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Immigrants and Cultural Continuance in the Liturgy: Celebrating the Nigerian Igbo Mass in the United States

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Abstract: The dynamics of the celebration of the Igbo Mass in the United States reveals a cultural nostalgia inherent among Igbo immigrants, one that aims at preserving the Igbo identity and culture, even in the diaspora. Convinced to maintain their cultural heritage on foreign soil, Nigerian Igbo Catholic immigrants established faith communities where liturgical worship is performed and expressed in ways that are consistent and meaningful to Igbo indigenous ways of worship. This essay studies the liturgical life of Nigerian Igbo Catholics in the United States, and how a people's cultural and religious heritage is preserved, sustained, and promoted in the liturgy. Thus, the celebration of Igbo mass in the United States serves as an avenue for encouraging and fostering a people's cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: Igbo, Immigrant, Mass, Nigerian, Culture, Identity, Catholic, Liturgy, Music, Dance, Preaching, Language, Community

Introduction

Nigerians are known to value their ethnicity more than their nationality, and even as migrants, one's ethnicity or tribal affiliation is very apparent in the interactions between Nigerians.¹ Most Nigerian immigrants in the United States are clustered in large urban areas which encourage the creation of ethnic and religious associations where such ties are reinforced. These religious groups serve the Nigerian immigrant community well in maintaining their cultural identities and values.

Convinced of the need to maintain an autonomous cultural expression of faith as well as teach and preserve the Igbo

¹ Obiefuna Onwughalu, *Parents' Involvement in Education: The Experience of an African Immigrant Community in Chicago* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc.:2011), 25.

language, culture, and tradition, Nigerian Igbo Catholics have found it not just essential but equally pragmatic to establish faith communities wherein worship can offer an indigenous experience since, "a major motivation that spurs immigrants to create or join congregations composed of fellow immigrants is to enjoy the companionship of others who share their ethnic background ... Immigrant religious institutions provide the physical and social spaces in which those who share the same traditions, customs, and languages can reproduce many aspects of their native cultures for themselves and attempt to pass them on to their children."² Ethnic communities' desire to be true to their faith and cultural identities is supported in the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council.

Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these peoples' way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.³

Sacrosanctum Concilium clearly encourages the preservation and incorporation of cultural heritages into the liturgy of through the expression of faith, the celebration of the sacraments and the unity of ministry. Thus, through the Eucharistic liturgy, cultural tradition can be preserved to posterity.

The sense of cultural integrity expressed in the liturgy not only reflects the worshipping community's deep understanding of the Catholic faith, but also aims to bequeath the rich Igbo cultural heritage to posterity who are far removed from the homeland. Indeed the dynamics of the celebration of the Igbo Mass reveals the cultural nostalgia that is inherent in migrant Igbos, one that aims at preserving the Igbo identity and culture,

² Helen Ebaugh, and Janet Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants* (California: Alta Mira Press, 2000), 385.

³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37.

even as immigrants. Many adult Igbo Catholics are convinced that their children, born in a foreign land, are bound to lose their identity unless there is concerted effort to impart the Igbo language, custom, and mores, within a liturgical framework. The purpose of this study is to show how a people's rich cultural heritage is expressed, sustained, and preserved in the liturgy using Igbo immigrants in the United States as a case study.

Interestingly, this study was born at a PhD seminar class on Modern Liturgy where I tried to conduct research on the how immigrants preserve their cultural heritage in the Eucharistic liturgy. Being an insider with respect to the Igbo culture, and having experienced firsthand the range of challenging conditions that are met by other Igbo Catholic immigrants in the United States, I was interested in some of the ways Nigerian Igbo Catholics maintain elements of their culture in the Catholic Mass. Since there are very few published resources on Nigerian Igbo Catholics, I used the Igbo Catholic community USA website as a resource,⁴ and supplemented it with interviews with members of the community and with participant observation conducted in 2010 at the Igbo Catholic Community Mass in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Given the need for a sustained cultural identity among the Igbo people on alien soil, this study focuses on the liturgical life of the Nigerian Igbo Catholic community in the United States with a focus on the Mass and on present-day cultural nostalgia inherent among the migrant Igbos. From the data collected and the participant observation, the essay argues that the central concern of forming these faith communities by Igbo migrants in the United States is for the enrichment of their communal life and welfare, reinforcing their cultural identity, and the preservation of their culture and religious heritage on foreign soil. I hope to add to the scholarship of the religious activities of African immigrant communities in the United States.

