Fondazione Guido d'Arezzo

POLIFONIE

Storia e teoria della coralità
History and theory of choral music

Organo del / *Journal of the*
Centro studi guidoniani

VII, 1
2007

BASIL OKEKE

The Dialectics of Music and Language in Igbo Liturgical Chants[*]

THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

The middle of 19th century marked the advent of the Western missionaries and the formal sewing of the seed of Christian Religion in Igbo land. The initial stage of the evangelization activity saw a stiff unwillingness on the part of the two cultures (Igbo culture and Christianity) to either concede or gain from the other. Not until the wake of the liturgical movement and subsequently the Second Vatican Council with its deliberations on the acceptance of the music of other cultures into the Church's liturgy did a ray of light flicker in the dark tunnel of the struggle for cultural co-existence. The two cultures began to experience a certain cultural cross-fertilization similar to what Bruno Nettl described in his two-type distinction of musical acculturation. [1] The celebration of the Holy Mass and singing at Mass, if there were any, were done, for instance, in Latin and, a little later, in English. So that the early Igbo liturgical songs, which at the developmental stage were not used directly in the liturgy but meant for use in private devotions, became simply nothing other than translations into Igbo language of many Latin and English hymn texts sung to their original melodies. Thus, the western songs struggled, on one hand, to adapt itself to the complex prosodic features of Igbo language and to the people's native way of singing and dancing; and, on the other hand, the Igbo traditional music culture came under the influence of western musical theories and praxis, such as, singing in parallel 3rds, 6ths etc. In this exchange of values, Igbo

---

[*] This essay is an excerpt of the author's master's degree thesis in Musicology at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, Rome, on the Igbo liturgical music of Nigeria. Special gratitude goes to my moderator, prof. Nicola Tangari, for his special attention to my work and for his translation in Italian.

[1] Brunno Nettl describes two types of musical acculturation as: "the intertwining of two musical styles, so that a single song contains characteristics of both of them" or "the other type of musical acculturation, a misture of styles in the repertory, found in American Negro music and in Spain, where folk music was somewhat influenced by the Arabic invasions in the Middle Ages." See BRUNO NETTL, *Music in Primitive Culture*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1956, pp. 120-121.

sentences lost their intonations, stress, rhythm and meanings to become a slave to already structured western melodies and rhythmic patterns. Hence, the old-time issue of textual incomprehensibility in the liturgical songs reasserted itself and in a more complicated form.

The magnitude of the effect created by the falling-apart of the music and the text in the early Igbo liturgical songs can be assessed and articulated in the words of G. T. Basden:

> Up to the present, English hymn tunes and chants, set to Ibo translations, are apt to be treated mechanically. The singing is not lacking in volume – far from it – but the living and soul-stirring effect engendered by the native songs is practically lacking in the translated productions. There is never the same spirit of abandonment in the foreign article as in the native one. European music, as they interpreted it, has not yet succeeded in gainingaccess to the inner being of the Ibo; it may have the form of music, but it lacks the essence. He will sing hymns as continuously as formerly he chanted native lyrics, but he is never carried away by them, however much he may enjoy singing. With English music volume is the one object in view, and congregational singing in the larger churches in the Ibo country is like the thunder of many waters. The more one listens to native music, themore one is conscious of its vital power. It touches the chords of man's inmost being, and stirs his primal instincts.[2]

The above observation made in 1921 by G.T. Basden, an Anglican Missionary who not only lived and worked among the Ibos of Nigeria, but also saw the Igbo Christian worship songs develop from the cradle, prompted us to engage in this research, in order to find out, firstly, how far the Igbo local church has gone in developing her own liturgical music; and, secondly, to what extent this her own brand of liturgical music has its taproot anchored in the people's native music culture.

However, given the major peculiarity of Igbo native music – its power of conveying series of meanings through a word or a sentence that is sung or played on a traditional music instrument – this essay will investigate the liturgical music examples from Igbo land from the perspective of the relationship between music and language in the liturgy.

[2] GEORGE THOMAS BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, London, Seeley, 1921, p. 192.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

To have an idea of what music making among the Igbos means, one has to step into the geographical, socio-religious context of the Igbos. This calls for a bit knowledge of who the Igbos are, their cultural modes of self-expression and, above all, their religious beliefs and practices. But since the material to be presented here existed for ages and was transmitted from one generation to another by oral tradition process, the essay will rely on some sort of reconstruction of the scanty historical information available, which though always hypothetical, is founded on strong analogies of cultural data and on a wider concordance of evidence from the general Igbo worldview.

The cultural area called Igbo land [3] "lies between 5° and 7° north of the Equator and between 6° and 8° east of the Greenwich meridian, spanning the river Niger about mid-way between the Niger Benue confluence to the north and the Atlantic to the South."[4] As far back as 1972 the estimated population of the Igbos was put at 18 million.[5] But looking at the recent census report of the Nigerian National Population Commission[6] we suspect that the population of the Igbos has risen high above the aforementioned figure. What is then regarded as Igbo liturgical music is practiced by over 20 million people, a figure that equals to 14.285 percent of the Nigerian population.

Igbo homeland is characterised by twofold geographical features: open grassland in the northern part and the tropical rain forest in the south. According to W.W. Echezona, these regional variations influence, to some extent, the materials available for the construction of musical instruments, control their forms and distribution and helps to explain the variety and often extremely local provenance of musical practices.[7] Another geographical feature affecting

---

[3] Igbo land, today, is specifically composed of the five states that are situated on the south-eastern part of Nigeria, namely: *Abia*, *Anambra*, *Ebonyi*, *Enugu* and *Imo*. However, on a wider sense, it includes also the Igbos of *Benue*, *Delta* and *Rivers* states of Nigeria. The people are called "Igbo" and the language, spoken by over 20 million people, is also referred to as "Igbo".

[4] S. N. CHINWUBA OBI, *The Ibo Law of Property*, London, Butterworths, 1963, p. 3.

[5] ITA I. EKANEM, *The 1963 Nigerian Census. A Critical Appraisal*, Benin City, Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1972, p. 67.

[6] Recent Nigeria census figures published in January 2007 by the National Population Commission put the nation's overall population at 140 million. Cf. N.P.C., «The 2006 Nigeria Census Figures», on the web: *www.Nigeriaworld.com*.

[7] See W.W.C. ECHEZONA, «Igbo Music», in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second edition, edited by Stanley Sadie, London, Macmillan, 2001, vol. 12, p. 75.

liturgical music performance in Igbo land is hot climatic condition. Like in other countries of sub-Saharan Africa, one is inclined to think that the hot climatic conditions, the proximity to rough natural environment that probably contribute to the energetic behavioural life pattern of the Igbos, come to bear as well in the peoples way of making music and singing in the liturgy – a peculiar voice timbre that is very loud and often, in some male coarse, and a lively rhythm. But as Rose Brandel suggests in her studies of the music of Central Africa, the voice timbre could be as well part of a traditional inheritance.[8] This Brandel's opinion looks interesting and invitational to dig deep into the traditions and music of the Igbos.

IGBO MUSIC AND TRADITIONS

The underlying force of social relationships and religious practices in the traditional Igbo society is regarded as "*omenala*," "a generic term for the body of Igbo socio-religious laws, customs and traditions passing from generation to generation and having its origin as far back as the time of the ancestors."[9] Among the Igbos to conduct one's life in a manner contrary to the directives and provisions of *omenala* would amount to "*nsoala*"[10] and this attracts some punitive measures from the elders of the community who symbolize the authority of the ancestors. Some traditional Igbo musical instruments such as *Ikoro*, for example, are typical symbolic representations of *omenala* and as such have special functions in Igbo society. However, with the advent of Christianity most of the Igbo socio-religious rituals associated with musical practices have reduced tremendously. Some have disappeared entirely or integrated into Christian practices as one would notice in some "Igbo Christian ritual music."

As seen in the definition above, the term *omenala* has both social and religious connotations which emphasize the intricate relationship between social life and religious practices in Igbo land. So that it is not easy to dissociate any aspect of Igbo life from Igbo traditional religion. As A. G. Leonard puts it, the Igbos are deeply religious people so much that "their religion is their existence

---

[8] "It is inherited and accepted manner of singing that influences each singer." ROSE BRANDEL, *The Music of Central Africa. An ethnomusicological study: former French equatorial Africa, the former Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi, Uganda, Tanganyka*, The Haugue, Nijhoff, 1961, p. 93.

[9] COSMAS OKECHUKWU OBIEGO, *Igbo Idea of Life and Death in Relation to Chukwu, God*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Roma, Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 1971, p. 22.

