

ABUSES THREATENING TRUE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS: THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

AUSTIN ECHEMA

Introduction

Right from the onset, it may be necessary to state clearly that what is referred to in this article as “true Christian worship” is the same as liturgy which is the common and official name used in Roman Catholic circles. Perhaps, the other important remark is that this article will be discussing the Roman or Latin rite and therefore Western liturgy. Although, of all things Catholic, there is nothing so familiar as the liturgy, yet most Catholics have never really been introduced to it, with the result that they have never come to know and understand its true nature. Most including the clergy and lay faithful are still confused, upset, or ignorant about why we celebrate our greatest act of worship, the Holy Mass, which again is another name for the liturgy.

What has been said so far is equally true of the sacraments of the Church. This explains why our liturgical and sacramental celebrations have been bedeviled with abuses. Both the clerics and the lay faithful have sometimes constituted themselves into the lord and master of the liturgy. It is true that the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council encouraged active participation (*participatio actuosa*) of all Christ’s faithful, yet this is not to be arbitrarily carried out. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, these abuses have assumed such an unprecedented magnitude (proportion) that the true Catholic worship has been eclipsed. Jesus Christ remains the chief person acting in every liturgical celebration which is the public worship of the whole Church. Every other participant, whether minister or lay faithful is subsumed in the one eternal high priest of Christ. In other words, they must and are bound to follow the liturgical norms that guide the Church’s liturgy.

This article, therefore, aims at examining the nature of the Church’s true worship, namely, the liturgy. It will consider the relationship between liturgy and the Church; and finally pinpoint some of the abuses that have plagued this earthly liturgy, which Pope St. John Paul II says “is a mysterious participation in the heavenly liturgy”¹.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010, 19. See Scott Hahn. *The Lamb’s Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth*. New York: Doubleday, 1999, 3.

The setting is the African context using Nigeria as a point of contact, where these abuses seem to have reached their zenith in recent times.

The Nature of Liturgy and Sacraments

The concept of worship is as old as the Church itself, with its roots firmly grafted on ancient Judaism. But in Roman Catholic circles, the contemporary view of worship is the outgrowth of the seminal principle of New Testament theology that all salvation history is recapitulated and ‘personalized’ in Jesus Christ. Everything in sacred history – every event, object, sacred place, theophany, cult – has quite simply been assumed into the person of the Incarnate Christ. He is God’s eternal Word (Jn.1:1,14); his new creation (2Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Rom. 8:19; Rev. 21-22); the new Adam (1Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:14); the new Pasch and its lamb (1Cor. 5:7; Jn. 1:29, 36; 1Pt. 1:19; Rev. 5); the new covenant (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; Heb. 8-13); the new circumcision (Col. 2:11-12); the new heavenly manna (Jn. 6:30-58; Rev. 2:17); the new temple (Jn. 2:19-27); the new sacrifice and its priest (Eph. 5:2; Heb. 2:17-3:2; 4:14-10:14); the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest (Col. 2:16-17; Mt. 11:28-12: 8; Heb. 3:7-4:11) and the messianic age that was to come (Lk. 4:16-21; Acts 2:14-36). All that went before is fulfilled in him, and that includes all cultic realities. Thus, the Paschal Mystery of Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of the world’s origin, the climax of the history of salvation and the anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of the world.² This is the basis for any Christian theology of liturgy.³

Henceforth, true worship pleasing to the Father is the saving life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The liturgy is quite simply the mystery of Christ operative in our midst. Salvation consists in our insertion into the salvific mystery of Christ primarily through the visible continuation of this mystery in the liturgy and indeed also through the sacraments of the Church. As Pope St. Leo the Great (440-61) puts it in his famous aphorism that sums up the entire patristic liturgical theology: “What was visible in our Redeemer has passed into the liturgical ministry of the Church” [*Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit in sacramenta transivit*]⁴ – what

² R.F. TAFT. “The Theology of the Liturgy of the Hours,” in Anscar J. Chupungco, ed., *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, Vol. V: Liturgical Time and Space, Collegeville, Minnesota: A Pueblo Book, 2000, 119-120; see also Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Between Memory and Hope: Reading on the Liturgical Year*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000, XV.

³ See, for example, Pius XII’s 20 Nov. 1947, Encyclical letter *Mediator Dei* (On the Sacred Liturgy), 16-20.

⁴ *Sermon 74 (De ascensione 2)* 2, PL 54: 398. See also Robert F. Taft, “Liturgy in the Life and Mission of the Society of Jesus,” in Keith Pecklers, ed., *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, London – New York: Continuum, 2003, 37.

