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Rejuvenating the Orchestral Art in the Liturgical Music of the Roman Catholic Church in Igboland

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Abstract

The Liturgical music of the Roman Catholic Church is epitomized in the mass – that cultic, evangelical and celebrative re-enactment of the Calvary event that means so much to Catholics and has been so little understood by non-Catholics. For the musician/musicologist, the dimension is bifocal; the order of the Mass and the other sections of the Mass. The order of the Mass consists of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei while the other sections of the Mass consist of the Entrance, Offertory, Communion and Dismissal. Myriads of centuries of colonization have left the average African still confused about his way of life and even his religion. In the Roman Catholic Church, the confusion in understanding of the requisite mood, musicality and expression of the new faith has become a pertinent issue calling for ethno musicological attention. Through an observational and descriptive study, this researcher looks at the music of the Roman Catholic Church in Igboland from both the theological and musicological zoom-lens with a view towards revitalizing values such as instrumentation and orchestration embedded in the autochthonous musical life of Africans.

Keywords: Rejuvenation, Orchestral Art, Liturgical Music, Roman Catholic Church, Igboland.

Introduction

It is not difficult to decipher so many vestiges of colonialism in the religious life of Africans today. In our churches the ripples are chaotic. From the entrance procession to the dismissal, the neo-colonial masters are still in charge. In our burial and wedding ceremonies the picture is even more grotesque. This is because the sweet memories of cultures of yester-years have not left us. The cultural dances have survived reminding us of how we should celebrate. But the new religion brought by the white men has confounded and confused our value system – bringing western education with western musical idioms and thus, leaving the average educated African Christian not knowing the dividing line between his new faith and his new culture. If Christ was a Jew, are we supposed to worship God like the Jews? If the Missionaries who brought Christianity to us were Europeans, was their faith in Christ tied intricately and inextricably to their culture as Europeans? According to Ehusani (2012), 'the mimicking of foreign modes of worship and the vexatious dependence syndrome which still bedevils the African Church are in themselves dimensions of colonialism' (p.5).

The Roman Catholic Church in Igboland started over a hundred years ago. Still under the colonial masters, the whole cultural fabrics of the Igbos were viewed by the missionaries with a colonial mentality. African drums, for example, were considered heathen artifacts. African airs were looked at as secular. Ipso facto, the earliest liturgical music performed in our

churches were purely made of European stuff. Umezinwa (2010) speaks of three periods in the developmental trend of liturgical music in Igbo land: **the Latin period, the imitative and the innovative period**. The Latin period was the period when liturgical music in the Roman Catholic Church was replete with Latin Hymns and Chants. The order of the Masses was only done in plain chants, for example, from the *Liber Usualis* for example, *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* from *Missa de Angelis*. Even the Entrance, Offertory, Communion and Dismissal songs were purely Latin Hymns like the *Attende Domino, Panis Angelicus, Ave Maris Stella,*and many others. First generation Christians who attended mission colleges like St. Charles' College Onitsha were only taught Latin songs at the earliest period.

The second generation (Imitative Period) began to have translations of Latin and English songs into the Igbo Language. Such hymns like 'Hark hark my soul' were rendered as 'N'oriri Ikpeazu' more like parodies of Western hymns sounded in vernacular. Musicians like Arazu (2011) and Fr. Ezenduka made frantic efforts to translate Latin Psalms and English Hymns into the Igbo Language. People like Nicholas Onyediefuna, composed 'MissaOdudoNso' and 'NdibiaraUkagaanata Ngozi' as first creative efforts of liturgical compositions that ushered in the innovative period. Fr. Bede Onuoha, Fr. I.P Anozie, Peace Val Ihim- the composer of 'Missa Ncheta' and 'Bianu Umu Chineke', Fred Uche, Dorothy Ipere, Jim Madu, Joe Onyekwelu and a host of other Catholic composers now became free to try out original compositions that were not parodies of Western tunes.