[10] "*nsoala*" simply means behaviours that go against the traditions of the Igbo people, it could be moral or social behaviours. Though in some Igbo communities the use of the term "*nsoala*" (i.e. abomination) is restricted to religious practices.

and their existence is their religion."[11] For Basden Igbo religiosity and social ethos are rather a unified whole.[12]

The implication of this socio-religious inter-relatedness is that there isn't much difference between what the Igbos regard as purely traditional music for social celebrations and the one designated for sacred functions. The musical and the instrumental forms of these two types are often the same, but in the case of vocal music the text usually makes the difference. Thus, textual (Igbo language and poetics) and melodic analyses (Igbo traditional melodies) help a great deal in determining the differences and similarities between one Igbo song and another.

IGBO LANGUAGE AND POETICS

The term literature – language, poetry and prose – is a word etymologically associated more with written tradition than with oral. Nevertheless, it is evident that written tradition presupposes a pre-literary stage or what is called oral tradition. Igbo language and poetics underwent this same evolutive process. For many centuries, before the invention of letters or writing and its later introduction among the Igbos, there were communications between individuals, there were speeches, story telling, proverbs, songs and all about *omenala*, but they could not be set down in writing. In other words, all had existed in the form of oral literature before taking a written form.

Oral literature, being a system of communication which depended largely on the ability of the memory to retain information, registered some practical results among the Igbos for many centuries. Since there were no other alternative means of decoding and retrieving information, the human memory was expected to be very much awake and as sharp as a knife to be able to perform this communicative function. For instance, some of the Igbo folk songs selected as examples in this write up were all learnt by heart during the author's childhood. However, the variations or rather mutations witnessed in these songs moving from one community to another make a case for the shortcomings of oral tradition and the necessity of transcending this mnemonic transmission

[11] ARTHUR GLYN LEONARD, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*, London, Frank Cass and Co., 1968, p. 429.

[12] GEORGE THOMAS BASDEN, *Niger Ibos. A description of the primitive life and customs and animistics beliefs &c., of the Ibo people of Nigeria, by one who, for thirty-five years, enjoyed the privilege of their intimate confidence and friendship*, London, Frank Cass and Co., 1966, p. 33.

method. It was then thanks to colonialism and the advent of missionaries that the needed change from oral to written tradition became possible in Igbo land.

Even though oral transmission still goes on today in some remote places in Igbo land, a lot of collecting and editing has already begun so that writing and oral tradition can be said to be going on contemporaneously. Nevertheless, Igbo modern authors and musicians still depend heavily on oral sources – Igbo stories, rhymed poetries and proverbs of the Ancestors – for their literary works and music writing. Much of the Igbo modern arts of poetry, prose, music and language have been shaped by the wisdom of the Igbo ancestors.[13]

Among the over 250 ethnic languages of Nigeria, *Hausa*, *Igbo* and *Yoruba* are the most widely spoken. In addition to these indigenous languages there exist also two other languages namely, English – a foreign language brought to Nigeria through colonialism and used as language of the literate class – and pidgin English – strictly neither foreign nor indigenous language, prevalent among the simple class, and described by Adebisi Afolayan, as "a simple language developed from English under the influence of local West African Languages and Portuguese for a restricted purpose, initially for commercial transactions among English traders and coastal West African peoples of the local multilingual West African communities."[14]

Igbo language, together with other African languages such as *Acholi* of Uganda, *Kinyarwanda* of Ruwanda and Burundi etc., belongs to the language group classified as *kwa* family, a sub-category of the large language family known as Niger-Congo,[15] or what Paul van Thiel described as Bantu languages, giving the fact of their being "tonal languages" as one of the major characteristics of this language group.[16] As a tonal language, therefore, meaning encoded in Igbo words and sentences is deciphered through syllabic intonation

[13] A good example of Igbo literature with Igbo traditional background is found in the works of a great and famous Igbo Nobel prize winner Chinua Achebe such as "Things Fall Apart", "Arrow of God" etc.

[14] ADEBISI AFOLAYAN, «African Languages and Literature in Today's World», in *African History and Culture*, edited by Richard Olaniya, Ikeja, Longman Nigeria, 1982, p. 176.

[15] JOSEPH H. GREENBERG, "Studies in African Linguistic Classification. The Niger-Congo Family", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 5, n. 2, 1949, pp. 79-100; cf. also BARRY NEIL FLOYD, *Eastern Nigeria. A geographical review*, London, Macmillan, 1969, p. 28.

[16] PAUL VAN THIEL "African Religious Music. Text Tone and Tune", in *Christian Theology of Inculturation*, edited by Mariasusai Dhavamony, Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997 (Documenta missionalia, 24), p. 171.

or accentuation. The word sequence coupled with vowel elision dictate a certain kind of rhythmic articulation, pronunciation and a melodic line. F. C. Ogbalu, a renowned teacher and scholar of Igbo language explains this very nature of Igbo language as follows:

> Tones therefore play a very important part in both grammar and speech. By tone is meant the stress on syllables of a word, whether they are high, low or intermediate. Such a stress makes a lot of difference in the meaning of words. There are many words, which have the same sound but not the same tone. The tones determine the meanings, which the word carries when it is so pronounced.[17]

A word, when pronounced in isolation, has, therefore, its specific inherent tones usually referred to as "lexical tones". Combinations in varied forms of such tones in a sentence help to identify the meaning conveyed by every instance of the usage. A typical example is the word *akwa*. This word written in isolation, in this case, conveys four meanings to an Igbo reader who is able to identify each of these meanings only through the tones given to each of the two syllables '*a*' and '*kwa*' in the pronunciation of the speaker. The three tones used in Igbo language, as outlined above by Ogbalu, are, high indicated by the use of an acute accent on a vowel (ó), Low (ò) and intermediate (ō). If these three types of tones are applied to our example above, the result will be as follows:

Ákwà	=	Cloth
*Ā*kwá	=	Egg
Ákwá	=	Cry
Àkwà	=	Bed

The third tone, intermediate, is applied to this word when it is followed by a corresponding verb for instance, *ikwā ākwà* means to sew a cloth and *ikwā ākwā* signifies to cry. In these sentences the tones that compose the word *Ákwà* (cloth) and *Ákwá* (cry) changed from high to intermediate because of the influence of the preceding tones of the verb *ikwā*.[18]

As a language in which one word could have series of meaning depending on how the word is pronounced, Igbo language is very reach in idiomatic

[17] F. CHIDOZIE OGBALU, *Igbo Idioms. The dictionary of Igbo idioms*, Onitsha, 1967, p. 18.

[18] The word *ikwā* means to sew materials such as cloth, but could as well mean to cry depending on the pronunciation.

expressions, onomatopoeia and, especially, alliterations such as in the following example with the word "*akwa*": "*Nwanyi na-akwa akwa, i na-akwa akwa na ọkụkọ gi yiri akwa n'elu akwa i kwara akwa.*" In a sentence such as the one above, the lexical tones place big restriction to possible suitable melodic lines.

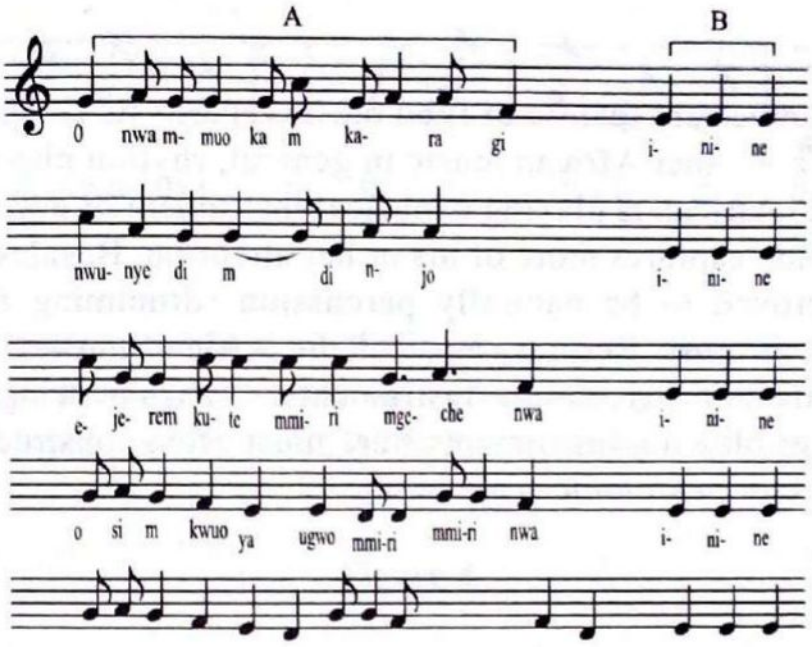
Literary genres and forms have also big influence in Igbo traditional music making. The genres are different textual forms in which Igbo oral literature was transmitted from generation to generations. More prevalent among them is the call and response form, followed by short poetic verse of usually one stanza. Others include Children's rhyme, satirical verses, and long poetic tale-type.[19] These poetic forms wield enormous influence in shaping the concept of form in Igbo traditional music.