Christ did visibly during his earthly ministry is the exact same ministry that the Church carries on now in the liturgy. These acts—liturgical and sacramental—do not merely express the Church; they constitute her.

Liturgy, then, is the common work of Christ (*actio Christi*) and his Church. Far from being extrinsic to our liturgy, Christ is its chief protagonist. Liturgy is much more than an individual expression of faith and devotion. It is first and foremost an activity of the body of which Christ is the head. This is why it is possible for the Church to make such extraordinary and bold claims about the nature of Christian worship, as in the striking assertion in the Vatican II Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 2: "...it is through the liturgy that the work of our redemption is accomplished."⁵ Pius XII had long affirmed the same teaching in his 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei*, the '*Magna Carta*' of the liturgical renewal of our time: "It is an unquestionable fact that the work of our redemption is continued and that its fruits are imparted to us during the celebration of the liturgy..."⁶ Hence, being an action of Christ and his illustrious Spouse the Church, the liturgy "is sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree."⁷ In other words, the worship rendered to God in union with her divine Head is the most efficacious and most exalted activity the Church undertakes; so that, "without the liturgy, there will be no Catholic Church."⁸ Consequently, liturgy is at the very centre of the redemptive work Christ exercises through the ministry of the Church.

Mediator Dei goes further to show how the Church continues the priestly work of her Lord and Head: "In obedience, therefore, to her founder's behest, the Church prolongs the priestly mission of Jesus Christ mainly by means of the Sacred Liturgy. She does this in the first place at the altar where constantly the sacrifice of the Cross is re-presented and with a single difference in the manner of its offering, renewed. She does it next by means of the sacraments, those special channels through which men are made partakers in the supernatural life. She does it finally by offering to God, all Good and Great, the daily tribute of her prayer of praise."⁹

It further states: "Along with the Church, therefore, her Divine Founder is present at every liturgical function: Christ is present at the august sacrifice of the altar both in the person of His minister and above all under the Eucharistic species. He is present in the sacraments, infusing into them the power which makes them

⁵ Citing a Phrase from the Old Roman Secret for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost: DOL 2.

⁶ PIUS XII, *Mediator Dei* 29.

⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7.

⁸ E. ANAGWO, *Liturgy in the Life of the Faithful*, Onitsha: Laurans Prints, 2012, 6.

⁹ *Mediator Dei* 3.

ready instruments of sanctification. He is present, finally, in the prayer of praise and petition we direct to God.”¹⁰ What this means is that the Church’s liturgy is not just a series of actions or rituals but in the final analysis a person, namely, Christ himself. He is the one who renders glory to God the Father, and then invites us to unite ourselves to Him and be totally transformed in Him becoming a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable to God (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). This is actually “the very core of the life and mission of the Church without which she would be reduced to the level of a service of altruism only, or to an earthly association of likeminded people.”¹¹ Furthermore, without the centrality of Christ in the liturgy, the eschatological finality of the community will also be taken away, for in her liturgy the Church celebrates already the heavenly liturgy. As Pope St. John Paul II explains, “the liturgy we celebrate on earth is a mysterious participation in the heavenly liturgy.” It is “*veritatis splendor*” as he calls it or “a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth.”¹² It is as if it were a heavenly happening here on earth, where “we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem towards which we journey as pilgrim, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle.”¹³

It is this centrality of the role of Christ which makes liturgy sacred and places it beyond the creativity of humanity. *Sacramentum Caritatis* calls Christ “the subject of the liturgy’s intrinsic beauty.”¹⁴ And Pope Benedict XVI then goes on to explain: “Since the Eucharistic liturgy is essentially an ‘*actio Dei*’ which draws us into Christ through the Holy Spirit, its basic structure is not something within our power to change nor can it be held hostage by the latest trends.”¹⁵ Consequently, it is not really what we do that matters as much as what He does in and through us. Every liturgical celebration revolves around Jesus. He is the principal agent of the liturgy; the Church is the secondary agent, for the liturgy is entrusted into her hands. For any worship to become liturgy, the Church must approve of it. In the words of Dom Lambert

¹⁰ *Mediator Dei* 20; see also *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7.

¹¹ M. RANJITH, “The Sacred Liturgy, Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church,” in Alcuin Reid, ed., *Sacred Liturgy: The Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014, 20.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church) Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010, 19.