This study will be divided into four parts; A. The Igbo People of Nigeria, Immigration to the United States and Quest for an Identity; B. Formation of Igbo catholic communities in

⁴ Igbo Catholic Community- Houston, ICCH, <http://www.igbocatholicshouston.org/history.htm> [accessed August 9, 2012].

America; C. Incorporation of Igbo Culture and Traditions in the Eucharistic Liturgy; and D. Significance of the Igbo Mass for Immigrants.

A. The Igbo People of Nigeria, Immigration to the United States and Quest for an Identity

Nigeria, one of the largest countries in Africa, is situated on the eastern end of the West Africa region; east of the Republic of Benin, south of the Republic of Niger and Chad, west of Cameroon, and north of the Bight of Benin and Bight of Biafra in the Atlantic Ocean's Gulf of Guinea. In comparative terms, Nigeria is larger than the states of California, Nevada, and Utah combined. It stretches about 767 kilometers (479.375 miles) in its east-west span wide, and about 1,605 kilometers (1,003.125 miles) from north to south.⁵ Igbos constitute one of the largest and most populous ethnic groups in Nigeria and in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶ With an estimated population of over 30 million people,⁷ the Igbo-speaking people are located in south-eastern Nigeria. Igbos are bounded in the east by the Ibibio people, in the north by the Igalla, Idoma and Ogoja people, in the south by the Ijo and in the west by the Edo.

Due to the effects of migration, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the peripatetic nature of Igbos, there are descendant ethnic Igbo populations in other countries within as well as outside Africa. In the twentieth century, the migration of Nigerians to the United States has depended on three factors: 1) a quest for higher education; 2) the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) and consequent economic instability and unemployment; and 3) military dictatorship and the ensuing effects of political repression.⁸ It is estimated that more than one million

⁵ Kalu Ogbaa, *The Nigerian Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 4.

⁶ Christopher Ejizu, "The Traditional Igbo Perception of Reality: Its Dialectics and Dilemma," *Bigard Theological Studies* 9(1989):58-73.

⁷ CIA World Fact Book, Nigeria: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed November 18, 2013). This estimate is 18% of the total population (174,507,539) as of July, 2013.

⁸ For further information on migration of Igbo people to the United States, see Y.K Djamba, "African Immigrants in the United States: A

Nigerians now reside in the U.S.⁹ But, it is quite difficult to determine how many of these Nigerians are Igbo because the U.S. census statistics and those of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) consider only race and nationality, not ethnicity.¹⁰ Nigerian Igbo immigrants have been drawn mainly to large urban cities, such as; New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. It is in these major urban communities that Igbo liturgical practices thrive today.

The Igbo have been exposed to Christian missionary activity since 1841; in 1857 an Anglican mission was opened at the important town of Onitsha along the Niger River, and the Roman Catholics came in 1885.¹¹ By the mid-twentieth century most Igbo had adopted Christianity, though the tensile strength of Igbo traditional religion sustained millions of devotees as they developed a strong sense of ethnic identity. Igbo traditional religion requires the maintenance of a harmonious relationship with humanity and supernatural forces such as God, divinities, and ancestors.¹² This Igbo spirituality is often expressed through prayer, songs, arts, dance, myths, and so on, which Igbos have beautifully incorporated into Catholicism.

Although miles away from their homeland and having been

socio Demographic Profile in Comparison to Native Blacks," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 34 no. 2(1999):210-215. Kalu Ogbaa, *The Nigerian Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003). R. Reynolds, "Bless this Little Time We Stayed Here: Prayers of Invocation As Mediation of Immigrant Experience Among Nigerians in Chicago," in *Ethnolinguistic Chicago: Language and Literacy in the City's Neighborhoods*, ed. M. Farr (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 161-187. J. Takuogang, "Contemporary African Immigrants to The United States." *A Journal of African Migration*, no.2 (September 2002), http://www.africamigration.com/issue_02.html [accessed August 9, 2013]. Ezekiel Umoh Ette, *Nigerian Immigrants in the United States: Race, Identity, and Acculturation* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), 9-30.

⁹ Onwughalu, 25.

¹⁰ Reynolds, 183.

¹¹ Ikenga Ozigbo, *Roman Catholicism in Southern Nigeria 1985-1931*(Nigeria: Etukokwu Publishers Ltd, 1988),36-92.