IGBO TRADITIONAL MUSIC

As the origin of the system of musical notation in Byzantine and Latin chants are traceable back to the Greek and Latin lexical accents, so also has Igbo music its origin in the prosodic features of Igbo language. Features such as speech tones, vocal and instrumental rhythms, poetic forms and other cultural exigencies have decisive implications for music making in Igbo land. They influence the melodic contours such that there exists between music and text a strong intimate relationship. Here below is an example of a typical Igbo traditional folk song.

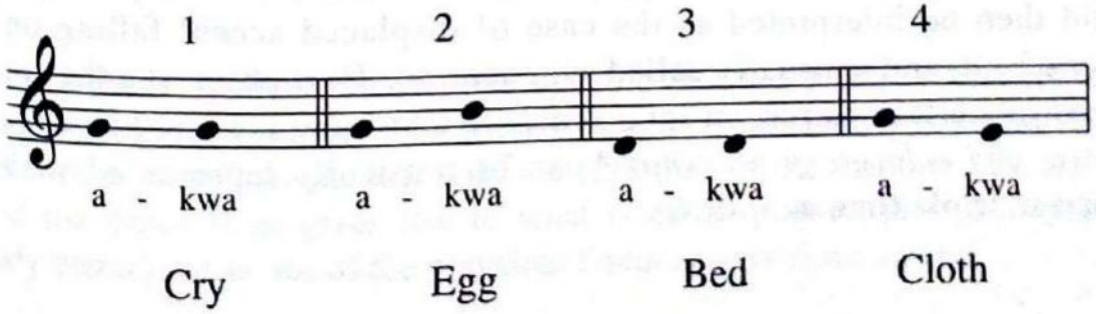
[19] Long poetic tales are usually cultivated by traditional priests and masquerades and used in the Igbo traditional religion's shrines sometimes in form of prayers.

Figure 1



The example in figure 1 above shows both the music and the poetic form of one of the Igbo Folk songs. The figure demonstrates also a perfect union between the music and the textual features. This leads to the discussion of the connections between *speech melody*,*speech rhythm* and *music making* among the Igbos. The same example giving with the word "*akwa*" can be represented musically thus:

Figure 2



As the above example shows, if the double bars are to be removed a musical phrase could just be formed repeating the word *akwa* several times with the correct lexical tones required at each instance to create a new word and meaning. From the above, it is evident also that a badly written melody, that is, a melodic line that fails to follow strictly the Igbo lexical tones or a foreign melody adapted to an Igbo text, may not pass as Igbo music, but "*igbonized tune.*"

In fact, in Igbo music the melodic line brings out more clearly the exact meaning of a word or a sentence than the usual verbal tone marks will do.

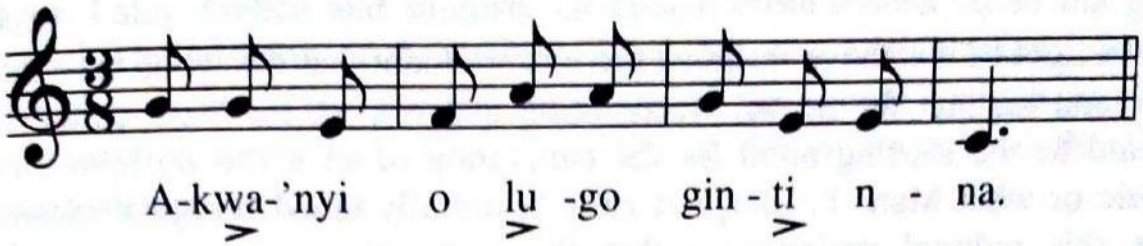
Another important feature of Igbo music regards its complex rhythmic patterns. Like in other African music in general, rhythm plays a vital role. Thus when an African is playing a musical instrument or even singing, the rhythmic tempo captures more of his or her attention. Besides, many Africans have proved to be naturally percussion (drumming for example) instruments' virtuosi. Besides, most of the African musical instruments are predominantly percussion instruments. African strings and wind instruments or blowing instruments[20] are most often constructed on *tritonic*, *tetratonic* or *pentatonic* scale basis.

What is actually fascinating about these African rhythmic instruments is not necessary the liveliness, fastness or the slowness of the tempo as the case may be in western music practice, but the complex simultaneous combination of their rhythms, with melody and dance steps or certain corporeal movements to produce what music scholars have described, using myriads of terminologies, as *poly-rhythm*, *polymeter*, *additive rhythm*, *cross rhythm*, *melorhythm*, *hot rhythm* etc. Perhaps some few examples from Igbo music may cut the long tale short. Some Igbo rhythmic features can be observed in figure 2 above. In each instance of the use of the word *akwa* the accent comes on the second syllable "*kwa*" and not the first "*a*". So, if one is to apply Western music rhythmic principles, it could then be interpreted as the case of displaced accent falling on the second beat, and is usually called syncopation. Thus observing the correct accent on certain words, an Igbo sentence involving the word ákwá (cry): "*Akwa 'nyi o-lu go gi nti Nna*"[21] can be musically represented with the tempo in triple time as follows:

[20] Samuel Ekpe Akpabot one of the Nigerian leading scholars in Nigerian traditional music, rather than the western classification of the world's musical instruments prefers to classify all African musical instruments as *string instruments*, the wind family as *blowing instruments* and the drums, gong etc as *percussion instruments*.

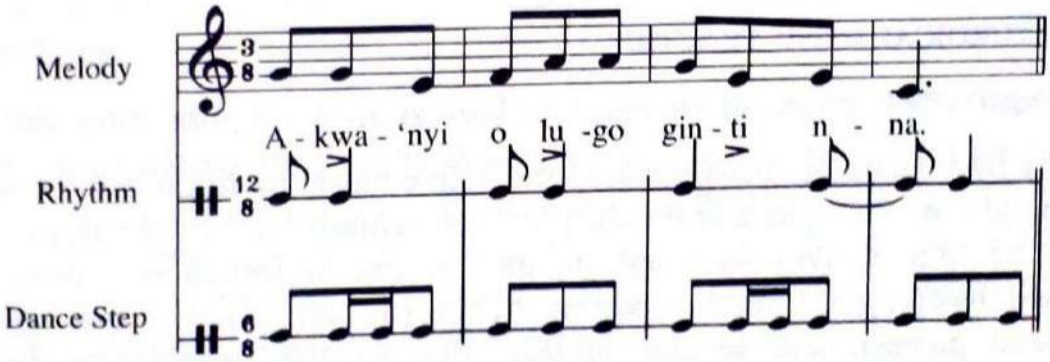
[21] Possible translation in English will be: Has our cry reached you Father?

Figure 3



If one attempts to add a rhythmic clapping or gong rhythmic accompaniment to this melody, observing the accentuated syllables, it will result in rhythmic variations causing a rhythmic syncopation as follows:

Figure 4



From the above example the stressed syllable of a word carries beneath it an accent causing a syncopation in a ternary time. A simultaneous combination of the 3/ 8 time of the melodic line with the 12/8 time of the rhythmic line and the 6/8 of the dance steps gives rise to what is called *poly-rhythm* or *polymeter* already mentioned as one of the prevalent features of African music.

Also Igbo traditional music is usually composed of short or fragmentary melodic phrases that are often repetitive with variations more on the textual level than in the melodic lines. They are mostly structured in pentatonic scale, though in a spontaneous performance melodies that exceed the normal pentatonic range are often heard especially in merrymaking events. Also in combining with the traditional instruments, the vocal part often sings at a

different pitch interval as the accompanying instruments thus producing in a traditional ensemble what looks like a bi-tonality.