¹³ C.T. OGUNLUSI, “Abuses in the Liturgy and the Ratzingerian Panacea,” in B. E. Ukutegbe, ed. *et. al*, *Abuses in the Liturgy and the Nigerian Context Today*, Benin City: St. Paul’s Printing Press, 2018, 115-116.

¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, The Sacrament of Charity (Henceforth *Sacramentum Caritatis*). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007, 36.

¹⁵ *Sacramentum Caritatis* 37.

Beaudium, liturgy is the “cult of the Church,”¹⁶ while Dom Odo Casel maintains that the “paschal mystery is experienced through the liturgy in which Christ himself is present and active through the Church and the Church acts with him.”¹⁷

The Church also approbates the celebration of sacraments, especially the Mass, sacramentals and blessings, the liturgy of the hours and the feasts in the course of the liturgical year, as her official form of worship. These are liturgical actions; they are public worship of the Church, and therefore, are never private, but always done in the name of the Church by persons validly and legitimately assigned to carry them out.¹⁸ The Church teaches that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation.¹⁹ God sanctifies and saves human beings through the sacraments, which are primarily means of salvation. Sacraments are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who acts in them in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.²⁰ The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.²¹

The Church affirms that the sacraments *act ex opere operato* (literally by the very fact of the action being performed), i.e., by virtue of the saving work and action of Christ, accomplished once for all. That means, “the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God.”²² Baptism, for instance, “does not have its effect because of the merits of the person being baptized, but because of the merits of Christ.” Baptism is efficacious “because of the passion of Christ.”²³ Put negatively, the significance of sacramental efficacy *ex opere operato* is that bestowal of grace is not dependent upon the sanctity of the minister, nor does the faith of the recipient put any obligation or obstacle on the grace; Christ remains free, sovereign and independent with regard to any human merit whatsoever. Put positively, *ex opere operato* efficacy means that this act is Christ’s act.²⁴

¹⁶ Quoted by Ignatius Puthiadam, *Christian Liturgy: The Presentation of the Greatest God – Human Story*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2002, 21.

¹⁷ PUTHIADAM 21.

¹⁸ H.P.O. OKEKE, *Let us Celebrate the Mystery of Faith*, Onitsha: Goodmark Press, 2005, 52.

¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 1129; cf. Council of Trent (1547) DS 1604.

²⁰ A. ECHEMA, “Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Channels for Evangelization and Salvation,” in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* 31 (June 2017) 123.

²¹ CCC 1127.

²² T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* III, 68, 8.

²³ M.G. LAWLER, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology*. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987, 38.

²⁴ Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*. London and Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1963, 82-85.

Sacraments are, therefore, the final events in the historical working-out of the relationship between God and humans in the economy of salvation. Although they are means of salvation, their function is more as signs of salvation. The Church's sacramental service is directed ultimately to the honour of God but in the first instance it is for the sake of human beings and their union with God.

However, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* points out that "the liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church,"²⁵ nor is the spiritual life limited only to participation in the liturgy.²⁶ For this reason, the Church highly endorses the popular devotions of the Christian people, which should be so organized "that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it."²⁷ While these others are optional, there is an obligation to participate in the Sunday liturgy.

In some cases, both the clergy and Christ's faithful confuse the liturgy with popular devotions, the sacraments and sacramentals. This distinction ought to be made clear both to the people of God and the clergy. Oftentimes, the faithful do not realize the tremendous nature of the liturgy. They are conscious of the horizontal plane, their own actions and the effect of their actions. The liturgy is seen as another human assembly in which human actions are determinant. Some people invest so much in making such assemblies interesting, enjoyable, captivating, exciting and emotionally fulfilling. That is why psychedelism in various forms, in music, dances, method of preaching and decorations is becoming the order of the day.²⁸ But the beauty of liturgy does not lie so much in what we do or how interesting and satisfying it becomes to us, as much as how deeply we are drawn into something that already happens which is profoundly divine and liberative. The liturgy is greater than us and carries with it a totally transforming effect, which we often cannot fully grasp. It is Christ's Paschal victory celebrated in heaven and on earth.²⁹

The Liturgy and the Church

The Church has a great responsibility towards her liturgical life. The seriousness of this matter has been made clear to all, down the centuries. Writing on the rites, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI, Emeritus) states: "They elude control by any individual, local community, or regional Church. Unspontaneity is

²⁵ Cf. SC 9.

²⁶ SC 12.

²⁷ SC 13.

²⁸ OKEKE 53.