¹² Alozie Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion, and Culture* (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 1991),59-63.

exposed for a long time to a different social and cultural life, many Igbo still have a strong nostalgia for their cultural heritage and are committed to preserving it. They often appreciate the need to educate their children in the culture of their progenitors through various means such as, festivals, traditional ceremonies, religious observances, and casual gatherings of fellow kinfolk. These nostalgic activities not only remind the Igbo of the land from which they emigrated, but also ensure the survival of their traditional values. Thus they are able to maintain and protect these values, norms, customs, and cultural identity on alien soil, and ensure their continued existence by passing them on to their American-born children.¹³ In essence, Igbo communities were formed, first and foremost, to foster the preservation of the Igbo culture and tradition.

Igbo Catholics in the United States, though registered with parishes where they attend Mass in English, gather periodically at a certain parish church designated by the diocese to celebrate Mass as well as perform other liturgical activities in the Igbo language. In some of the designated parishes the Igbo Mass is celebrated every Sunday,¹⁴ whereas it is celebrated once a month in others.¹⁵

B. Formation of Igbo Catholic Communities in America

Many immigrant ethnic groups in the United States, including the Igbo, have generally found it spiritually enriching to establish native church communities where they can experience liturgical worship in ways that are consistent with and meaningful to their native experience of church.¹⁶ Such

¹³ D.I Ndubuike, *The Struggles, Challenges, and Triumph of the African Immigrants in America* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 108.

¹⁴ Blessed Sacrament St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church, <http://www.bsscb.org/index.cfm> [accessed August 9, 2012].

¹⁵ See, Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland USA, <http://niccchurch.org/index.html> [accessed August 9, 2012], Igbo Catholic Community Archdiocese of Chicago and Environs, INNAC, <http://igbocatholicschicago.org/> [accessed August 9, 2012], Igbo Catholic Community- Houston, ICCH, <http://igbocatholicshouston.org/> [accessed August 9, 2012].

¹⁶ According to the United States Conference of Catholics Bishops Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travelers (PCMRT),

immigrant church communities are known to serve as avenues for community building, experiencing togetherness, overcoming cultural isolation, and providing a stronghold for advocacy programs that help children of immigrants and their families. Some Igbo immigrants in the United States yearn for a Eucharistic liturgy that expresses their traditional heritage conforming with how liturgical celebrations are performed in Nigerian Igbo churches. These yearnings began the quest for a need to have liturgical celebrations in the Igbo language and style in the United States for Igbos.

Liturgical celebrations such as weddings, child dedication, and funeral Masses, in the Igbo language date back to 1980 in the United States.¹⁷ However, the celebration of the Catholic Mass in the Igbo language on a formal basis did not begin until 1994 in Houston, Texas.¹⁸ The Igbo Catholic Community began remotely as distinct chapters in various U.S. cities before the chapters were amalgamated in 2003 at the Tenth Anniversary celebration of the Igbo Catholic Community in the Los Angeles Archdiocese, officiated by His Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze, then Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments.¹⁹ It was at this special

there are 17 African cultural/ ethnic communities in the US: Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Cape Verde, Eritrean and Ethiopian (Ge'ez rite), Ghanaian, Ivory Coast, Kenyan, Liberia, Nigerian, Rwandan, Sudanese, Tanzanian, Ugandan, Zairean, Zambian; 9 Caribbean Communities: Belize, Dominican Republic, Grenadian, Guyana, Haitian, Jamaican, Santa Lucian, Trinidad and Tobago; and 12 European Communities: Croatian, Czech, French, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Hungarian, Slovak, Slovenian, Ukrainian. Cf. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/pastoral-care-of-migrants-refugees-and-travelers/ethnic-ministries/>, accessed [December 19, 2013], and <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/pastoral-care-of-migrants-refugees-and-travelers/ethnic-ministries/upload/ACC.pdf>, accessed [December 19, 2013].

¹⁷ A detailed information on the formation of the Igbo catholic community can be found in; Igbo Catholic Community- Houston, ICCH, <http://www.igbocatholicshouston.org/history.htm> [accessed August 9, 2012].

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ According to the history on the formation of Igbo catholic community in the US, during the celebratory occasion, there was evidence of

occasion that the individual groups became consolidated to become "Igbo Catholic *Communities* USA."²⁰ However, in Baltimore, at the 2008 national convention of the nascent organization, the name for the organization was changed to "Igbo Catholic *Community* USA" (ICCUSA) to emphasize unity.²¹ Today ICCUSA strives to maintain a permanent link between the Igbo immigrants and their native land through Igbo preservation of the Igbo culture and tradition in the Eucharistic liturgy and fostering the wellbeing of its members.