The challenge of inculturation came as the post Vatican II wave of 'aggionamento' – opening the doors and windows of the church to receive the fresh airs of the cultural music of the people (Flannery, 1982). By then, the Roman Catholic Church was losing so many of her members to the African indigenous churches, a.k.a, *Aladura* Churches, who through their liberal approach to African Music were drawing many people away. The Roman Catholic Church was forced to begin allowing the use of local musical instruments like the African drums (*Igba*), xylophones (*ngedegwu*), seed rattles (*ichaka*), metal gong (*Alo* and *Ogene*), clef (*Okpokoro*), and others. This brought a new breeze of homeliness that, in the view of some scholars, became the secret of Roman Catholic dominance in number over other churches up till today.

The modern era of producing many musicologists who are church musicians and more especially priests who are theologian – musicologists has revolutionized the whole scenario. Following theories of Igbo Music from scholars like Ekwueme (2004), Agu (1999), Uzoigwe (1998), Onyeji (2013), Okafor and Okafor (2009), the intellectual atmosphere is rife with musicological ideas relevant for inculturation in liturgical music inIgboland.Kofi Agawu was very passionate in making this appeal for cultural renaissance in these words:

> I ask that we rethink the extent to which European influence has come to determine our construction of the "purest" of African musics and to embrace the challenge of formulating a view of our creative activities not under the weight of a nostalgic look at the past but through a realistic look at the present. (Agawu, 2003: 29).

This researcher is interested in the area of instrumentation. We need to study the instrumental musical resources used in African traditional religion for sacred worship such as *Ikoro* drums,

xylophones (*ngedegwu*), horns (*opu*) and many others. Since the period of tearing of African drums as a symbol of conversion to Christianity is over, Thihagale (2010) argues that "the recasting of the original rites of the local culture with a goal towards allowing the Christian message as received and as expressed to express itself in the local culture" is the business of *avant-garde* church musicians.

The orchestral art embedded in the African blood has not yet been well explored in our churches. What Adeogun (1999) calls the 'sanctity of immobility' is a sickness still found in some clerical leaders of the Roman Catholic Church – a notion that clapping and dancing are in themselves, obscene expressions of mundanity. It is true that in the past, the church fathers frowned at the use of musical instruments in the liturgy as vestiges of inordinate incursions of orgiastic dance in the Jewish temple after years of sojourn into exile in pagan countries. But must the church in Africa continue to shy away from a culture that is truly ours? Our music is very temperate and instrumental. According to Omojola (1999), Instrumental and dance music represent the epitome of the Nigerian musical tradition. He expounds the concept of melorhythmic polyphony as a premise for interrogating African indigenous compositions. As Omojola (2021) boldly puts it,

> All melodies are rhythmically defined. Melo-rhythm, however, refers not to silent rhythms – those that hide behind melodic motion. Melo-rhythm designates and empowers rhythm as an active determinant of melodic identity. If rhythmic lines must be (at least minimally) melodic, and if the juxtaposition of melo-rhythmic lines is deliberate, that is, according to specific rules of complementarity, then harmonic resultants should be seen to be repurposed rather than incidental. (p.86).

Developing any meaningful orchestral art within the African conceptual framework, therefore requires a thorough study of our traditional instrumental repertories especially as they suggest a correlation between rhythm and melody. To continue to run away from the orchestral art is to render our liturgical music culturally moribund and artistically schizophrenic. How much of our traditional worship music were purely vocal or *accapella*? This researcher therefore recommends a systematic study of the orchestral art through a methodology and a pedagogy that would be safe and sound for the maintenance of a good liturgical decorum.

Concept of Worship

According to Leaver and others (1998), the term worship is used in a general sense to refer to man's encounter with the holy, awe-inspiring and attractive being called God. Liturgical worship 'refers to those forms of public corporate worship which follows a set structure of series of rites (procedures) required or usual in solemn celebrations' (p.9). Liturgical worship, therefore, belongs to the aspect of theology which uses the tools of systematic theology to analyze the dynamics of worship, its relationship to man, its scriptural bases, historical development of its rites and its foundation in basic Christian doctrines.