²⁹ RANJITH 19.

of their essence.”³⁰ Consequently, “...no other person whatsoever, not even a priest may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on their own authority.”³¹ And so, the clear demand of the great Pope St. John Paul II is only normative: “No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands; it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality.”³²

Since Christ is the main subject of liturgical action, nobody is allowed or permitted to arbitrarily change or tamper with the essential orientations or norms of liturgy. Otherwise, we would be not so different from those who, impatient at waiting for Moses to descend from the mountain, constructed a golden calf and worshipped what was made by their own choosing. They made their own ritual, eating, drinking and merry making – “playing god” in the process and the Holy Scriptures mention what then happened to them.³³ This reference to the golden calf, according to the then Cardinal Ratzinger, is “a warning about any kind of self-initiated and self-seeking worship.” When such a thing happens, liturgy automatically becomes “pointless, just fooling around. Or still worse, it becomes an apostasy from the living God, an apostasy in sacral disguise. All that is left in the end is frustration, a feeling of emptiness. There is no experience of that liberation which always takes place when man encounters the living God.”³⁴

Abuses in Liturgical Celebrations: The African Experience

Although abuses in liturgical celebrations have been there from the years following the post conciliar liturgical reforms, they seem to be more common in our own days. One of such abuses is the “arbitrary alterations of ‘liturgical’ texts,” which is as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and inculturation. Recently, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in its *Communiqué* at the end of its Second Plenary Meeting at *Domus Pacis* Pastoral Centre, Akure, 8-16 September, 2016 seriously expressed concern on this matter.³⁵ Some people wish to make the liturgy more “interesting” or palatable to what they call “our times.” They invent their own norms, thereby running the risk of emptying liturgy of its essential inner dynamism which can only result to the so-called worship-forms becoming eventually tasteless and boring. The use of unapproved texts and rites, the on-the-

³⁰ J. RATZINGER, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000, 165.

³¹ SC 22; CIC, c. 873, 838, 846; see also *Vicesimus quintus annus*, December 4, 1988, 10.

³² *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* 52.

³³ RANJITH 17.

³⁴ RATZINGER 23.

³⁵ CBCN, *Communiqué* 2016.

spot improvisation are not what makes the liturgy interesting and effective. On the contrary, they can only lead to “manipulations of horizontalism, man-centeredness and even desacralization and banalization.”³⁶

People do not go to Mass in order to admire the preacher, the choir, the readers or even one another. The primary movement of the Mass is vertical, toward God and not horizontal, toward one another. The Eucharistic sacrifice and indeed all other liturgical celebrations are not something that we make or invent on our own. They are gifts of Christ, our Redeemer, which he entrusted to his Body, the Church for salvation.³⁷ It is not proper for each celebrating priest or local community to presume to have the right to create or invent words, and gestures in the sacred liturgy. In the words of Robert Cardinal Sarah, “We observe more and more that man seeks to take the place of God. The liturgy then becomes a mere human game. If Eucharistic celebrations turn into human celebrations of ourselves and places where we apply our pastoral ideologies and partisan political preference, which have nothing to do with spiritual worship that is to be celebrated as God wills, the danger is immense. For then God disappears.”³⁸

By its very nature, liturgy is fixed in form and procedure, in structure and essential content. This is the genius of liturgical worship. It is repetitive and therefore, a certain predictability and stability is unavoidable. This may sometimes lead to dull or mechanical routine. But liturgical fidelity is a matter of charity, unity and finally of faith. Fidelity necessarily includes obedience, recognizing specific limits and accepting liturgical authority. This means that “creativity” cannot be an authentic category for matters liturgical.³⁹

These fundamental structures of the liturgy uphold the unity and catholicity of the liturgy in the interest of the good order of the whole Church. They reassure parish communities and dioceses that they are in union and communion with the universal Church in the celebration of Mass as well as other sacraments that span over the centuries. It reinforces the sense of belonging to a worldwide Church, and bears witness to the unity and coherence of the Church’s tradition. The faithful come to Mass knowing what to expect in the readings, prayers, gestures and movements. It is their right to receive a liturgy celebrated according to the approved books of the

³⁶ F. ARINZE, “The Role of Liturgical Norms in the Eucharistic Celebration.” An Address to the Path to Rome International Conference in Mexico City on November 3, 2007; *Notitiae* (Nov-Dec 2007) 2.

³⁷ A. ECHEMA, “The Importance of Liturgical Norms in the Eucharistic Celebration: The Nigerian Experience,” in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology* 29 (June 2015) 65.

