

# Sustaining Our Musical Heritage: Towards an Anthology and the Archiving of Indigenous Nigerian Catholic Liturgical Songs

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**Abstract:** With the linguistic and musical liberalisation of Catholic worship occasioned by Vatican II, there was a shift from the total application of the plainchant and the exclusive use of Latin in the liturgical celebrations globally. This development gave rise to music compositions in the indigenous languages of the locations of these Catholic Liturgical Celebrations. The same scenario is also applied to the Nigerian Catholic Liturgical Setting. However, while the traditional Catholic Latin liturgical songs were lucky to have been anthologised and archived, the post-Vatican II Nigerian counterparts, especially the earlier ones, have not been so fortunate. This paper, therefore, attempts to uncover the factors responsible for the non-preservation of these songs and proffer solutions to the notable absence of the preservation and archival modules for the indigenously composed Nigerian Catholic liturgical songs. The main finding was that there is a dearth of both anthological and archival modules for liturgical music compositions in Nigeria. The paper recommends that to preserve our musical heritage, concerted efforts should be made toward the collection, documentation, and archival of indigenous liturgical compositions in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Preservation, Indigenous, Nigerian, Liturgy, Catholic Songs

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## 1. Introduction

Just as it is with the other spheres of human endeavours, the preservation of indigenous Nigerian catholic compositions is a sine qua non to maintaining an aspect of the African Music heritage. Notably and prior to the present time, there was generally a dearth of documentation of musical works in Nigeria. However, the essence of collecting, documenting, and archiving of musical products cannot be overestimated. They are all precursors to the sustenance of the musical heritage of any people. And therefore, very important in the sustenance of the people's musical culture. Brandelleroa and Janssenb [1] see 'heritage as both a source of identity and a receptor of value attributed to it by communities, institutions and people.' Practically, Anderson [2] associates heritage with more collective understandings of shared inheritance, tied in with the delineation of 'imagined communities', particularly related to notions of nationhood. In this essay, nationhood as used by Anderson,

may be alluded to as the entire Catholic community in Nigeria. The preceding, therefore, is indicative of the need to keep track of every index to aid the preservation of the cultural heritage of a given people or society and more importantly the Nigerian Catholic musical heritage. However, and as noted by Violyta and Pesulima [3], changes in arts are influenced by various factors, such as education, social, economy, politics, religion, and culture. With reference to the Catholic liturgical compositions, these changes were initiated by the introduction of an inculturated mode of worship.

Vatican II treaties gave rise to the 'inculturated' liturgical celebrations in Nigeria and elsewhere. Beall [4] defines inculturation as "the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures" (para. 2). Before Vatican II, the liturgy's traditional language, Latin, was, to a certain extent, universal. By inference, the Pre-Vatican II era also promoted the Gregorian Chant and other liturgical music forms in Latin. According to BBC Music Magazine [5], 'Gregorian chant is a form of sacred

song in Latin... employed within the Roman Catholic Church for centuries.'

The pre-Vatican II was a period as noted by Kanu and Kanu [6], that 'Africans, a people of songs, dance and drums, were not allowed by some missionaries to sing in their local languages or to beat the drum and dance to its rhythm during worship.' (p. 55).

However, one can allude that after Vatican II, there was a gradual waning of Latin and the Plain Chant as the exclusive liturgical language and musical form respectively in the catholic global sphere, and incidentally, Nigeria. According to Umezina [7], 'the second Vatican council encouraged the adaptation of the liturgy to the indigenous forms to encourage active participation of the worshipping community.' (p. 7). To buttress the above submissions, Akpakpan [8] writes that:

Initially, the Catholic Liturgy was mainly celebrated in Latin and sung as plainchant. After Vatican II and the introduction of inculturation, there was a choice for Catholic dioceses/parishes around the globe to celebrate and sing the liturgy in the languages of the places they were situated (p. 58).

Chukwuneta & Agu [9] corroborate that the above 'situation remained so, not until the second Vatican Council... pronounced new policies in Christian worship which created a landmark that brought radical changes in modes of worship and use of music in the Catholic Church.'

Akpakpan also notes that inculturation 'has given rise to a gamut of indigenous compositions that are used in the contemporary Catholic liturgy in many dioceses...' (p. 58). With Akpakpan's assertion in the preceding, one may agree that an opening was eventually created to celebrate various liturgical rites in the Nigerian people's indigenous languages. Conversely, the Gregorian (Plain) Chant gradually ceded to some degree, its dominance as the primary form of liturgical music, leading to liturgical songs that were/are composed in the indigenous Nigerian languages. Today in Nigeria, these early and post-Vatican II compositions are or should be regarded as the forerunners of the aggregate of songs known as 'Nigerian Catholic Liturgical Music'. It is also pertinent to note that this array of liturgical music transcends songs composed in the Nigerian traditional languages. Notably, some are also in Latin and others in English with blends of cross-cultural music traits.