C. Incorporation of Igbo Culture and Traditions in the Eucharistic Liturgy

The Igbo generally worship in a style that reinforces their cultural identity²² as is consistent with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The Igbo Catholic community makes room for liturgical and cultural diversity during its liturgical activities. Thus the Eucharistic liturgy is celebrated by means of a unique Igbo articulation and understanding of worship. Using the traditional language in worship, the community preserves Igbo culture and language both in the Eucharistic liturgy and other non-liturgical services, such as teaching the Igbo language, catechism classes, and Igbo religious hymns and songs to their children. The Igbo Mass celebrated in the United States, just as it is performed in Nigeria, features Igbo ethnic liturgical hymns, songs and music

delegates from other chapters who were present. Among the represented chapters were Igbo Catholic Community, Baltimore, MD; Igbo Catholic Community, Houston, TX; Igbo Catholic Community, Queens, NY; Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community, San Bernardino, CA; Nigeria Catholic Community, Washington, D.C.

²⁰ Igbo Catholic Community- Houston, ICCH, <http://www.igbocatholicshouston.org/history.htm> [accessed August 9, 2012].

²¹ During this convention, an evolved understanding prevailed – one that saw association not as a gathering of separate Igbo Catholic communities, but as a nucleic realization of the one Igbo Catholic community with its branches spread across the United States.

²² April Gordon, *Nigerian Diverse Peoples* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2003), 238.

with exotic musical instruments as well as the congregation wearing Igbo traditional attires.²³

Structurally, the Igbo Mass, from the entrance to the dismissal rite, is celebrated the way most parishes celebrate in the U.S., but with unique Igbo flourishes. These adaptations in the Igbo Mass could be seen in the language, style of preaching, music and dance incorporated into the Mass, and in the manner in which the people celebrate the offertory.

Language of the Igbo Mass

Among the major achievements of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* are articles²⁴ which encourage the use of the vernacular in the liturgy and the adaptation of the Roman rite to various cultures. These articles represent the Council's concrete response to the pastoral needs of the local churches. Language is the vessel that contains a people's culture, for, "Language is not only a mode of expressing the culture of its native speakers, but also is itself a part of that culture."²⁵ Language plays a vital role in religious worship, since it enhances an active participation of all involved in the ritual act. The main unifying cultural feature of the Igbo is their language, also called Igbo, which has many dialects.²⁶

²³ Youtube Video: *Uka Nkuputanwa Iberosi Twins: Nigeria- Igbo Catholic Association Atlanta GA Mass in Igbo Language* [accessed April 7, 2013]; Youtube Video: *Igbo Catholic Community Harvest of 2007*, Newark NJ [accessed April 7, 2013].

²⁴ SC, 36-40.

²⁵ Igwe Osita Agwuna III, *Igbo People: A Language and A People* (Onitsha: Pioneer Printing Press, 1980), 29.

²⁶ Since there are seventeen different dialects of Igbo which often are not mutually intelligible to other Igbo speakers, a standard Igbo phonology called "*Igbo izugbe*" has been developed in the later part of the 20th century. This serves as the official accepted form of the language. Besides the various speech sounds peculiar to specific dialects, there are 36 letters of the Igbo alphabet, eight vowels sounds, and five "officially accepted" parts of speech in the Igbo language. Cf. Raphael Egwu, *Igbo Idea of the Supreme Being and the Triune God* (Germany: Echter Verlag Wurzburg, 1998), 30-34; Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle, *The Sound Pattern of English* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); John A. Goldsmith, *AutoSegmental Phonology* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1979).

The Igbo Mass employs the Igbo language for the entire liturgy whether in Nigeria or in the United States. For the language of a people opens to them the spirit of the Church's liturgy, expressed in maximum, active, conscious, plenary and socio-communitarian participation in liturgical celebrations.²⁷ Thus, a full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations is possible only if the worshipping community understands both the text and the ritual of the celebration.²⁸

Igbo liturgical texts were produced in the 1900s, but more radical liturgical innovations began seriously in Nigerian Igbo Catholic churches in the 1970s with the translation and printing of the English-Latin Missal to Igbo language called *Usoro Emume Nke Missa*.²⁹ The Igbo missal, which had the Sunday reading and prayers of all the three cycles of the Roman Missal was translated by several people on their own and was used by different parishes in Nigeria beginning in 1974.³⁰ In 1977, a number of other liturgical and catechetical books, such as the text for the celebration of the sacraments, *Usoro Emume Sacrament, Katekisim Igbo* (Igbo Catechism), and *Katekisma Nk'Okwukwe Nzuko Katolik N'Asusu Igbo* (Catechism of the Catholic Faith in Igbo Language), were translated and produced for an active participation of Igbo Catholics in the liturgy.³¹ By

²⁷ Patrick Chibuko, Patrick Chibuko, "Dialectics of Language in the liturgy" (Lecture, Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt Nigeria, April 28, 2008).