Christian Liturgy owed its earliest traditions to Judaism and this influence can be noticed in early Christian Liturgy in the areas of Divine worship such as singing of Psalms, hours of prayer (Divine Office), spiritual reading, celebration of paschs, and so on. History informs us

that the early apostles continued to worship at the Jewish temples and synagogues before they were later excommunicated. After the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70AD, the synagogue now became a substitute for it. It became probable also that when the local church had to separate from the synagogue (due to early persecution of Christians), it modeled its worship on what it had been used to in the temples and synagogues, now in private homes. Jungman (1959) argues that what the early Christians did at the temple, strictly speaking, was not Christian worship as such but what they did in their homes, for example the celebration of the breaking of breads at this house or that, Act 2:46. Michael Molley in Leaver (ed), (1998) therefore contends that the earliest liturgical musical form of worship was found in the form of chanting/recitation of Psalms and Hymns used later in the Divine Office but as the church moved from comparatively simple domestic worship to the more complex patterns of basilicas, 'there was a restructuring of the liturgy to reflect or adapt to the imperial space' (p. 328).

So many other things happened, for instance, with regard to the use of musical instruments. Weakland, in McDonald (1967) reported the rejection of all musical instruments from Christian worship by the early church fathers as being associated with 'pagan orgiastic rites' – a result of exile contamination. The protestant reformers thought otherwise and launched the church not only into the world of polyphonic music but also poly instrumental music. The Catholic Church came back slowly to the acceptance of this polyphonic and polyrhythmic musical culture then perceived as the church's inveterate enemy to solemnity. By the dawn of the Vatican II, the language of 'aggionamento' was saying 'open the doors and windows of the church to the cultural musical influence of the people'. The idea of inculturation came as a bang – a kind of *Copernican revolution* to enhance the solemnity of the liturgy within the context of the people's 'weltanschaung'- worldview. The call for inculturation and indigenization of liturgical music in Nigeria was gathering momentum as indigenous musicologists like Bode Omojola continued to lament the complete disconnect between what happens in the Churches and what happens in the villages. According to Omojola (2021), "The modal music that I sang at home differed significantly from the tonal harmonies that we performed at school and in churches, two public spaces where the cultural impact of British Colonial rule lingers". (p.82). The intellectual arena was gradually getting set for a needed marriage between Western and African pedagogical concepts in both the academic and liturgical music spaces. This is in tandem with MekiNzewi's contention that,

> A composer of African modern music should enable a listener to appreciate the quintessential African harmonic, developmental and textural – structural idioms. Otherwise the composition is of no consequence to a continuum of African creative integrity. It will be a disservice, in fact an insult, to Africans to categorize it as an African modern music. It could be a modern African's music. (Nzewi, 1997: 72)

This creativity has become rife in the area of African instrumentation/orchestration introduced into the Nigerian Roman Catholic liturgy as both essential and incidental.

Inculturation Vs Solemnity

Udoh (2004) defines church music as "music composed, adopted or deemed suitable for church use or for Christian worship, prayer public or private" (p. 165). But this definition is

vague and nebulous leaving a critical mind awash with such questions as 'who deems it suitable and under what parameters of judgment?' As Okafor and Okafor (2009) rightly observes: "What is music in one culture may be sheer noise in another and what is noise in one culture may be very meaningful in another"(p. 13), one can as well say that what is sheer noise in one church could be adjudged suitable "joyful noise unto the Lord" by another church.

Agbo (2012) gives some insight into the **cultic, evangelical** and **celebrative** sense of worship. The cultic sense of worship emphasizes what we do in worship for example, rituals and rites. The evangelical sense of worship emphasizes what we say in worship, for example, the reading of the scripture and the preaching of the Word of God, while the celebrative sense of worship emphasizes how we feel during worship for example, the type of music and dance that will help believers during thanksgiving would be different from the type suitable at the penitential service or funeral ceremony.

