniment must serve to support the singing but never to overwhelm the sound of human voices in the liturgy. This state of things, namely, "the excessive use made of musical instruments" was strongly deprecated by Pope Pius XI, who wrote thus: We hereby declare that singing with orchestra accompaniment is not regarded by the Church as a more perfect form of music or as more suitable for sacred purposes. Voices, rather than instruments, ought to be heard in the church: the voices of the clergy, the choir and the congregation. Nor should it be deemed that the Church, in preferring the human voice to any musical instrument, is obstructing the progress of music; for no instrument, however perfect, however excellent, can surpass the human voice in expressing human thought, especially when it is used by the mind to offer up prayer and praise to Almighty God.⁴⁶

It is obvious that Pius XI's emphasis here is not on a normative total impossibility of using any other instrument outside the organ, but the inappropriateness of using an excessive instrumentation as exemplified by the symphony orchestra and the primacy of voice over instrument in liturgical service. Interestingly, while he argued that "no instrument, however perfect, however excellent, can surpass the human voice in expressing human thought," Pius XII would argue, years later, that when "the violin and other musical instruments that use the bow... are played by themselves or with other stringed instruments or with the organ, they express the joyous and sad sentiments of the soul with an indescribable power." This is not a contradiction of one Pope by another but nuanced views of the same reality from various

angles.

In the final analysis, a commonsense and moderate use of chamber orchestral instruments would seem laudable from the optics of Joseph Ratzinger who argued that "when man comes into contact with God, mere speech is not enough... [his] own being is insufficient for what he has to express," therefore he has to invoke and invite "the whole of creation to become a song with him."⁴⁷ The invocation of the entire creation then becomes iconically symbolized in the use of varied western instruments to accompany the liturgical music with the same spirit and approach that characterize the liturgical usage of the organ.

IX. CONCLUSION

In concluding this reflection, let me state that the decision of the Church to admit instruments in the liturgy is the fruit of the maturation of the Church's liturgical and aesthetic sensibility down through the ages. It may interest us to know that at the early period of the Church, the use of musical instruments was really frowned upon. This will help us to understand my initial statement that the musical instruments approved by the church as liturgically fit are not to be seen as exotic additives to the liturgy. Perhaps, we can end this discussion with every liturgist making up his mind to start from today to include the question "who is playing the organ?" in his inquiries for liturgical planning.

Therefore, the challenge is there for all Nigerian Catholic liturgists and musicians to find ways of applying the various directives of the Church on the necessary but appropriate use of musical instruments in the liturgy, especially, in line with the genuine spirit of *aggiornamento* or authentic reform principles of Vatican II, for the proper and fitting enrichment of liturgical music in our local church. In doing this, one needs to bear in mind the gulf of difference between sacred

music and profane music and that a mixture of or confusion about the two within the liturgy constitutes a painful clash that impedes the Church's desire of arriving at an authentic liturgical worship that can really serve as "the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit,"⁴⁸ a quality worship that serves to proclaim "the glory of God" while achieving "the sanctification of the faithful."⁴⁹

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