²⁸ Cf. SC,36.

²⁹ The Episcopal Conference of Nigeria and the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship. *Usoro Emume Nke Missa* (Ibadan: The Catholic Bishops of East Central State, Nigeria: 1973).it is important to note that this liturgical text contains only the preface and Eucharistic prayers in Igbo , English, and Latin.

³⁰ Ikenga Ozigbo, *Igbo Catholicism: The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984* (Ibadan: Africana-Fep Publishers Limited, 1985), 33.

³¹ It is important to note here that the first translation of the Catechism in Igbo language was done by Fr. Aime Ganot, and C.Vogler and L.Lejeune (Spiritans who were on mission in Nigeria) produced the Catechism of the Catholic Faith in the Igbo Language; A Gnot, *Katekismi Ibo*, Roman Catholic Mission, Onitsha Lower Niger (Paris:1901); C.Vogler and L.Lejeune, *Katekisma Nk'Okwukwe Nzuko Katolik N'Asusu Igbo*, Roman Catholic Mission, Onitsha Southern Nigeria(Strasbourg:1903).Further reading on the translation of liturgical texts into Igbo language could be found in Donatus E.O Ogudo, *The*

1983, a translation of the Sunday readings and prayers for every Sunday, Solemnity, and Holy Week, was produced by the Igbo-Speaking Bishops of Nigeria, and entitled, *Akwukwo Misa – The Missal*. This translation called *Akwukwo Misa*, is been used to celebrate the Igbo Mass both in Nigeria and in the United States.

Music and Dance in the Igbo Mass

For Igbo, the liturgy is a joyful celebration. Songs give sweetness to the expression of prayer; promote the union of minds, and make rites more solemn, by rooting them in a person's culture.³² Singing is an essential part of the solemn liturgy of the Church, and every liturgical celebration liturgy should always be marked by the presence of songs as the church rightly expresses in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy."³³ Herein lies the motivation for the composition of Igbo songs whose text and music will be worthy of the worship of God.

Virtually all Nigerian cultures have their own traditions of music and dance, which are central to the way Nigerians remember their past and celebrate their present.³⁴ In fact music and dance are often central to specific events such as: worship, title taking, naming ceremonies, town festivals, harvest, victory

Catholic Missionaries and the Liturgical Movement in Nigeria: An Historical Overview, (Paderborn:Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei,1988), 64-72. Donatus Ogudo has a detailed topic on Liturgico-Catechetical Texts in the Vernacular.

³² Patrick Chibuko, "Dialectics of Language in the liturgy" (Lecture, Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt Nigeria, April 28, 2008).

³³ SC, 112.

³⁴ For further reading on music as a representation of cultural style, see Jeff Todd Titon, *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1984).

at war, initiation rites, etc.³⁵ As with most Christianized people, the Igbo people incorporate many of their indigenous cultural values, customs, and traditions into their Christian worship. In the Igbo Mass, religious dances are sometimes performed at different moments during the liturgy: entrance procession, Gospel procession,³⁶ during offertory, and at the recessional.³⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* asserts:

In certain countries, especially in mission lands there are people who have their own musical tradition and this plays a great part in their religious and social life. For this reason their music should be held in proper esteem and a suitable place is to be given to it, not only in forming their religious sense but also in adapting worship to their native genius.³⁸

The tunes and local musical accompaniment bring to light the culture of the people which has been incorporated into their Christian worship, gearing towards an active, conscious participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy. Songs and dances are accompanied with traditional instruments such as, drums of different sizes and intensity, wooden gongs of various dimensions, flutes of diverse size and tone, stringed instruments, xylophones, earthenware pots, and metal gongs.³⁹

³⁵ For an example of traditional Igbo dance see, Special Igbo Cultural Dance, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmOKYR-C4dq&feature=relmfu> [accessed August 9, 2013].

³⁶ During the gospel procession, a "town crier" often announces the arrival of the book of the gospel and invites all to be attentive and to listen to the "Word of God," which is our source of spiritual nourishment. This procession is accompanied by appropriate hymns and dancers who usher in the Gospel.

³⁷ In most Catholic parishes in Nigeria, this religious dance is common in most liturgical celebrations like Christmas, Christ the King, Easter, Ordination of priests, religious professions, etc, and has been adopted by Igbo immigrants in the United States.

³⁸ *SC*, 119.