In light of the above insights, there is no doubt that the Igbos have inherent love and instinct for music. Recognition and respect for these cultural traits should be the starting point for the cultivation of an authentic Igbo liturgical music or what Mark P. Bangeart calls "culturally tuned liturgical music."[22] It was this cultural springboard that the early missionaries were unable to discover. European music concepts were hastily introduced to the jettison of the native musical elements, which would have blended creatively with the new culture. As to the extent the missionaries succeeded is a matter of opinion. However, a look at the examples of early Igbo liturgical music has shown these works to be as good as *voice-of Jacob-hand-of-Esau*, so that they may not really be recognized as Igbo liturgical chants but mere *igbonized* western melodies. We have tried to let these songs speak for themselves by presenting in this work some selected examples. And we regard this earliest attempt of the missionaries as first experiment in Igbo liturgical music.

IGBO LITURGICAL MUSIC PRACTICE

First Experiment

The first encounter between the Igbo native music tradition and the western musical idioms took place in the then mission schools built by the missionaries. There the Igbo natives were able to gain access to formal education which included: teaching of Catholic doctrine, hymns (in Latin, English and vernacular translated pieces), and secular subjects like English, writing, reading and arithmetic. Physical and medical care of the people also took place within the school premises.[23] Apart from the time dedicated to teaching of music during catechism lessons, most of the songs used for pious devotions were also learnt in the schools. Thus the people began to learn, read and sing from a western perspective. This early attempt toward a formal music education of the natives

[22] The phrase 'culturally tuned Liturgical music' was borrowed from an essay by MARK P. BANGERT, "Liturgical Music, culturally tuned", in *Liturgy and Music. Lifetime learning*, edited by Robin A. Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman, Collegeville (Minn.), Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 360.

[23] See F.K. EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*, London, Frank Cass, 1972 (Cass Library of African Studies. General Studies, 119); *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985. A history published to mark the first centenary of the Catholic Church in Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province within the former lower Niger Mission*, edited by Celestine A. Obi, Onitsha, Africana FEP, 1985.

began first with the introduction of Latin hymns, later French hymns and much later English hymns.[24] The natives were to learn these hymns in their original languages, Latin, French and English. Of course these hymns could not gain access to the inner being of the natives. So a step was further taken towards translating the hymn texts into the language of the people but the original melody remained untouched. This move led to the emergence of the first "igbonized western melodies."

Variety of hymnody was the consequence of different traditions brought by the mainline reformation churches who were first to arrive in Nigeria. One of the simple hymnody style, referred to above as strophic was the highly favoured musical form by the missionaries. The repetitive character of its melody approximates the simplicity of Igbo native songs. Probably for this reason the Catholic missionaries preferred its use in the Igbo Catholic worship rather than the Roman Catholic Latin polyphonies or motets, which perhaps might not have been easy a song-tradition for the natives, unless with a sufficient western musical education. We now present the examples of these forms.

Strophic Form

In this work, strophic form is used to designate the hymn form "consisting of a number of stanzas sung to the same melodic line."[25] The stanzas are usually in rhymed form, almost of equal meter and are generally composed of four to six lines. The following hymn gives a good idea of what Igbo hymns during the missionary period resembled. The text is sung to about six different western tunes. The following is one of the hymn tunes.[26]

[24] The change from one language to another accords with the order of arrival and handover of the missionary leadership batten from one country to another. The earliest attempt to evangelise Nigeria and subsequently Igbo land was by the Spanish and Italian missionaries. This was followed later by French Holy Ghost missionaries and much later by Irish Holy Ghost Fathers.

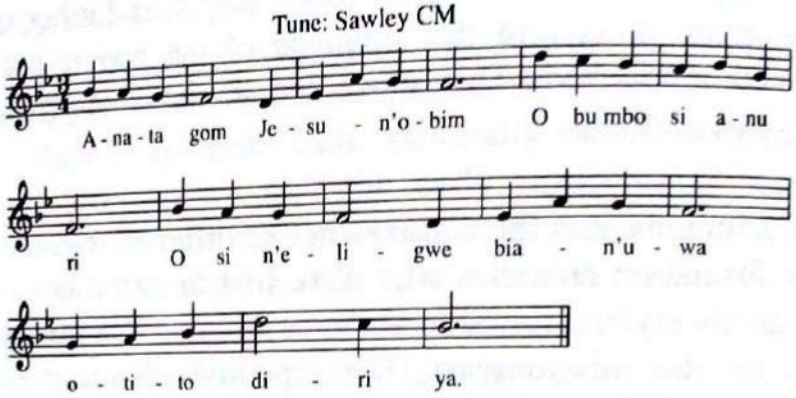
[25] CARL F. SCHALK, *Luther on Music*: *Paradigms of Praise*, St. Louis, Concordia, 1967, p. 41.

[26] *New Catholic Igbo Hymn Book*, Onitsha, Africana First Publishers, 1982, p. 93.

Figure 5

Hymn No. 1: Melody

Tune: Sawley CM



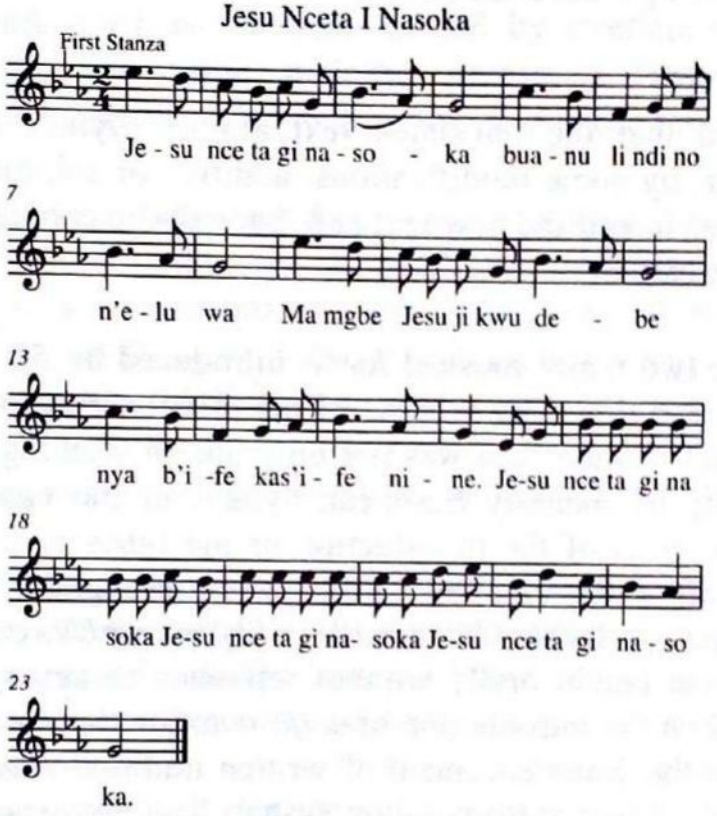
Strophic-Antiphonal Form

A *solo-call / group-response*, being the musical form prevalent among the Igbos, before and during the missionary era, attracted the interest of the missionaries. It was then introduced, in addition to the previous, as a musical form that will use the antiphonal techniques as does the natives' call and response form.

The terminology strophic-antiphonal form is used in this essay to designate the hymn form, which, in addition to having a certain number of stanzas that are sung to the same melodic line, has also a short textual refrain that is repeated after each strophe. In some cases where the literary style does not provide a refrain, the first stanza will then function as chorus-refrain after each of the strophes. The hymn *Jesu Nceta I nasoka* is an example of strophic-antiphonal form.

Figure 6

Hymn No. 2: Melody



Other strophes are sung likewise as in the first stanza followed by the refrain. Here is a juxtaposition of the original Latin text and the vernacular translation showing more things about the textual structure and the metric form of the hymn.

Hymn No. 2: Text

Latin Text	**Igbo Text**
Refrain	
Jesu, dulcis memoria	Jesu nceta I nasoka
Verses	
Jesu dulcis memoria, Dans vera cordis gaudia: Sed super mel et omnia,	Jesu nceta I nasọka, Bụ anụli ndị nọ n'uwa Ma mgbe Jesu ji kwudebe
Ejus dulcis praesentia.	Nya b'ife kasi ife nine.
Sis Jesu nostrum gaudium,	Jesu bụlu anụli anyị,

Qui es futurus praemium	I bụ ụgwọ nk'anyi n'olili,
Sit nostra in te Gloria,	Nk'akwadel' nenuigwe,
Per cuncta semper saecula. Amen.	Nim'otito ndu ebebe. Amen.[27]

One observes too that the translated text almost rhymes metrically to the original. However, by some modifications, additive or subtractive, the original melody was altered to suit the new text and the melodic coherence with the new text was not taken care of.

