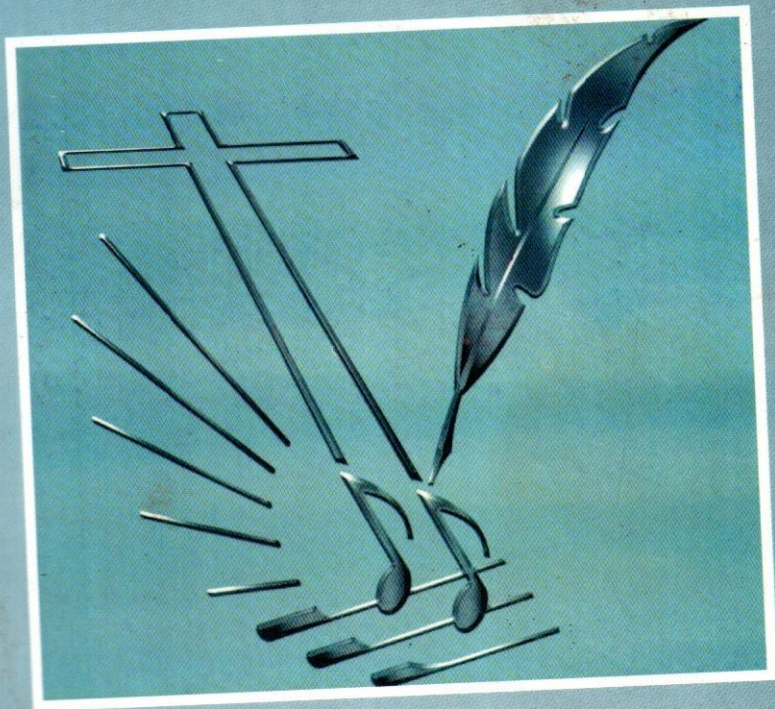




**PEOPLES' CREATIVE
EMPOWERMENT INTERNATIONAL**
Empowering the Grassroot Creatively

Essential Elements of Liturgical Music



A Handbook for Composers and Music Lovers
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Section Two

2.1 INSPIRATION AND SPIRITUALITY IN LITURGICAL MUSIC

(DR. Joe Onyekwelu)

Abstract

What Choristers in the Christian church should always have in mind is the relevance of inspiration and spirituality in liturgical music. Conscious of the fact that singing is praying at a higher level, our behavior or actions should be dramatic in a sense. That is why liturgical music is a kind of musical drama or spiritual opera where mood and solemnity play important roles. The chorus of angels does it that way as they sing praises in heaven. When a piece of music is inspired in a composer, it is his compositional technique that directs the performers on how to apply the spirituality implied in the song. This is where the application of musical signs and directives come into play and should be followed by the choir and the congregation. In this way the children of God enjoy divine appreciation of songs especially during liturgical service. The paper discusses three aspects namely, sources of inspiration, relevance of inspiration to spirituality and yearning and aspiration.

Introduction

For this lecture to be meaningfully absorbed by all of us who are choristers, it is not my intention to embark on serious research from

books but to base this study on practical experiences acquired over the years using simple expressions at our level, just as St. Paul gave his lectures in 1st Corinthians 2:4-5 "...and my teaching and Message were not delivered with Skilful words of human wisdom, But with convincing proof of the Power of Gods' Spirit."

What is inspiration? One can define it as a natural force that drives one into action that generates a creative achievement. This force which stimulates a person to physical creativity is spiritual. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English "Inspiration is a supposed force or Influence on poets, artists, Musicians etc stimulating creativity Ideas etc... P. 704

Spirituality is a state of mind under which one finds himself as he embarks on an action considered to be Devine or Holy. Both definitions portray a clear demonstration of 'actions that originate from the spiritual and manifest in the physical. In other words, liturgical music in the Catholic Church cannot manifest without inspiration from the right source-the Holy Spirit. Divine Messages to God's children come through different sources or channels-the priests, the prophets, the preachers, the inspired musicians etc. Christians utilize these messages to obey and serve God in the proper way and manner.

Since the liturgy is a very essential forum for worship, the musical compositions associated with it must be such musical products that are

well inspired passing through the spiritual and physical stages as required in the service of God. Liturgical music is not for dancing and enjoyment, rather it is for the spiritual upliftment in the service of God-the creator.

Sources of Inspiration

The liturgical seasons of the Christian church generate a lot of inspiration in the composers. Such seasons as the Advent (when the faithful look forward in expectation of Christ's coming), Christmas (the birth of Christ), Easter (the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ or the redemption) often provide a wide range of inspirations based on the teachings of the Holy book and the spiritual feelings that manifest from them. Take as an example, George Frederic Haendel after downloading the Bible in his brain was inspired to compose the Messiah-a work based on the life of Christ which took him 24 days to complete. The movements include arias, recitatives, choruses and orchestral sections. According to Robert Hickok, (1979, 126),

Part I, deals with the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. Part II, the sacrifice of Jesus and the salvation of humanity through his suffering and death. Part III, the certainty of eternal life through faith in the risen Christ.

With regard to composers in our environment, Dorothy Ipere after absorbing the stories surrounding the birth of Christ from the Bible was filled up with thoughts that created a large mental picture of all that happened in Bethlehem and beyond. She was highly inspired and came

up with a powerful composition- "Amuru Nwa ka Nnwa" which begins with the expression - "Nnukwu Ihe mere Na Bethlehem." This is a real inspired song, so moving that any listener is moved to join the chorus in the journey to Bethlehem to see the new born child-Jesus. The story is so narrated in music that one would think that Dorothy was there in Bethlehem when it all happened. That is inspiration that paints a large picture in the mind of people. Dorothy employed such compositional technique as call-and-response" in African music as well as contrapuntal imitation of western music.