The Roman Catholic Liturgy is organized in such way that the liturgical mood varies in an undulating way. From the entrance, there is an aura of solemnity as the entrance hymn ushers the Priest (Chief celebrant) to the altar. After the introduction of the mass, there is a penitential rite that carries a very solemn mood. From there comes the joyful singing of the Gloria. A sober mood follows the liturgy of the word ending with the homily and prayer of the faithful. Then comes the liveliest part of the liturgy which is the offering time. After the offering, the Chief celebrant calls the congregation up for the preface before the liturgy of the Eucharist. There is a joyful singing of the *Sanctus*-an invitation of the angels and saints in the sacrifice of the Eucharist. This is the most solemn part of the Liturgy ending in the communion service. It is a solemn moment of adoration. The songs and music are less noisy and more meditative. After the communion comes the dismissal full of joy and liveliness again.

There are two issues of consideration here; the liturgical and the musical. The following critical submissions of Gelineau (1978) stand tall here,

> Liturgical music has always had ritual status. Until modern times, a distinction was made between Cantus Ecclesiaticus (rites) and arsmusica (art). The former was part of the ceremony. Chanting of Psalms, the Kyrie, the Alleluia, bell-ringing were not primarily an exercise in the art of musical but ritual practices. However, modern subjectivity has laid more stress on the aesthetic aspect of music. Church music is now expected to be 'art'. It must be performed by artists, whereas formerly it was the business of the clergy. It is now judged by the aesthetic standards by which the art of music is judged in that particular culture as a whole (p. 83).

Thus, it happened that the marriage of liturgy and art music was birthed– a historical land mark worthy of note here. Today so many issues are of essence in liturgical music considerations in the Roman Catholic Church; the liturgical mood of the celebration, the choir-congregational relationship (that is, how easy it is for a congregation to join in a particular music being performed), the artistic standards of the music (that is, as a work of art, how appealing is the music? How related to the culture of the people. What musical genre/ form does it represent? We would now approach the latter considerations more squarely now.

Rejuvenating the Orchestral art in Roman Catholic Church Music

While upholding the primacy of singing in Nigerian and Igbo traditional music, Ekwueme (1992) and Omojola (1999) acclaim instrumental music as representing the epitome of the Nigerian dynamic and technically complex musical tradition. "The distinctive quality of African music" says Kofi Agawu, "lies in its rhythmic structure. Africans possess a unique rhythmic sensibility…full of irregular rhythms". (Agawu, 2003: 125, 127). Although purely instrumental and vocal performances abound, the predominant category of musical performances however tends to be those in which voices and instruments are combined together. This is also expected to be the case even in liturgical music.

Ekwueme (1992) continuing from the works of Echezona (1963) and Okosa (1962) enumerates the following taxonomy of local instruments that could form an instrumental accompaniment to Igbo choral singing even in our churches; Idiophones for example,*ogene, alo,* xylophones and thumb piano; membranophones for example, drums; aerophonesfor example, flutes and horns; chordophones, for example*une*and others. Nzewi (2003) and Onyeji (2004) describe the use of these instruments with the following ensemble roles in a typical African performance setting; **pulse marker** for example, *udu*, **timeline** for example, *okpokoro*, **phrase referent** for example, *ogene,* **action rhythm** for example, *alo*, **fleshing,** for example, *ichaka* and others. These instruments form the instrumental resources available even in the liturgical music context of Igbo land today.