³⁹ Example of these instruments include inter alia; 1) *Ekwe (Slit drum)*: This wooden musical instrument is a very powerful and effective means of communication. The instrument also comes in a smaller size known as the *okpokolo*.; 2) *Ogene (Metal gong)*: The *ogene* is a hollow metal gong about one foot long and oval, often with a handle at one end, and it is

The kind of liturgical music and dance used in the Igbo Mass is one that is not foreign but part and parcel of the people's way of life. It should be clear that the dance is not there for recreation or entertainment, but for prayer, which is the raising of minds and hearts to God through bodily gestures and movements, for "when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished and their minds are

played by hitting methodically with a piece of hardwood; 3) *Udu (Clay pot)*: *Udu* is percussion instrument made from pottery. Some of these pots, especially the small clay pots used for dancing, have a perforation on the upper side of the body. It is played with the palms of the hand or soft pads, but the left and right hands control the holes at the side and top of the *udu* respectively; 4) *Ichaka (Rattle)*: This musical instrument is fashioned from the calabash, a tropical African plant of the bignonia family, bearing large, gourdlike fruit. The instrument is made by stringing hundreds of tiny beads all around the dried calabash fruit. The beads strung around it produce a rattling sound when the instrument is shaken; 5) *Oja (Flute)*: The *oja* is the most common of the woodwind instruments. A melodious instrument, it is able to produce the first five notes of the diatonic scale. Structurally, it has three holes two at the sides and one at the bottom. A curved opening is made at the top where the lips rest as air is blown into the flute; 6) *Igba (Drum)*: *Igba* is the chief among the percussion instruments constructed from soft wood cylinders with open ended bottoms and a top sealed with dry animal skin leather; 7) *Ngedegwu/ Ngelenge (Xylophone)*: *Ngedegwu* is regarded as a melodic instrument made of strands from a special wood and sounds like the western piano. For further reading on Igbo musical instruments see; N.S Onuigbo, *The Three Worlds in Igbo Traditional Religion* (Enugu: Delta Publication, 2009), 141-188. Patrick Chibuko, *Paschal Mystery of Christ Foundation for Liturgical Inculturation in Africa* (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2001), 157-158. Joy Nwosu, "Classification of Igbo Musical Instruments," *Nigerian Magazine* 144(1983):38-58. Azubike Ifionu, "Igbo Music and Dance," *Groundwork on Igbo History* (1992):720-742. N Okaosa, "Ibo Musical Instruments," *Nigerian Magazine* 75 (December 1962):4-14. Traditional Musical instruments: Igbo Ogene Anuka Gong (bell) <http://www.the-nigeria.com/2011/11/traditional-musical-instruments-igbo.html#!/2011/11/traditional-musical-instruments-igbo.html> [accessed August 9, 2013]. Samples of Musical Instruments from the Igboland, <http://www.umunna.org/instruments.html> [accessed December 27, 2012]. Igbo Culture, Traditions and History, <http://enyi-oha-one-of-naiji.blogspot.com/2012/02/traditional-igbo-music-drums-and-flutes.html> [accessed August 9, 2013].

raised to God, so that they may offer Him their rational service and more abundantly receive His grace."⁴⁰

Preaching

Preaching in an Igbo Mass is performed by the priest using various forms and styles. Many Igbo priests begin their sermon with a popular hymn or chorus to dispose the congregation to be active listeners, so they can receive the message. Thus we see music playing yet another role in the Mass during the Liturgy of the Word. Effective preachers choose appropriate hymns or choruses that reflect the theme of the homily and readings for the day, or they might begin with a series of interpellations to which the congregation responds with effective gusto. A common pattern of the interpellation is as follows:

Priest: Otito diri Jesu (Praise be to Jesus)

People: Na ndu ebebe (Forever and ever)

Priest: Onye jisie ike (Whoever is steadfast in faith)

People: O ruo ana eze (makes heaven)

Priest: Onye jekata ghalu (If one should backslide in faith)

People: Nwanne ya enyelu ya aka (Let him or her be supported in faith by the brethren)⁴¹

Some priests employ the dialogue method, which involves asking relevant questions related to the readings of the day or asking a member of the congregation to share his or her reflection on the readings. Others choose the storytelling method, possibly using stories from traditional folklore to drive home a point or deliver the inspired message. There are yet others who preach by delivering their homily straightforwardly, using only gestures and relevant movements. Therefore, these methods of preaching the Word of God in the original language of the people with such dynamism elicit both devotion and active participation in the liturgy.

⁴⁰ SC,33.