The writers do not intend to have a detailed deliberation on the concept of 'Inculturation'; neither do they want to have an in-depth discussion on Vatican II and its documents. The paper rather seeks to examine the degree to which Catholic Liturgical Music in Nigeria have been or can be preserved for posterity. It is not the place of this piece to deliberate on the liturgical aptness and mode of applying indigenously composed songs to Nigeria's liturgical rites. Delving into the concern of aptness would be too broad and out of the ambience of this particular discourse. Before going further, let these pertinent questions be asked: Where is our catholic liturgical music heritage? Has it been preserved? An attempt to answer these questions would, to a certain extent, elicit a

further and endless loop of questions and postulations. However, just as it was with the other genres of Nigerian Art Music, there is a dearth of publication outlets for Nigerian compositions. In the general musical parlance in Nigeria, it has been noted that documentation and archiving have not always been given serious attention. According to Ayorinde, Talabi, and Okunade [10], 'in Nigeria, the lack of access to or non-existent standard institutional musical archives has a gross negative implication on musical scholarship and musical arts education.' Therefore, some indigenous compositions last just a few years after the demise of their composers. This situation does not allow references to such compositions whether for performance or research purposes. This, however, reiterates the importance of archiving and documentation in almost all facets of human endeavour. According to Jayeola, Akintunde and Ugwu [11], 'since the beginning of the human race, music, like every other art has begun to experience great modification and poor documentation which has led to the extinction of many indigenous music and other arts.'

## 2. Anthology and Archiving of Catholic Music/Musical Artefacts in Nigeria

Webster [12] defines an Anthology as a 'collection of selected literary pieces or passages or works of art or music.' Depending on the context, the word may be synonymous with an 'album', 'compendium', and 'compilation'. From an exclusive musical sense, an anthology is a printed or manuscript collection of musical works selected from a particular repertory and sometimes contains pieces by more than one composer. It may also include folksong collections, tune books, songsters, and hymnals. From the sonic perspective, an anthology may also refer to a group of recorded music. From the initial submission, it is, therefore, possible to have 'An Anthology of National Anthems of World', and 'An Anthology of Yoruba Catholic Liturgical Songs', both representing a collection of the National Anthems of World and Yoruba Catholic Liturgical Songs respectively.

Conversely, Webster [13] writes that to archive is to 'collect and store materials (such as recordings, documents, or computer files) so that they can be found and used when they are needed. Furtherance, Ellis [14] defines archives as 'documents made or received and accumulated by a person or organisation in the course of the conduct of affairs and preserved because of their continuing value.' (p. 2). From the above, we may observe the essence of 'collecting', now with an extension so that the archival materials can be found and used when needed. At this point and for a proper grasp, we should also look the word 'archive' within the musical lens. Essentially, musical archiving is the collection and storage of selected music works/artefacts to be retrieved and used when needed. In our bid to further look at Anthology and archiving, we need to have a cursory look at the concept: 'Musical Artefacts.' However, it is important to look at the word on its

right. Artefacts refer to items or objects; therefore, musical artefacts connote objects that produce sounds- musical instruments.

We would prescribe how to collect and preserve music compositions, performances, and musical instruments within Nigeria's liturgical settings in this discussion. However, to anthologise and archive, we must do them in three ways; anthologising and archiving the composition, if notated; the sound, for both notated; and non-notated pieces and the instrumental resources. The just enumerated approach allows us to anthologise and appropriately archive.

### 3. How Do We Achieve the Above

For songs that have not been notated, we search, collect via recording, and transcribe songs from their sonic to the visual forms (notation) before proceeding to the regular book production process. Also, for songs that have been notated already, we collect, re-score, proofread and proceed to the traditional book production process. Notably but not exclusively, the older indigenous liturgical songs are in the category of those that may not be notated. On the other hand, it is assumed that newer liturgical songs are usually in their notated forms.

As a summation of the preceding paragraph, one may rightly deduce that the processes involved in anthologising and archiving liturgical music in Nigeria include:

- a. Collection through Tape recording of Songs;
- b. transcriptions of the songs from the sonic to the visual symbols (any Notational system);
- c. editing of the text, melodies and harmonies of the songs;
- d. typesetting of the song for the printing press; and
- e. the final publication of the book collection.