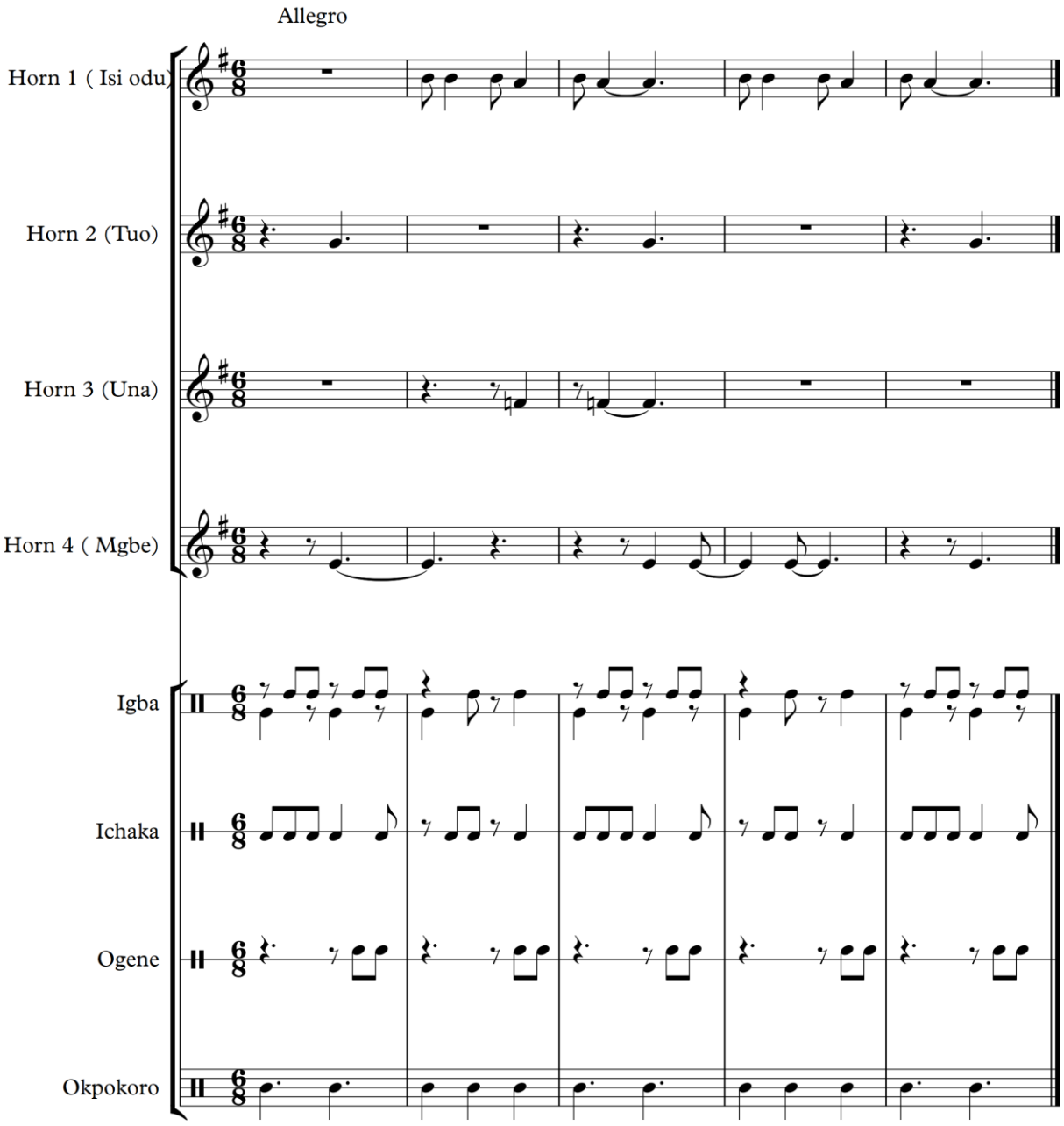
This researcher proposes a rejuvenation of the orchestral art in church music through a systematic ethnomusicological study of popular instrumental music genres of the Igbo tribe for example, *Atilogwu*of Enugu area and *Ikorodo* of Nsukka area, *Akunechenyi* of Anambra area, *Abigbo* of Imo area, and so on and a conscious compositional and performance oriented application of the knowledge of this art in the Roman Catholic Liturgy. A number of compositions have been done by Agbo (2009) with a vision towards making the above-mentioned genres resound again more adroitly in the Roman Catholic Liturgy taking note of the following rhythmic frameworks as sample accompaniment motif.