³⁸ R. SARAH, *God or Nothing: A Conversation on Faith with Nicholas Diat*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015, 275-276.

³⁹ Cf. RATZINGER 168; Echema 67.

Church.⁴⁰ Any neglect of the liturgical rules, leaves the People of God at the mercy of the priest's personal ideas, feelings, theories, or idiosyncrasies.

By their very nature, liturgy and the sacraments do not admit arbitrariness because as the action of Christ and the Church, they are official and public; hence any changes have to be official and not at the instance of the individual ministers.⁴¹ And as Anagwo rightly puts it, "these celebrations are contained in the official liturgical books so that the liturgical practices would not be exercised according to individual's whims and caprices."⁴²

But is there any room for creativity in the liturgy? The answer is yes, but it has to be according to the established liturgical norms and not the creativity of inventing novelties or of trying to entertain people. According to Cardinal Arinze, "the liturgy is not a field for self-expression, free creation, and the demonstration of personal tastes. Idiosyncrasies tend to attract attention to the person rather than to the mysteries of Christ being celebrated. They can also upset, puzzle, annoy, mislead, or confuse the congregation."⁴³ Indeed, "ample flexibility," "is given for appropriate creativity aimed at allowing each celebration to be adapted to the needs of the participants, to their comprehension, their interior preparation and their gifts, according to established liturgical norms."⁴⁴ But the document warns that, "it should be remembered that the power of the liturgical celebrations does not consist in frequently altering the rites, but in probing more deeply the Word of God and the mystery being celebrated."⁴⁵

Any private recasting of ritual by any priest or lay faithful is an insult to the dignity of the believer and introduces individualism and idiosyncrasies into celebrations which belong to the whole Church. Generally, experimentation and creativity can only cause scandal, confuse the congregation, breed uncertainty, perplexity, opposition and factionalism. One such example is the abuse in the practice of Eucharistic adoration, whereby people are confused with regard to sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament. The Bishops of Nigeria pointed this out in what they referred to as "the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament as if it is a magical and theatrical display."⁴⁶

What the People of God expect from their pastor every Sunday is not novelty but a celebration of the sacred mysteries that nourishes faith, manifests devotion,

⁴⁰ Cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (henceforth *RS*) 12, 18, 24, 184.

⁴¹ Cf. B.E. UKUTEGBE, "The Dignity and Place of Liturgical Books in Sacred Liturgy: An Evaluation in the Light of Digital Revolution" in B. Ukutegbe, ed. et. al. *Abuses in the Liturgy...* 2018, 98.

⁴² E. ANAGWO, *Liturgy in the Life of the Faithful*, Onitsha: Laurans Prints, 2012, 7.

⁴³ F. ARINZE, *Celebrating the Holy Eucharist*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006, 85.

⁴⁴ *RS* 39.

⁴⁵ *RS* 39; cf. *Liturgicae Instaurationes* 202.

⁴⁶ CBCN, *Communiqué* 2016.

awakens piety, leads to prayer, enriches and incites them to active charity in their daily life.⁴⁷

Another serious abuse in the liturgy is the non-observance of liturgical norms. This abuse is so serious that it actually invalidates the Mass and other sacraments which eventually prevent participants from sharing fully in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ. The abuse stems from a false understanding of freedom. That is why some priests do not see anything wrong in experimentation.

Some priests in Nigeria invent their own liturgy, introduce extraneous gestures, icons, dances, secular greetings and invite the congregation to recite some parts of the Eucharistic prayer meant for the priest alone.⁴⁸ According to *Liturgicae Instaurationes* 4: “The Eucharistic prayer more than any other part of the Mass is, by reason of his office, the prayer of the priest alone.”⁴⁹ “Recitation of any part by a lesser minister of the assembly, or any individual is forbidden. Such course conflicts with the hierarchic character of the liturgy in which all are to do all but only those parts belonging to them. The priest alone, therefore, is to recite the entire Eucharistic prayer.”⁵⁰ The part of Mass most violated in this regard is when the priest invites the congregation to join him to sing or say, “Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, Almighty Father...” This prayer said immediately after the Eucharistic prayer is for the principal celebrant alone or in a concelebration with concelebrants, never with the congregation.⁵¹

Furthermore, some priests have plagued the liturgy with additions, commentaries,⁵² idle chatter and totally unjustified modifications or omissions. Even the lay faithful are not totally exonerated. The recent introduction in some places of a liturgical gesture such as waving of the hands or handkerchiefs after the dismissal injunction has no place in the Catholic liturgy. This is nothing but one of those useless influences from the Pentecostal churches, which should be discouraged.