⁴¹ This interpellation is commonly used by Igbo priests both in Nigeria and has found its way into the sermons of Igbo Masses celebrated in the US.

Offertory

The offertory procession, according to the Roman rite, involves the singing of the offertory hymn and a procession to the altar with the bread and wine to be offered, which are then presented to the priest by those selected to bring forth the gifts. Also money and other gifts for the poor and the church may be collected or brought forward at this time.⁴² In the Igbo Mass, however, offertory involves a procession of the entire assembly accompanied with singing, dancing, and clapping, as they present their gifts at the altar of the Lord.⁴³ The offertory hymns are carefully chosen to inspire active participation and generous donations of cash offerings at the collection boxes/baskets which are normally placed before the sanctuary, or at other strategic locations in the church.⁴⁴ Non-monetary gifts are also common and welcome. Even when people have nothing to offer, they are encouraged to stand up and go to the collection boxes/baskets empty-handed as a sign of self-offering to God.⁴⁵ The offertory music is very animated, exciting, and inspiring, and usually lasts a relatively long time, given that the whole assembly has to dance with exuberance to the altar, to present their offerings. Even though this method of offertory is time consuming, no one seems to be in a hurry.

Compared to the placing of gifts in a basket passed around during time for offertory, known as the secret-bag method of collection introduced by the missionaries, the Igbo style of offering of gifts is seen as yielding more active participation in the liturgy.⁴⁶ The secret-bag collection, as it were, did not allow

⁴² *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani* (General Instruction on the Roman Missal) An English Language Study Translation by the Secretariat for the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (U.S.A: 2000), nr.73.

⁴³ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 273.

⁴⁴ Youtube Video: Uka Nkputanwa Iberosi Twins: Nigeria- Igbo Catholic Association Atlanta GA Mass in Igbo Language [accessed August 9, 2013].

⁴⁵ Patrick Chibuko, "Alternative Order of Eucharistic Celebration: A Case for Local Churches in Nigeria," *Journal of Inculturation Theology* 10, no. 1 (April 2008):54.

⁴⁶ Elochukwu Uzukwu, 273.

people the opportunity to personally present their offering to God in a more direct and visible fashion, as one would before a deity in the Igbo traditional religion, for instance. The present method of singing and dancing to the sanctuary to present gifts, is a striking adaptation of Igbo custom to the Eucharistic liturgy.⁴⁷ It also demonstrates the genius of the people, and makes them active participants in the liturgical celebration.

D. Significance of the Igbo Mass for Immigrants

The Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community in the United States serves as an avenue for community building, experiencing togetherness, overcoming cultural isolation, and providing a stronghold for advocacy programs that help children of immigrants and their families. The Igbo Mass has further helped Nigerian Igbo immigrants increase their self-esteem as they sustain and foster their ethnic identity in a foreign land.⁴⁸ This self-awareness invariably fosters self-identity and builds personal strengths such as courage, persistence, creativity, stronger interpersonal relationships in an immigrant community. More concretely, this opportunity to worship in a familiar language and style provides an environment for all Igbos to worship in their native language. It also helps Igbo immigrants to promote their religious and cultural heritage as a people, maintain the Igbo Catholic identity and tradition which is under threat of assimilation in the United States, provide spiritual guidance to Igbo children, and promote cultural awareness among the younger generation of the Igbo community.⁴⁹ Although this faith community has become an avenue where young Igbo-Americans learn the Igbo language, most of the younger generation are not able to speak the language fluently.⁵⁰ The various Igbo Catholic community chapters need

⁴⁷ Ibid.,273; Patrick Chibuko, "Alternative Order of Eucharistic Celebration: A Case for Local Churches in Nigeria," :51-71.

⁴⁸ Moses Biney, *Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land in African Immigrant Religions in America*, ed. Olupona, Jacob and Regina Gemignani (New York: New York university press, 2007), 276.

⁴⁹ Frank Okechukwu, interview by author, South Bend, IN, April 3, 2012.

⁵⁰ This is my observation having visited many Igbo catholic families in Chicago and its environs, and attended other social gatherings organized by Igbo in the United States.

to find other avenues that will help the younger generation learn the language better within the Eucharistic liturgy. One way may be involving children more in the readings at an Igbo Mass, providing Mass bulletins that are written in Igbo language, and supporting their language acquisition at home.