In my own composition of Christmas season I received inspiration from the Holy bible together with the catholic doctrine with which I have been acquainted from childhood. This inspiration carried me from Advent to Christmas. I started with the anticipation of Christ in a piece entitled "Lee ya ka o na-abia"- see him or look at him coming - a song that makes one have a mental picture of Christ coming majestically from a distance that would take him about one month to arrive at. This composition was followed by the next one titled "Kedu Eze Amuru Ohuru" meaning where is the new born king?, based on the question which the three wise men put to Herod when they saw the star from the east.

The composition by Fr. Jude Udeonu was another powerfully inspired song titled "Ka Ugwu Nine Na Ndida Nye Chineke Ekene"- let all the hills and valleys salute God. Here Fr. Udeonu, based on the inspiration that

came to him, was not only announcing the birth of Christ but urging all the hills and valleys (not only people) to salute God and thank him for Christ the son of God has been born to the world.

Looking at the above compositions, one can observe the sources of inspiration which generate joyful songs from the composers-songs very suitable for the liturgical seasons of the Christian church.

Yearning and Aspiration

Yearning and aspiration are other important factors that give inspiration to one who is desperately in need of something, especially a creative artist like a poet or musician. It is a fact of life that many people have spent years praying and asking God for something they need so desperately. For a music composer, it is a source of inspiration. The example I am going to cite might arouse your sympathy. "It is the case of Joe Onyekwelu who has no brother in this world as he is the only son of his parents out of twelve issues by his mother. When he got married, his yearning and aspiration were to have a male child. This dominated his thought and daily prayers which eventually influenced his musical compositions in the church.

In his first composition 'Bata N'ime m', he pleaded with God to come into his life and give him joy. That joy was the gift of a male child. Joe did not have his way as his wife delivered a female child. He continued with prayers and later came up with another composition titled 'Chukwu Dube m'. Here, Joe asked God to guide and lead him to have a male

child. Yet God did not grant the request as another female baby was born to him. He continued praying until the wife gave birth to the third issue and it was another female child. This time Joe was disappointed with the Lord and in that mood the inspiration that came to him was a protest to the Lord and he came up with the composition entitled 'I natago Ozi Anyi'-Have you received our message. He was asking God whether up till then he had not received his prayers.

The protest came to a level where it now struck Joe that he was talking to the Almighty Father. Only then he stopped to think twice. He then changed his mood and came up with an appeal for God's mercy and forgiveness. This song which started with a protest now ended with repentance and prayers for forgiveness.

In the month of June that year, Joe took his wife to the labour ward at the UNTH. It was late in the night when he heard the painful cry of a woman in labour, followed by the cry of a child. Joe was shivering with anxiety when the midwife came out to announce to Joe that it was a successful delivery. Male or female? Questioned Joe anxiously. Thank God, your wife has delivered a baby boy. Joe was shaking and so full of excitement that he grabbed the nurse in a joyous embrace. "Go home now!, the nurse told Joe, and get us the following items for use on your wife and child. Bring them early in the morning".

Joe Jumped into his car to move but before then, his head was almost

filled with praises. Getting to Akwata by Coal Camp, the inspiration was so much that he packed his car by the road-side to put down the songs of praise before they vanished. It was around 2am when he put on the light on the roof of the car, picked up his pen and began to write, 'Kunie K'anyi Kene Dinwenu'Kunie Kanyi Kene Chineke...'

Today this song has emerged as a popular and powerful song for thanksgiving and offering in the Catholic Church.

Spirituality: How Essential?

This is where the mood and solemnity of certain sections of the liturgy are displayed - demonstrating the spirituality required in each section. The mass is a sacrifice, the most powerful of all the liturgical celebrations of the Catholic Church. The important sections so far recognized are five which include the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Each section follows its mood and solemnity as a liturgical drama which must be performed faithfully.

It is important to note that the kind of inspiration that comes to a church composer must have spiritual connotation. Therefore, the relevance of inspiration to the spirituality of a song cannot be over-emphasized in the Catholic liturgy. The mental imagination of the spiritual drama bubbles in the composer to create melodic phrases and rhythms that reflect in the entire music, putting the faithful in the mood to participate in the worship. That is why mood or solemnity of sections of the liturgy must be observed as indicated by the composer.

This is where the choir has to set the pace for the entire faithful or congregation to follow as it is the trained choir that first demonstrates and maintains the spirituality behind the composition as inspired in the composer.

Conclusion

It is important to mention once more that the relevance of inspiration, and spirituality in liturgical music cannot be overemphasized. Both are actions that originated from the spiritual and manifest in the physical. Inspiration is of heavenly origin where the angels use all that were inspired in them to sing praises to God every moment. The same is applicable in the church of God where God inspires his faithful to sing praises to him.

The liturgical seasons of the year provide materials for inspiration. Such seasons as Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Assumption and All Saints are examples. There are then other kinds of inspiration that come to composers in the church who serve God using their God-given talents in musical composition.

Mood and solemnity are the elements that add to the spirituality of songs during liturgy. That is what makes liturgical singing a kind of spiritual Opera. That is musical drama, an indication that one who sings well prays twice.

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