Sample A


ATILOGWU
Allegro
Pot Drum (Udu)
Wooden Slit Drum (Ekwe)
Metal Gong (Ogene)
Seed Rattle (Ichaka)
Drum (Igba)
Big Metal Gong (Alo)
3
Pot Drum (Udu)
Wooden Slit Drum (Ekwe)
Metal Gong (Ogene)
Seed Rattle (Ichaka)
Drum (Igba)
Big Metal Gong (Alo)

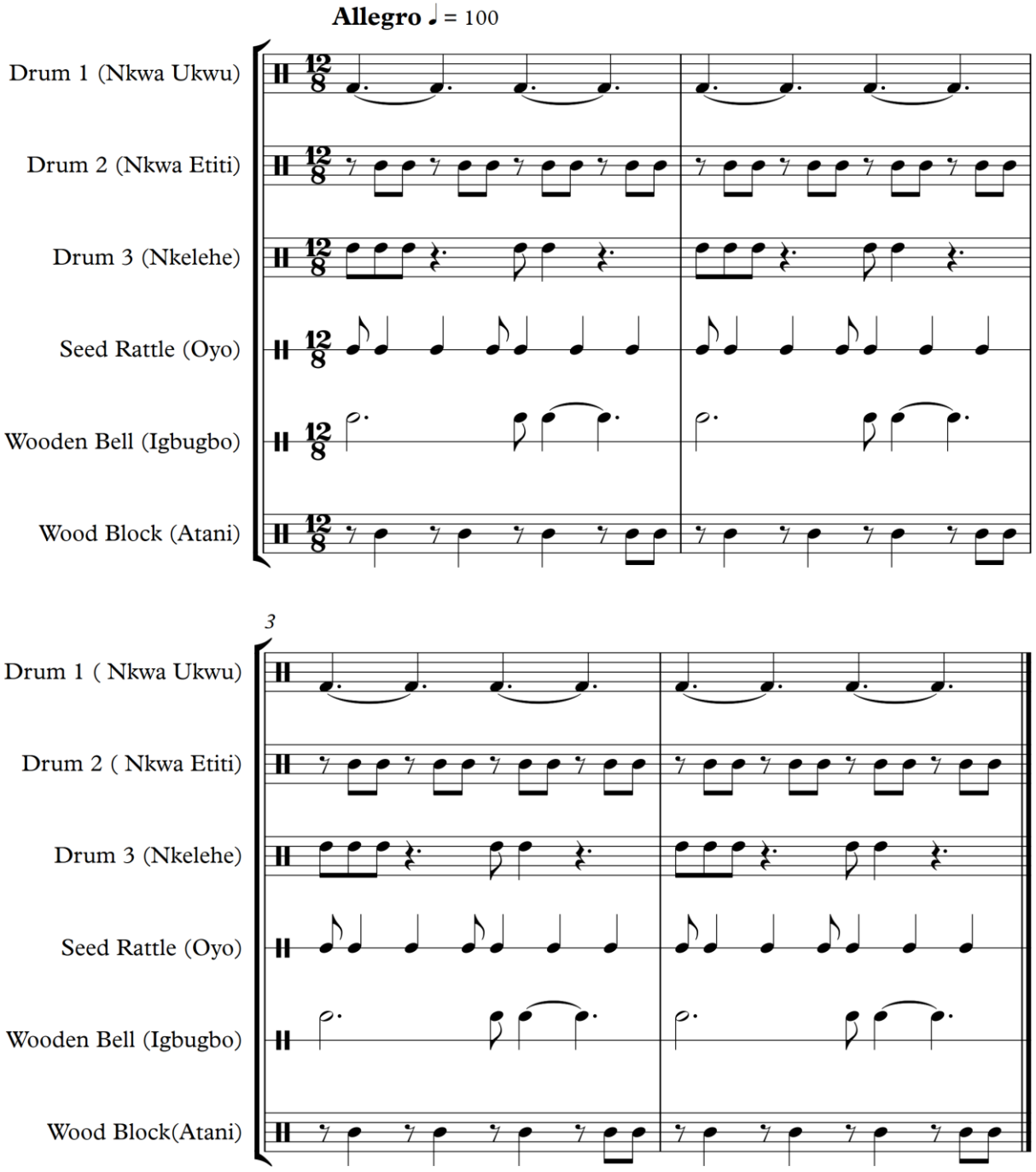
Sample B

IKORODO STYLE



Sample C

ABIGBO STYLE



Sample D

AKUNECHENYI STYLE



It is expected that when composers embark on fresh compositions with the exact knowledge of given accompaniment frameworks, the music ends up reflecting the genres more familiarly than when accompaniments are left to the arbitrary device of individual church choirmasters. There could be various permutations of sample A, B, C or D above. Composers can decide to assign roles to various orchestral instruments according to their specific roles in a particular traditional ensemble of study. For example, a composer who wants to experiment on *Ikorodo* genre must take note of the special metronome beat played by the clef (*okpokoro*) which must

be supported by the small metal gong (*ogene*). Suitable woodwinds would then be employed to provide the hocket technique of the horn ensemble as typical of the original *Ikorodo* ensemble. *Ikorodo* music is one good example of a traditional music genre where the instrumental/ orchestral art is so well developed that the vocal and instrumental resources enjoy a holy symbiosis. Choir directors should also make effort to choose already existing works that fit better into the above accompaniment samples.

The more elaborate orchestral art of genres like the *Ikorodo, Akunechenyi or Abigbo* dance, could be fully explored using the requisite horns, flutes or drum repertory with a vision towards simulating a typical African polyphonic setting in rambunctious moments of the Roman Catholic Liturgy such as the Entrance, Offertory, Gloria, Sanctus or Dismissal sections. The celebrative sense of African worship must never be sacrificed at the altar of solemnity or whatever one may call it.

CONCLUSION