⁴⁷ ECHEMA 69.

⁴⁸ E.C. ANAGWO, “Liturgical Norms and Good Governance: The Imperative of the Rule of Law,” in *Areopagus* 3 (October, 2013) 25.

⁴⁹ Cf. *GIRM* 10.

⁵⁰ *SC* 28.

⁵¹ ECHEMA 74.

⁵² Some pious celebrants are guilty of this ‘sin,’ when they gloss all the prayers and explain all the gestures: “Now the priest is about to present to God the bread that has been gotten through the hard work of men: “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you...” “All together now let us proclaim our faith in Christ who is present in our midst: “The Mystery of Faith...” Or the singing of choruses at the elevation of the host or chalice during consecration, etc. This sort of thing only shows a thirst for novelty (calling as it does for a climate of theatrical production and representation) and the urge to impress. This is in stark opposition to the notion of a ritual that has been handed down through the centuries. See Denis Crouan, *The Liturgy Betrayed*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000, 14.

Priests are to be reminded that the only valid matter for the celebration of Holy Mass consists of wheat unleavened bread and grape wine. *GIRM* 319 says: “Following the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine with water to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.” And *GIRM* 320 adds: “The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently baked, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened.⁵³ Likewise the wine for the Eucharist must be from the fruit of the grape vine (cf. Lk. 22:18), natural, and pure, that is not mixed with any foreign substance.⁵⁴ Again, care must be taken to ensure that the elements are kept in good condition; that the wine does not turn to vinegar or the bread spoil or become too hard to be broken easily.”⁵⁵

There are loud rumours today that some priests use unauthorized wine such as Baron de Valls, Jacob’s wine, Bacchus, and other similar table wines to celebrate the holy Eucharist. But the use of unauthorized bread or wine invalidates transubstantiation. There are rare exceptions where bishops may grant individual priests with allergies or alcohol problems the right to use low-gluten altar bread or mustem (a specific form of grape juice with fermentation suspended). It is a grave sin for a priest to celebrate Mass knowing the matter is invalid. Similarly, priests ought to know that the use of private texts, the proliferation of unapproved Eucharistic Prayers and the manipulation of the liturgical texts tantamount to a falsification of the Catholic liturgy. They should realize as Thomas Aquinas warns: “One who offers worship to God on the Church’s behalf in a way contrary to that which is laid down by the Church with God-given authority and which is customary in the Church is guilty of falsification.”⁵⁶

Such falsifications can never bring good results; instead the consequences are the impairing of the unity of faith and worship in the Church, doctrinal uncertainty, scandal and bewilderment among the People of God, and the near inevitability of violent reactions. The faithful have a right to a true liturgy, which is the liturgy desired and laid down by the Church. Undue experimentation, changes and creativity bewilder the faithful.⁵⁷

Another worrisome practice in Nigeria is the unscrupulous manner in which some priests handle the consecrated hosts. Some leave them in their rooms, cars, even carry them in their pockets as substitute for charms and talisman against

⁵³ Cf. *CIC*, c 924, 1,2,3; also c 926.

⁵⁴ *GIRM* 322.

⁵⁵ *GIRM* 323.

⁵⁶ T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2, q. 93, a.1.

⁵⁷ Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, Instruction Concerning Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery, *Inaestimabile Donum*, April 17, 1980, Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1980; see also *Crouan*, 49-51.

armed robbers and evil people. Some use the Holy Eucharist to administer oath taking. These practices are signs of lack of reverence and respect for the Blessed Sacrament.

Another practice which “obscures the very essence of Catholic worship and is gradually eroding the true Catholic identity” according to the Nigerian Bishops is “excessive monetary collections.”⁵⁸ Eugene E. Uzukwu calls this abuse, “the introduction of patterns of cooperative development or improvement unions into the rite of the ‘presentation of gifts’ during the Eucharistic Celebration.”⁵⁹ The presentation of gifts or offerings in procession, according to the Roman rite, involves simply bringing the bread and wine to the altar accompanied by the offertory hymn. Money or gifts for the poor and the Church may also be collected or brought forward during the preparation of the gifts.⁶⁰