These are the two major musical forms introduced by the missionaries into Igbo culture and tradition. The success of the missionaries in the development of music education in Igbo land was not only due to teaching and encouraging the natives to sing by memory European hymns, or the vernacular translated version, but as a result of the introduction of the Igbos to a system of music writing called *tonic solfa notation*.[28] First hymns brought by the missionaries and later published in a Hymnody (*Akwukwo Ekpere na Ukwe ndi Katolik n'onu* Igbo) of 1932 were taught orally without reference to any system of musical notation. It was then the introduction of *solfa notation* that marked a break with oral tradition and the commencement of written tradition and music writing in Igbo local Church. T*onic solfa* notation system has disappeared in the Anglo-American music world and its concept long forgotten but nevertheless, has remained till today a common practice among many church choirs in Nigeria.

With the introduction of this system of music notation Igbo people began to cultivate a harmonic sense. Singing in parts, *Soprano*, *Alto*, *Tenor* and *Bass*, was thus encouraged and taught. In older tradition, before the advent of the missionaries, singing in two or more parts did somehow exist, but in another

[27] APOSTOLIC VICARIATE SOUTHERN NIGERIA, *Old Catholic Igbo Hymn Book*, p. 173.

[28] *Tonic* and *solfa* are the key words to understanding the *solfa notation* system. *Tonic*, which is understood as the key-note or the tonal center of a given piece, is not fixed but moveable, while *solfa* connotes using *solfa* syllables to write or to sing a piece of music. The idea of solfa notation was originated in Britain by John Curwen in the 1840s.[28] He drew his inspiration from Sarah Anna Glover's treatise on the teaching of singing. But as a system based on aural perception of relative pitch, *solfa* notation has its origin in *solmization*. *Solmisation* is a system of using the syllables to designate notes of the hexachord, and is connected with the famous Italian monk Guido d'Arezzo. It was used also in the medieval era for ear-training. Whether the *tonic Sol-fa notation* or the *'fixed' sol-fa* derived from French *solfege* and the Italian *solfeggio* all are said to be offshoots of solmisation.

form in which voices, apart from the usual singing in unison, are often doubled in parallel 4ths and 5ths. While the combination of voices in parallel 3rds and 6ths and much later in four parts singing is perhaps one of the legacies of the missionary schools. [29] Also there existed a type of polyphony or what some music scholars described as *hochetus* caused by overlapping of two voices singing repeatedly the same melodic phrase, a feature which some ethnomusicologists have described as common to African music.[30]

When the Igbo ancestors sang their songs or played their music no person stood before the singers, dancers or traditional orchestra to conduct them; neither were there a metronome nor any other type of rhythmic device to regulate the tempo or to control the music performances of the traditional minstrels.[31] Hence, no mention was made of the presence of choir or choirmaster elements in the traditional society. So it was probably singing in parts that gave rise to the need for the office or role of a choirmaster.

As a result of the replacement of traditional music idioms with the western musical categories, some questions and problems arose. First, original texts and melodies when compared with the translated ones reveal some textual variants and poor linguistic arrangements; second, tonic solfa notation has always presented innumerable limitations such as inexactness in singing a melody that involves a mixture of difficult intervals from one major to minor scale; third, the two hymnic forms used by the missionaries are unsuitable as model for authentic Igbo liturgical music, because of their 'fixed' forms that fail to give room for melodic variations corresponding to the variations in the lexical tones; lastly, Igbo liturgical music in the missionary tradition lacked a good music-text relationship. A typical example is found in bar 8 of the first stanza of the hymn illustrated in figure 5. The different speech tones that compose the entire text were ignored in the melodic structure. As a result, the meaning encoded in the words changed to acquire different signification. Here are the examples of the melodic lines from the missionary traditions:

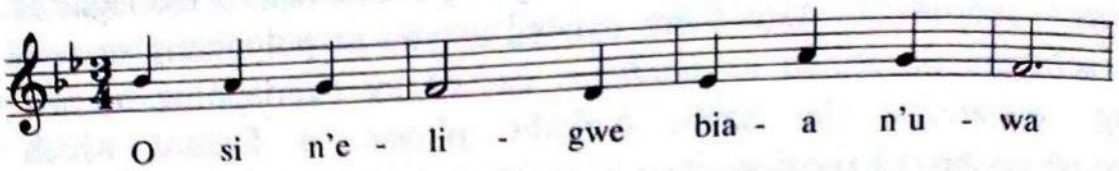
---

[29] See ECHEZONA, *Igbo Music*, p. 77.

[30] See ALAN P. MERRIAM, *The Anthropology of Music*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 151.

[31] "A group of choir standing motionless in lines with the choir master standing in front, and making use of his right hand to give direction to the movement of the song is foreign to Igbo Tradition. Such songs organized in choir belong to formal schools, the Igbos refer to all such school and Church songs as *ukwe*, a word of doubtful origin." FRANCIS OKO UGWUEZE, *Igbo proverbs and biblical proverbs: Comparative & thematic research*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Roma, Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 1976, p. 34.

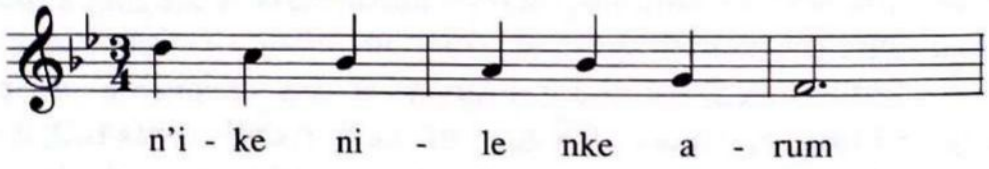
Figure 7



The word *eluigwe*, written as *eligwe* because of vowel elision, means heaven. When written separately as *elu igwe*, it has two different meanings thus: élú ígwē (up in the sky' or Heaven) and élú ígwè (on the top of an iron). The Igbo sentence *O si n'éligwē bịa n'ụwa* would originally mean *He (Jesus) came down from heaven* but the melodic pattern altered the intonation of the word *n'éligwē to n'éligwè* thus fostering the meaning *He came down from the top of an iron.* Since the rest of the stanzas throughout the hymn are sung to the same melody a lot of disagreements between text and music abounds.

In the second line of the third stanza, the phrase *n'íké nine nke àrú m* signifies *with all my bodily strength*, but as sung in the following melodic line:

Figure 8



the text acquires a pejorative sense as shown in this meaningless phrase, "*with all the buttocks of my abomination*". In Igbo language the word *íké* signifies *strength or power*, while *ìkè* means buttocks. To represent musically well the two contrasting usages the choice of melodic intervals has to depend inevitably on the speech tones. Hence, the first word composed of two high tones must be represented by one repeated musical note or tone, for example, *Sol - Sol*, or *La - La* and the second being composed of high and low has to be denoted by melodic interval of minor or major 2nd, 3rd, 4th etc. for example, *Fa - Mi* or *Mi - Re* as illustrated in the sample hymn shown above.

If the melody were originally conceived along with the text, i.e., contrary to the practice of adapting a text to a pre-existent melody, such incoherence and textual incomprehensibility wouldn't exist. To re-write the above melodic phrases in accordance with the tonal pattern of Igbo language, here are possible resultant melodic phrases.

Figure 7a

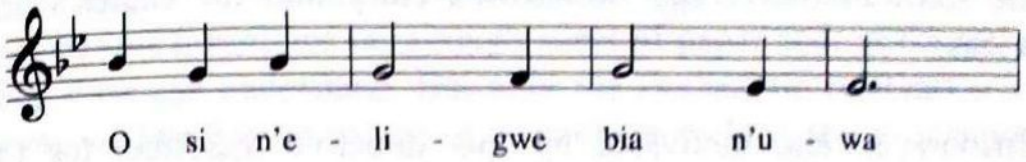
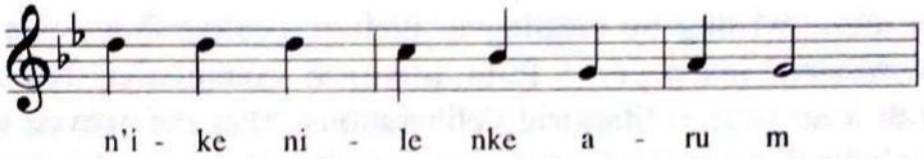


Figure 8a



In the second case, the melodic structure restores the proper contextual understanding of the words *iké*, *strength* and *àrú*, *body*. In both cases the melody is structured according to the different combinations of the rising and falling of the three tones of Igbo language, high, intermediate and low, thereby restricting the text from having a different meaning. The effort to overcome these problems is the bedrock of indigenous initiatives in liturgical music writing.