### 4. Towards the Anthology and Archival of Indigenous Liturgical Songs across Dioceses in Nigeria

Indigenous liturgical compositions in Nigeria are songs written by composers in Nigeria for the Catholic liturgy as a result of conscious efforts by composers 'to put into practice Vatican II's recommendations on inculturation, the use of the vernacular, and local instruments to enhance the people's active participation in the liturgy.' (Agbo) [15]. However, since the Vatican II treaty, a gamut of indigenous liturgical composition has been emerging. But there has not been a serious anthological module put in place to preserve them.

Within the dioceses in Nigeria, the liturgy languages are usually Latin (the Official Language of the Catholic Church), English, and the liturgical celebration location's indigenous languages. It is to be noted that the notation and preservation of non-indigenous liturgical songs have been in place over the centuries. Hence, there would not have been available for our usage. On the other hand, several indigenous liturgical songs have been composed and used in worship in the Catholic liturgy in Nigeria. In some instances, some of these

songs are very effective within the liturgical functions they are applied. However, many are not often used or heard beyond their composers' resident parishes/dioceses. Therefore, if various diocesan music commissions/directorates put a collection and documentation system in place, these songs would have a more comprehensive application within their originating parishes/dioceses and perhaps, be made more available to the other parishes/ dioceses within a given province and beyond.

The above reference is only made to songs whose composers are known. However, within the gamut of liturgical songs used across the dioceses in Nigeria, there also exists a body of songs whose composers are unknown. This group may be annotated 'traditional'; is not written down in any form and, over the years, passed from one generation to another by rote. Besides this category, we also have a range of songs in the various editions of Catholic songbooks in Nigeria that present only textual forms and have no music notation to preserve their tunes. One wonders if there could be any homogeneity in the performances of this category of liturgical songs at different times and by different people.

Therefore, the preceding attempts to categorise liturgical songs in Nigeria into two broad spectrums: existing Latin and foreign-composed English songs; and indigenously composed songs. Within the colonies of the existing Latin and English liturgical songs used in Nigeria, there are problems of collecting, notating, publishing and preservation, for they have already passed through these processes from the climes of their origins. However, most of their indigenously composed counterparts have not been fortunate to pass through the same crucible. Besides collecting, notating, publishing, and preserving indigenously composed liturgical music in Nigeria, there seems to be no serious censoring system in some dioceses.

Nevertheless, our indigenous composers' songs have great musical and aesthetical worth but are liturgically not apt. This group may be categorised into songs composed with suitable text but with inappropriate tunes for the liturgy designated part; those with appropriate themes but unsuitable texts for the liturgy and those written with both the texts and tunes unsuitable to the designated liturgical section.

Also, indigenous Liturgical songs within the context of composers' identity in Nigeria may be classified into two types: those whose composers are known and those whose composers are unknown. Furthermore, there are songs written in a combination of music score and text; and those are written with only the text. For those that are scored with both text and music, their collection and preservation post no problem. However, liturgical songs that are written only in their textual forms portend more problems in collecting and preserving their tunes.

### 5. Prescriptions

In a nutshell, to preserve our ingenious catholic music heritage, we need to have an aggressive collection and documentation of the musical artefacts across the dioceses

within Nigeria. The model, as enumerated earlier, could serve as a prototype for this project. It will be pertinent to recast this model, adapting it to the church music situation. In this respect, the project of preserving our indigenous liturgical songs could be done using the following as a guide:

- a. Collection of indigenous liturgical through recording (those not yet written down);
- b. transcriptions of these songs from the sonic to the visual symbols (Notating);
- c. collection of indigenous liturgical compositions that have been written down but not published;
- d. editing of the texts, melodies and harmonies of the liturgical songs in b and c above;
- e. scrutiny of the edited songs in d above to determine their aptness for the intended liturgical part;
- f. selection of suitable songs after due scrutiny in e;
- g. typesetting of the songs for the printing press;
- h. also, the final publication of the songs after due consultation with the Church hierarchy.

## 6. Conclusion

This writer believes there should be a concerted effort towards collecting, documenting and archiving, especially in written form, and the publication of indigenous liturgical music compositions. To ensure that these songs are 'liturgically worthy', the writer also advocates that existing music directorates in our dioceses point their searchlights more seriously to the aspect of censoring songs used in the liturgy within their dioceses. The process of collecting quality control of liturgical songs within the dioceses should be continuous, while songs screened and adjudged to have liturgical worth should be edited and published periodically. To preserve our indigenous liturgical songs for posterity, we should promptly engage in this project, especially now that we still have Church music practitioners with residual knowledge of 'old songs'. If we rescind from doing this, posterity will always ask: Where is our Liturgical Music Heritage?

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