But today, this has become a fundraising strategy to ensure a self-reliant Church. All offertory hymns are carefully composed to inspire and ensure maximum participation of all. The procession is accompanied by singing, handclapping, and dancing. The minister often stands before the altar to sprinkle holy water on those presenting their gifts. The dramatic display of this kind of presentation of gifts is on *Cathedraticum*, Harvest and Bazaar. We are all witnesses to the exaggerations and abuses in this way of celebration, which include the noise and distraction, the loud music and excessive dancing, the thorough-fare among the People of God in the bid to make change whereby they reduce their money to smaller denominations. On the part of priests, they rush the Eucharistic liturgy – what is understandable after over two hours of intensive dancing, shouting, auctioneering and breaking (selling) of kola nuts with half of the congregation gone.⁶¹

This aberration has given rise to the syndrome of 2nd and 3rd collections in one particular Mass. As a corollary to this abuse is the recent development of launching during a funeral Mass. No matter the intention of the deceased or the bereaved, this practice smacks of insensitivity, lack of respect for the dead and defiance to liturgical decorum. Part of the “excessive monetary collections” is the current trafficking with tithes. This is considered by many as evidence of corruption in the Church; it is exploitation of unsuspecting lay faithful and at worst extortion. Tithing is one of those unfortunate practices copied from some gullible Pentecostal pastors who are

⁵⁸ CBCN, *Communiqué* 2016.

⁵⁹ E.E. UZUKWU, *Worship as Body Language. Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997, 273.

⁶⁰ Cf. GIRM 49-53.

⁶¹ A. ECHEMA, “Pastoral Administration of Sacraments and Sacramentals: Abuses,” in Maurice Jiwike, ed., *The Challenges of the Pastoral Ministry in a Pluralistic Society*, Owerri: Assumpta Press, 2004, 45.

bent on impoverishing their members in order to enrich themselves. The fact that the hierarchy has not yet made any official statement on tithe does not justify it. The liturgy must not be used for any economic or selfish end. The primary purpose of all liturgical celebrations, especially the Holy Eucharist (Mass) is the glorification of God, and sanctification of humanity.

The cry of the Nigerian Bishops about “the near absence of silence and decorum during liturgical celebrations” is justifiable. Indeed, the liturgy of the Church in some African countries like Nigeria today has become a noisy affair. Fulton Sheen describes our age as probably the most talkative in the history of the world. Hyperactivity and love of noise and chatter characterize our age. The Church’s liturgy seems to have fallen victim to this societal malaise and has become an abundance of words.⁶²

According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, “At the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.”⁶³ “For in the liturgy God speaks to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel.”⁶⁴ The fundamental attitude of the “*homo liturgicus*” – both individually and collectively – is one of receptivity, readiness to listen, self-giving and self-relativizing. It is the attitude of faith, and faithful obedience; of orientation towards God, wonder, adoration and praise. It is an attitude of contemplation that is alien to the “*homo faber*” in many of us.⁶⁵

The generation of noise in the celebration of the centre and summit of the Church’s liturgy is as a result of the excessive epic mimicking of the Pentecostal TV preachers by some priests and even the lay faithful. Their excessive and emotional singing of choruses and dancing have left the Church’s liturgy half Pentecostal and half Catholic. The indiscriminate and frequent calling of God’s name, commanding Him and apparent physical manipulation of the Holy Spirit with the noise and shouting that go with such invocations have turned the solemn liturgy into a noisy affair. The irony of the whole matter is that the more noise one generates, the more acceptable one becomes. On account of the quantity of the words we utter at the liturgical celebrations, a loss of quality must be feared.⁶⁶

Another area that signals danger to the sacraments and sacramentals is the indiscriminate anointing going on, including bathing of “clients” with special water and oil. The new *Rite of Anointing of the Sick* stipulates: “The sick person is anointed

⁶² ECHEMA, “Foreword,” in Benedict Ukutegbe, et. al. ed., *Active Participation and the Church in Nigeria*, Warri: St. Paul’s Printing Press, 2017, XI.

⁶³ SC 30.

⁶⁴ SC 33.

⁶⁵ G. DANNEELS, “Liturgy Forty Years After the Second Vatican Council: High Point or Reception,” in Keith Pecklers, ed., *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, London – New York: Continuum, 2003, 10.