Igbo Liturgical Chants: Indigenous Initiatives

The declaration of the Second Vatican Council of the church's desire to admit into her Liturgy the indigenous compositions of other non-western cultures was the reason for an unprecedented boom in indigenous liturgical music writing in Igboland. In the wake of the revision of the liturgical books after Vatican II, the new Igbo musical repertoires started budding. Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, the Igbo local church has already started ripping an ever-increasing harvest of liturgical songs. Priests, religious men and women, seminarians and lay faithful all began to test their talents in music composition. Thus Compositional energy was no longer devoted to translation and adaptation of ecclesiastical western songs and melodies, but to writing in native air and rhythm songs they could really appreciate and recognize as a product of their own culture. These songs were arranged to synchronize with the people's native way of speaking, singing and dancing. But for the most part they were written in the common language, spoken, understood and used for other transactions among the people. In fact, they were songs born out of a zeal for musical inculturation and a desire to translate into practice the resolution of

the Council that "anything in people's way of life, which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error"[32] and which harmonizes with the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy be allowed entry into the church's liturgical celebrations.

Encouraged and motivated by this directive therefore, the Catholic Bishops of Igboland began to emphasize the need, in our worship, for songs written in Igbo language and by indigenous composers who, surely, are better at home with the semantics and phonetics of the language than a foreigner. Recommending such songs as an authentic means of our religious self-expression, the Bishops took a step forward to immortalize their interest in indigenous music writing by creating in their respective dioceses a liturgical music commission, independent from liturgical commission but always in alliance with it on general liturgical deliberations. That the natives, today, can write songs which reflect their own native music style has developed into a religious-cultural pride which has further metamorphosed into varied forms of liturgical groups, liturgical choir associations, liturgical music competition (both set-piece competitions and composition competitions) and festivals of liturgical music and culture. Besides, different types of liturgical songs have grown out of these indigenous initiatives.

Types, Texts and Forms

Igbo indigenous liturgical songs are still undergoing a continuous process of development and transformation so that classification into types may not be an easy task. Not until the early 80s, the composition of many Igbo songs for liturgy took the form of oral improvisation. And, because they keep evolving without being written down made studies, analyses, descriptions of their musical systems and their classification into types and forms very difficult. Even, when information exists about them, especially the ones arranged or 'composed' in the early 70s, it rests only with the originators who are often amateur choirmaster-composers. Within few minutes, before choir practice or

[32] Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [4 December 1963], § 37: "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."

even right at the venue of choir rehearsals, this type of composers has already transformed a popular native melody well-known by heart into a new worship song. Sometimes, the organized ones among them manage to scribble down their spontaneous inventions on a rough sheet of paper and, of course, using a code they alone can understand. But after the Eucharistic celebration some of these works are lost. Hence, as one of the indigenous Igbo church composers, C. C. Iwobi also observed, to collect these early compositions, with all the melodic variations that it entails, and classify them continues to be elusive.[33]

Whereby the songs are written by a professional Igbo musician, that is, in the later years, it is surprisingly published in the unorthodox tonic sol-fa notation and less frequently in Staff notation. Thus to facilitate easy study, analysis and classification of these songs, the examples are transcribed into staff notation and are drawn only from those liturgical repertories that are true reflection of Igbo cultural idioms, especially as regards the Igbo language peculiarities. The criteria for our selections include also songs that were available in print during this research.[34] To guide this task of classification are the three words making up the subtitle above: types, texts, forms.

Types

Going by the definitions of liturgical music and religious music given by liturgists and music scholars,[35] Catholic Igbo indigenous songs for worship can

---

[33] "There is a dearth of publications of hymns written in a simple style, in the Igbo idiom and in accordance with the rules of Igbo tonal inflection. The majority of the organisations associated with the propagation of indigenous liturgical music would agree that this dearth is the most serious handicap retarding the growth of liturgical music in Igboland....Not much has been done to collect, edit and publish these hymns. Rather, each Parish serves as an enclave for its own repertoire consisting of a small fraction of the thousands of hymns which could easily be available throughout Igboland, were someone to take the pains to publish them. A phenomenon which is retrogressive and should be resisted is that whereby choirs sing hymns which are unacceptable liturgically, culturally and musically. Such hymns are usually written on scraps of paper, in unorthodox sol-fa comprehensible only to the choirmaster or the composer concerned." See C.C. IWOBI, "Foreword" [13th October 1989], in D.E. IPERE, *Ukwe Advent Na Christmas*, Enugu, Our Saviour Press, 1989.

[34] The songs referred to are those written by some Igbo professional church composers from the 80s till date.

[35] Religious music (*musica religiosa*), in Joseph Gelineau's taxonomy of definitions, denotes: "all music which expresses religious sentiment but which is not designated for use in the liturgy." While Liturgical music (*musica liturgica*) is defined as that "which the Church admits, both in Law and in practice, to the celebration of her official and

even right at the venue of choir rehearsals, this type of composers has already transformed a popular native melody well-known by heart into a new worship song. Sometimes, the organized ones among them manage to scribble down their spontaneous inventions on a rough sheet of paper and, of course, using a code they alone can understand. But after the Eucharistic celebration some of these works are lost. Hence, as one of the indigenous Igbo church composers, C. C. Iwobi also observed, to collect these early compositions, with all the melodic variations that it entails, and classify them continues to be elusive.[33]

Whereby the songs are written by a professional Igbo musician, that is, in the later years, it is surprisingly published in the unorthodox tonic sol-fa notation and less frequently in Staff notation. Thus to facilitate easy study, analysis and classification of these songs, the examples are transcribed into staff notation and are drawn only from those liturgical repertories that are true reflection of Igbo cultural idioms, especially as regards the Igbo language peculiarities. The criteria for our selections include also songs that were available in print during this research.[34] To guide this task of classification are the three words making up the subtitle above: types, texts, forms.

Types

Going by the definitions of liturgical music and religious music given by liturgists and music scholars,[35] Catholic Igbo indigenous songs for worship can

---

[33] "There is a dearth of publications of hymns written in a simple style, in the Igbo idiom and in accordance with the rules of Igbo tonal inflection. The majority of the organisations associated with the propagation of indigenous liturgical music would agree that this dearth is the most serious handicap retarding the growth of liturgical music in Igboland....Not much has been done to collect, edit and publish these hymns. Rather, each Parish serves as an enclave for its own repertoire consisting of a small fraction of the thousands of hymns which could easily be available throughout Igboland, were someone to take the pains to publish them. A phenomenon which is retrogressive and should be resisted is that whereby choirs sing hymns which are unacceptable liturgically, culturally and musically. Such hymns are usually written on scraps of paper, in unorthodox sol-fa comprehensible only to the choirmaster or the composer concerned." See C.C. IWOBI, "Foreword" [13th October 1989], in D.E. IPERE, *Ukwe Advent Na Christmas*, Enugu, Our Saviour Press, 1989.

[34] The songs referred to are those written by some Igbo professional church composers from the 80s till date.

[35] Religious music (*musica religiosa*), in Joseph Gelineau's taxonomy of definitions, denotes: "all music which expresses religious sentiment but which is not designated for use in the liturgy." While Liturgical music (*musica liturgica*) is defined as that "which the Church admits, both in Law and in practice, to the celebration of her official and

be classified into two major types: liturgical music and liturgico-religious music. In popular usage, however, both types frequently overlap. In many Igbo parishes, for example, most Christians find no big difference between the two. To the liturgico-religious music type belong songs that can be regarded as religious songs but are also suitable for use in the liturgy and have already been integrated into Igbo liturgical celebrations. This includes catchy liturgical songs and choruses. Igbo liturgical songs denote those songs that are written in accordance with the norms of Igbo language, and are accessible through a hymnal or other collections of such kind, by which the faithful render praise to God in the liturgical celebrations. Such compositions include: "Igbo Masses", processional songs (both for entrance rite and for offertory), ritual songs, psalmodic and alleluiatic chants, communion songs and recessional songs.