We have established both the theoretical and practical frameworks for a robust exercise in indigenous orchestration especially within the Roman Catholic Liturgy following the impetus of the Vatican II for inculturation. We have also presented some brief accompaniment frameworks for various popular instrumental music genres in Igboland such as *Ikorodo, Atilogwu, Akunechenyi, Abigbo,* to mention but a few. That said, the challenge facing the contemporary musicologist with a theological bent is enormous: the challenge of composing for a typical African liturgy in a celebrative mood with a full option of local and instrumental resources, the application of African melodic, local and harmonic techniques like the use of the ostinato, call and response style, parallelism, hocket technique, variation style, overlapping, improvisations and overall massive polyphonic texture. The obvious lack of full audience participation in our Roman Catholic Liturgy today is symptomatic of the lack of sufficient inculturation exercise. Worthy of praise here is the works of *avantgarde* composers like Jude Nnam whose many revolutionary motets are making the rounds in many Catholic Churches today because of the inculturation ideas therein; the call and response style, use of ostinato refrains, pop rhythms and general congregation-friendly choruses. Pure African forms and genres are yet to emerge from contemporary liturgical music composers.

This researcher recommends that composers explore more vistas of boundaries beyond even the popular SATB choral style. The four-part harmony is not truly the African style. A two- or three-part style with soloist lines for call and response refrain would be more ad rem. A more polyphonic orchestral setting that is truly representative of Africans in a celebrative mood is yet to be realized in our liturgy. The time has come for better synthesis of both Western and African elements in terms of melody, form, harmony, development style, instrumental accompaniment, and so on. This researcher believes in hybridization. The liturgy must be dynamic. A culture that does not metamorphose into synthetic hybrids is a moribund culture because the only thing constant in life is change.

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