Despite the aforementioned challenge, the Igbo Mass offers attainment of the fullness of being for the Igbo, as their identity becomes both an ingredient and product of communality. Beyond the question of identity formation and preservation of heritages, the communities also function as support networks, which benefit members in areas such job search, the securing of health and life insurance, and mortgages.⁵¹

Conclusion

The Igbo Mass fulfills the yearnings of many Nigerian Igbo immigrants who are unfamiliar with, or often feel lost in, or alienated from, the Western style of worship. Since ritual plays a powerful role in worship, namely drawing people into the realm of the sacred, there is a deeper appreciation of the Igbo mass because a larger sense of continuity is preserved in the liturgy; evident in the incorporation or integration of cultural praxis in the liturgy.⁵² Additionally, this faith community aims at sharing the Igbo culture with the whole of the parishes where it exists, parishes which, in turn, serve as the medium of contact and locus for the development of a working relationship between Igbo Catholic immigrants and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, on the one hand, and with other ethnic communities, on the other. Through these faith communities Igbos contribute to the fostering of the Catholic faith in a most unique and positive way.

⁵¹Austin Okigbo, interview by author, South Bend, IN, April 9, 2012. Fr. Austin Okigbo is an Igbo Catholic priest and an assistant professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Colorado Boulder. He holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology and African Studies. Fr. Okigbo pioneered the beginning of the Igbo catholic community of the Delaware valley in 2000.

⁵² Donatus Chukwu, interview by author, South Bend, IN, March 13, 2012.

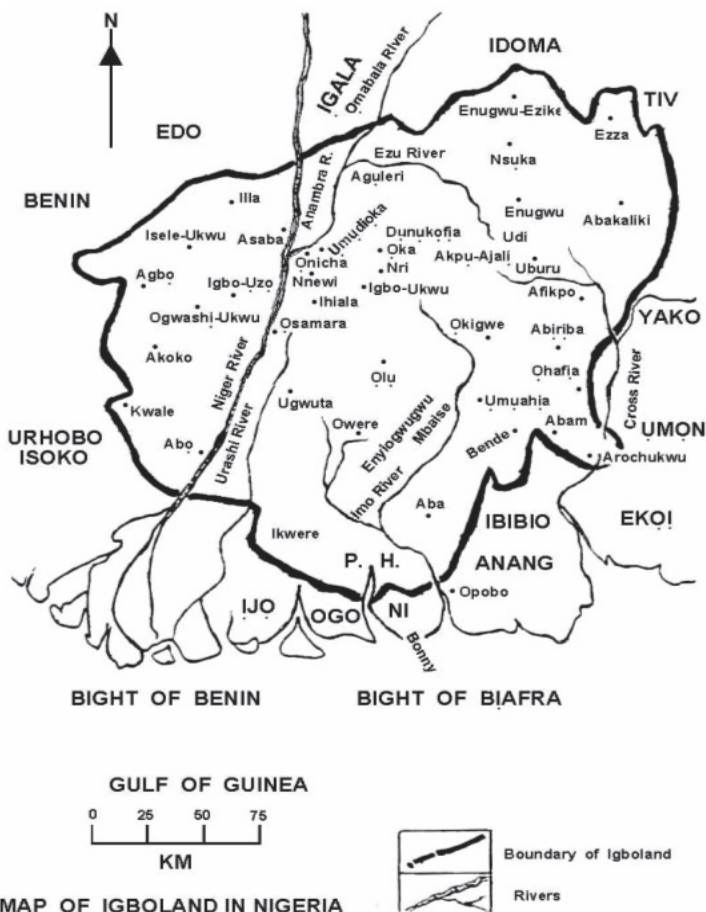
Furthermore, the Igbo Catholic community, to a great extent, is engaged in forging new identities by utilizing several cultural tools and activities, including language education and the observation of festivals obtainable in their home countries. Also, it creates the forum for individuals to build social capital and support networks, to assist them in addressing some of the general challenges they face as immigrants such as adapting to their new environment, employment, social and cultural shocks, supporting family members back in Nigeria, identity issues, housing, and racism.⁵³

Finally, from this study, it is evident that liturgy is not only the place where we lift up our hearts in worship to God, it is also a place where ethnic identities can be formed and cultural values preserved to posterity.

⁵³ For further reading on the Challenges of Igbo immigrants in the US, See Obiefuna Onwughalu, *Parents' Involvement in Education: The Experience of an African Immigrant Community in Chicago* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc.:2011), 30-33 and Ezekiel Umoh Ette, *Nigerian Immigrants in the United States: Race, Identity, and Acculturation* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), 122-139.

1. Pictures

MAP OF IGBOLAND ⁵⁴



⁵⁴ Map extracted from Nigerian Wiki.
http://nigerianwiki.com/wiki/Igbo_people [accessed August 9, 2013].

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