"*Igbo Masses*" are usually music setting of the text of the Ordinary of the Mass (*Ordinarium Missae*). Majority of these Masses are written in "congregational style" reflecting the community-minded African mentality that is evident in *call-response* form. In some of these masses the musical form most often does not follow the textual form. They are usually sung by the entire assembly. The choir leads in the singing with some *call* verses while the rest of the assembly *responds* to the *call*. These Masses composed in the above style have survived till today in Igbo liturgical celebration, for example: *Missa Ihụnanya* (Mass of Love) by Fr. Cyril Ezenduka, *Missa Inye Ekele* (Mass of Thanksgiving) by Fr. Cyril Ezenduka, *Missa Ncheta* (Mass of Remembrance) by Peace Val Ihim, [36] *Missa Anuri* (Mass of Joy) by Dorathy Ipere[37] etc. Because these Masses are easy to commit to memory, within a short time people have learnt them by heart and could sing them without recourse again to hymnals. On the other hand, some Masses (though in the few) are written in "cathedral style", that is, intended to be sung, exclusively, by large choirs of well trained-choristers and soloists, provoking similar experience as one would have in a concert performance in Europe of a baroque Mass like Bach's B-

public worship." Cf. JOSEPH GELINEAU, *Voices and instruments in Christian worship. Principles, laws, applications*, Collegeville (Minn.), Liturgical Press, 1964, pp. 59-65. See also Edward Foley's definition of liturgical music; music "which weds itself to the liturgical action, serves to reveal the full significance of the rites and, in turn, derives its full meaning from the liturgy." Cf. EDWARD FOLEY, "Liturgical Music", in *A New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, edited by Peter E. Fink, Collegeville (Minn.), Liturgical Press, 1990, p. 855.

[36] *New Catholic Igbo Hymn Book*, Onitsha, Africana First Publishers, 1982 (revised 2005), pp. 228-243, 251-261, 261-268.

[37] D.E. IPERE, *Ukwe Advent na Christmas*, Enugu, Our Saviour Press, 1989, pp. 1-14.

minor Mass.[38] In compositions such as these, no doubt, the melodic contour is maintained in the idiom of Igbo music. Though in some, it is not always respected.

Igbo Processional Songs

The Mass of Roman Rite has four processions: the entrance procession, the gospel procession, the offertory procession and the communion procession.[39] In the same Roman Rite Mass celebrated in Igbo land, only two of these four processions are musically emphasized – the entrance procession which reaches its climax in the gospel proclamation and the presentation of the gifts procession. The gospel procession is musically orchestrated but not as often as in the case of the entrance and offertory procession. The strong musical emphasis placed on these two processions derives from the nature of the songs that accompany them. The Igbo entrance or offertory processional songs have particular characteristics. They are songs that easily spur the entire assembly to participation in the singing and can also elicit some kind of corporeal movements in sintonia with the rhythm of the song and of the traditional instruments' accompaniment.

Therefore, not all the Igbo entrance songs in the liturgical celebration are regarded as processional. Entrance songs in the daily morning masses or in the Sunday Masses without the entrance procession, lack the processional feature described above. Big feast days and solemnities usually call for a long procession of the ministers of the Mass accompanied often by different families or group of persons who came to Mass for one special intention or the other, particularly for the so-called "thanksgiving Mass" or Mass for a reception of a woman after childbirth and for presentation of a new born baby in the church. Here is a typical example of Igbo processional song showing the melody and a rhythm that is characterised by the accentuated notes resulting in syncopation.

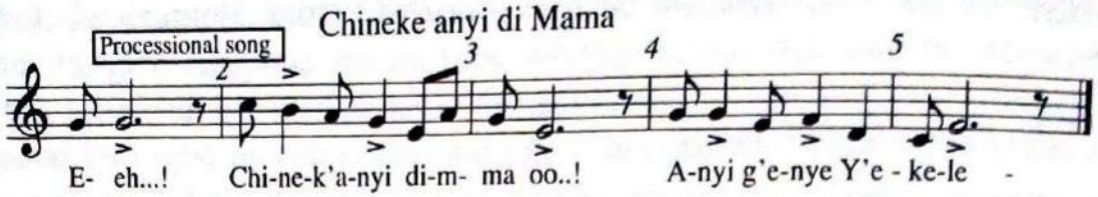
[38] We excuse this extreme comparison, but it is the way we feel about such Masses in Africa.

[39] Cf. LUCIEN DEISS, *Visions of Liturgy and Music for a New Century*, Collegeville (Mass.), Liturgical Press, 1996, p. 118.

Figure 9

by Fr. C. Ezenduka

Chineke anyi di Mama



Translation of the Text

Yes indeed! Our God is good!
We have to give praise to Him

This song is always accompanied by a continuous snappy syncopated hand clapping[40] or by a special type of traditional drum ensemble (called in Igbo *Akwunechienyi, or igba eze*). In view of its textual content, it can serve dual-purpose. It is appropriate for entrance procession as well as for the presentation of the gifts procession. If the voices and the instruments synchronize well during the performance, the liturgical scenario is simply that of a perfect announcement of the movement of the entire worshipping community (represented by their priest, minor ministers and few members of the assembly) as one people and one race united in heart and voices, into a state of celebration, into the celebration itself.[41]

In his exploration of the interplay of music and ritual, Edward Foley describes ritual music in general terms as music wed to human rituals. According to Foley, the numerous ways in which music unites itself to various human rituals can be classified into four categories. The first type of ritual music is "music alone" devoid of lyrics. A second type is a "music wed to ritual

[40] See the subsequent section on analysis of forms and music for the notation of the snappy hand clapping.

[41] The degree of the community's participation engendered by Igbo processional songs, like the above example, reminds one of the ministerial function of entrance song as described by Lucien Deiss: "perhaps it is the entrance song that most immediately illustrates the unifying power of song, which is one of the ministerial functions of song. The faithful coming to church are a crowd, sometimes even an unruly one. In the church, they are juxtaposed units. Singing together, they express their unity for the first time." Cf. DEISS, *Visions of Liturgy and Music*, p. 122.

action."[42] A third type is a "music united to a text" without any accompanying ritual action. A fourth type is a "music wed to a Text, accompanying an action."[43] This last category seems to summarize the other three and is well-known in Igbo liturgical celebrations.

Igbo ritual songs consist of liturgical songs and many borrowed religious repertories (i.e. liturgico-religious songs) adapted today to various liturgical exigencies in Igboland. These songs include: *Nyelum Aka, O Maria ka m wee debe ihe m kwere na nkwa* (Help me, O Mary, that I may keep to my baptismal promises.), *Were mmiri n'obara saa m Eze di nso* (sprinkle me with water [or hyssop] and "blood", Holy God) *Nwanyi biara uka nwa* (she is blessed, the woman who comes for churching) or *Dubatanu nwa chineke n'ime ulo nso chukwu* (bring the child of God into the temple of God) etc.[44] Except *Were mmiri n'obara saa m* that was borrowed from religious song repertories for use in the liturgy, the rest were specifically written for liturgical purposes. These songs are never sung without an accompanying ritual action. Whenever *Nyelu m Aka* is heard in an Igbo liturgical gathering, it means a priest is either administering the sacrament of baptism or sprinkling holy water on the faithful at Mass as a memorial of their individual baptism or as a simple penitential rite for forgiveness of sins. Likewise the songs *Dubatanu Nwa Chineke* and *Nwanyi biara uka nwa* are rendered exactly at the moment the entrance procession of the ministers, the parents and the new born baby reaches the central door leading into the church.

Texts

The text, in the words of Lucien Deiss is, along with the music, "the path that leads the faithful into the heart of the liturgical celebration."[45] The song text, together with other liturgical texts, in a Mass articulates in clear terms the mystery being celebrated. Through participation in the singing the worshipping assembly has repeated chances of memorising and reflecting on the message-content of the day's celebration. Thus, song texts, as an embodiment of people's poetic, religious and cultural expressions and part of sound communication, are

[42] EDWARD FOLEY, *Ritual Music. Studies in Liturgical Musicology*, Beltsville (Mar.), The Pastoral Press, 1995, p. 114.
[43] FOLEY, *Ritual Music*, p. 115.
[44] Unfortunately these songs, except the last one which was composed by the author, Basil Okeke in 1986, like is said of most of the early Igbo liturgical repertories, have no indication of who the composers were.
[45] DEISS, *Visions of Liturgy and Music*, p. 124.

very significant in Christian ritual.[46] In Igbo song-texts the faith of the Igbos, the image they have of God, of man and of the world around them are revealed. First, let us search for the sources from where Igbo church composers draw their texts as it will be helpful to the evaluation exercise.

Textual Sources and Analysis

The first liturgical song-text to be examined is the song *Chukwu bu muo* (God is a Spirit). This song is a short biblical passage evolving from Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "*God is a Spirit. And they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth*" (Jn.4:24). Thus, the source is biblical. Many Igbo composers have used this short biblical passage for their composition,[47] but we present here only the version by Laz Ekwueme and the one by David Okongwu set in an *anthem form*[48] and in a simple counterpoint technique are selected for our illustration purposes.