⁶⁶ ECHEMA, “Pastoral Administration...” 51.

on the forehead and on the hands ... In case of necessity, however, it is sufficient that a single anointing be given on the forehead or, because of the particular condition of the sick person, on another suitable part of the body”⁶⁷

Ordinarily, “the oil of the sick is blessed by the Bishop on Holy Thursday.”⁶⁸ But “in a case of necessity, any priest but only in the actual celebration of the sacrament” (c. 999 §2) may bless the oil of the sick. Today, however, some priests anoint indiscreetly with total disregard to the rules. Some have their own special oil blessed and sold at exorbitant prices. These abuses are nothing short of simony, which was part of what caused the Protestant revolt of Martin Luther in the 16th century. Some priests constitute themselves into personality cults, super priests (*Fada karaka*) and give the impression that their oil, water or other sacramentals are special and more efficacious than the normal ones.

Consequently, they sometimes present these sacramentals as having power in themselves and, therefore, become a substitute for charms. It is no longer the faith of the Church and of the Christian at work but that of magical Holy Water, Crucifix, Chaplet, Scapular, etc. The Church is very careful with the ministry of exorcism. Apart from the canons of the new code of 1983, *the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* has published certain *Instructions on Prayers for Healing*. Articles 1-10 of the Disciplinary Norms of this Document need to be made known to our priests and seminarians. They need to know also the *Guidelines for the Healing Ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria* issued by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in 1997.

Ignorance is part of the problem. No wonder the prophet Hosea laments: My people perish for want of knowledge! Since you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you from my priesthood. Since you have ignored the law of your God, I will also ignore your sons (4:6).

There is nothing like Healing Mass. It is totally forbidden to introduce into the celebration of the Holy Mass, the Sacraments or the Liturgy of the Hours, prayers for healing- whether liturgical or non-liturgical, and nobody may exercise the ministry of exorcism without the express permission of the diocesan Bishop.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing*, 23; see also c. 1000.

⁶⁸ *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing*, 221.

⁶⁹ C. 1172; see also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*, 8.

Conclusion

The Catholic Liturgy is greater than we are and carries with it a totally transforming effect, which we often cannot fully grasp. It is Christ's Paschal Mystery and victory celebrated in heaven and on earth. Cardinal Ratzinger has earlier on affirmed these truths in the following words: The life of the liturgy does not come from what dawns upon the minds of individuals and planning groups. On the contrary, it is God's descent upon our world, the source of real liberation. He alone can open the door to freedom. The more priests and faithful humbly surrender themselves to this descent of God, the more "new" the liturgy will constantly be, and the more true and personal it becomes. Yes, the liturgy becomes personal, true, and new, not through tomfoolery and banal experiments with the words, but through courageous entry into the great reality that through the rite is always ahead of us and can never quite be over-taken.⁷⁰

At ordination, the Church entrusts her own form of worship to each priest according to a specific rite. The priest does not determine the forms and content of that rite. In every liturgical celebration, his intention must be to do what the Church does. Since he is performing a sacred rite in the name of Christ, he must intend what Christ, and therefore, the Church of Christ intends. One way of proving that this intention agrees with that of Christ and the Church is by respecting the laws that govern the celebration of the liturgy, which includes obedience, recognizing specific limits and accepting liturgical authority.⁷¹

Liturgical abuses are a phenomenon that reveals a serious shortcoming of the inability to interiorize rituals through which personality and social life grow and develop. In the absence of this work of interiorization, which is an educational work of the first importance, certain juvenile – not to say infantile – personalities keep their relationships in a basic state of violence. It is this basic state that explains why celebrants who are the most eager to embrace liturgical modifications are found to have a propensity to reject any kind of authority, starting with the authority of the Pope and the Roman Curia, to that of the Roman Missal and other official liturgical books.⁷²

As Francis Cardinal Arinze points out, "the spirit of rejecting rules and regulations, regarded as a violation of one's autonomy, needs to be corrected. It is wrong and unreasonable to maintain an attitude of 'Nobody is going to tell me what to do.' This would be a false understanding of liberty."⁷³ Similarly, *Redemptionis*

⁷⁰ RATZINGER 169.

⁷¹ ECHEMA, "Pastoral Administration ...," 53.

⁷² GROUAN 27.

⁷³ ARINZE, *Celebrating the Holy Eucharist*, 904.

Sacramentum instructs: “God has not granted us in Christ an illusory liberty by which he may do what we wish, but a liberty by which we may do that which is fitting and right.”⁷⁴

Finally, it is the right and duty of the Local Ordinary to legislate on liturgical celebrations which include the sacraments and sacramentals. He is the absolute interpreter of liturgical laws in his diocese. As the *GIRM* puts it: “The diocesan Bishop is the chief steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care; he is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole of its liturgical life.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *RS* 7.

⁷⁵ *GIRM* 22, *SC* 41, cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus* 15.