The Bible has been translated into Igbo language. Thus from Igbo *Baibụlụ Nsọ* the Igbo composers draw their material for music composition without having to go through the crucible of translation again. In the new Igbo bible the unique name used to translate God is *Chineke* (God the Creator) not *Chukwu*[49] (God in the sense of absolute Being). Liturgical songs written before the Catholic translation of the bible into Igbo language used varied names for God, especially Anglican composers. In the two versions of God is a Spirit cited above, Laz Ekwueme used the word *Chineke*, while David Okongwu preferred

---

[46]Cf. MARY E. MCGANN, *Exploring Music as Worship and Theology. Research in Liturgical Practice*, Collegeville (Minn.), Liturgical Press, 2002, p. 26.

[47] This is a textual preference or likeness which is not unconnected with Igbo religious world-view and mentality. The Igbos, before their acceptance of Christian religion and even to date among Igbo traditional religionists, believed much that the world is inhabited by invisible beings such as good spirits, and evil spirits, with *Chukwu* (God in the sense of absolute being) as the highest of all spirits. So the Igbo world is a world of spirits. It is not then surprising that the Christian biblical theology of God as Spirit was not difficult for the Igbo understanding.

[48] A music form known as anthem is a musical form cultivated among Anglicans, just as catholics of 16th, 17th centuries would talk of their latin motets. The composers mentioned above are all Anglicans but write music for both Anglican and Catholic use.

[49] The word *Chukwu* was a name used for the pagan god of *Arochukwu* – a people believed to be one of the legendary origins of the Igbo race. The word was assimilated into Christian worship by the missionaries and used for Christian God. But today it has been dropped in the new Igbo bible perhaps because of the pejorative meaning the "*Chukwu*" of the *Arochukwu* people used to have in the past. However, Christians are still making use of both names to designate the Christian God.

Chukwu. This same problem is encountered also in many catholic compositions, for example, in most of the songs still to be analyzed here, the two names are used interchangeably. But fortunately the arrival of the new Igbo Catholic *Baibụlụ* has started standardizing musical textual preferences and usages.

The next important source for Igbo liturgical music is the liturgical texts. It is clear that a greater part of liturgical texts is taken from the bible, think of the readings, the responsorial psalms, biblical allusions in the prayers etc. Except in a polyphonic setting, where a portion of the text may be repeated to suit the melodic lines of the voices, the "Igbo Masses" which we have already discussed are liturgical texts that are not tempered with, either by way of addition or subtraction of a word. Psalms as they appear in the liturgical context, such as responsorial psalms, entrance antiphons - which more often are extracts from psalmody, the Alleluia and its verse before the Gospel and communion antiphon constitute the liturgical sources for Igbo music compositions. Mrs Dorathy Ipere's collection of songs titled *Ukwe Advent na Christmas* previously quoted, offers a good example of song-texts drawn from the liturgical well. All the songs in this hymn book, except the Ordinary of the Mass, are either a responsorial psalm, an Alleluia chant before the Gospel or an antiphon after communion.

We note also that texts of some Igbo liturgical songs are paraphrases, or adaptations of biblical texts, liturgical texts and previously existing song texts. Fundamental to the origin of a text is its nature. Some texts are in forms of acclamations, proclamations, psalms, hymn or prayers. Usually how the composer intends to set the music for a given text bears much on the textual form. At times, to suit a composer's preference for a certain musical form, biblical or liturgical texts are cut from its original context and joined to another to form a new song-text. Other times the alteration may be by way of adding new word or phrases to make up the desired textual form. Thus is borne a new Igbo song-text, which we refer here as biblical paraphrase or adaptation. Some of the Igbo song-texts that originated as a result of this practice are often homiletic, penitential or praise-like in character concluding usually with a doxology as was customary in the traditional prayers of the early Christians.

The song *Tobe Chukwu Nna* (Praise God, the Father)[50] is a typical example of a biblical paraphrase and allusions. The phrases such as: praise God

[50] The original composer of the song *Tobe Chukwu Nna* is unknown. The name of Bigard Team of composers appears only with regard to the arrangement and harmony of the song. Perhaps it is one of those popular Igbo songs that the identity of the composer got forgotten after a long period. Cf. *New Catholic Igbo Hymn Book*, p. 69.

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; By sacrificial death of Christ we are set free (Eph.1:7; Heb.9:23; 10:9-14) are all biblical themes. In general the song is a call to repentance and subsequently to participation in the sacrifice of the Mass. It begins with a verse-refrain, which is a paraphrase of the doxology and concludes with a verse that is a doxology proper. The example below shows only the refrain and some verses:

Igbo	**English**
(Refrain)	
Tobe Chukwu Nna na Nwa na Muo Nso n'uwatuwa.	Praise God, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit world without end.
(Verses)	
Ka anyi bia soro Kristi, runyere Chukwu aja Mass	One with Christ may we offer to God the sacrifice of the Mass.
Otito diri Chukwu Nna, Chukwu Nwa, Chukwu Muo Nso.	Glory be to the Father, to the son, to the Holy Spirit.

Spontaneous musical interjections, hearing and proclaiming the word of God and intercessions during prayer meetings constitute another textual source for Igbo indigenous worship music writing. Song-texts born out of this context often develop into liturgical songs but mostly into religious songs. Though, often, these religious songs are also used in the liturgical celebrations, especially for offertory processions as liturgico-religious songs. Sometimes the songs-texts have their origin in the private devotions, personal prayers, and spiritual meditations of individuals and particularly in the charismatic prayer meetings. In this type of gathering for praise worship, fixed prayer or song texts have no place. The texts are normally as simple[51] as any spontaneous utterance would be and the composers'[52] personal experience of God and the depth of their knowledge of the Catholic doctrine, faith and morals bear as much on its content. Once the texts are free from theological errors and conform to the spirit

[51] Note that simplicity here implies that the language of the text is that of common usage.

[52] Composer of these songs are usually collective, that means, the act of music-making involves the entire community at prayer or worship.

of the liturgy, they are accepted for use in Igbo liturgical celebrations and are prohibited if otherwise.

Translated sources also form one of the biggest and earliest fonts from which many Igbo composers draw their texts. Some of the traditional Catholic prayers and Latin hymns were translated into Igbo and produced in pamphlets during the missionary era to help facilitate private devotions. Afterwards these translated texts became a big source for liturgical music composition competition in some Igbo dioceses such as Enugu diocese. *Obi Nso Maria* is an Igbo translation of a Marian text and prayer, *O Immaculate and amiable heart of Mary*, likely connected with the Marian apparition at Lourdes. In the later missionary days in Igboland the text was sung into such a famous tune known among Marian devotees as *Ave Maria* of Lourdes, but because of the music-language issue the melody was dropped in favour of a culturally-tuned *Ave Maria*, in which Igbo words will have their proper intonation and meaning.[53]

In addition to all these sources, biblical, liturgical, paraphrases and adaptations, translations of previously existing song texts and spontaneous collective utterances at prayer meetings, Igbo indigenous liturgical song writers compose also their own texts, which most often are purely of catechetico-moral character condemning the evils of our society or exhorting the people to virtuous acts. It is the indigenous character of the melody and rhythm given to these texts drawn from the above sources that distinguishes them from the old missionary hymnal-type.

Textual analysis of some "culturally-tuned" Igbo liturgical songs reveals that Igbo song-texts are carefully ordered to be able to communicate meaning to the worshipping assembly. Simple vernacular language and texts with familiar themes are usual characteristics of Igbo song-texts. The simplicity and directness of the language can be gleaned from the limited use made of

[53] During the occasion of the first indigenous vocal music composition competition in Enugu,[53] *Obi Nso Maria* musically arranged by a couple, C.C and L Iwobi, emerged as one among the best indigenous pieces. Other valuable indigenous works emerging from the same competition were: *Macula non est in te*, a Marian hymn musically arranged by Dorathy Ipere, and *Anyi ga-eje n'iru Jesu* by David Okongwu. The songs have two textual sources. First, *Macula non est in te*, came from translated sources. *Macula non est in te* is an abbreviation of the original Latin text *Tota pulchra es Maria. Macula originalis non est in te* but later translated into Igbo, retaining its title in Latin. For *Macula non est in te*, see IPERE, *Ukwe Advent na Christmas*, p. 136, for details of the complete Igbo translated text. Note also that the Latin words, in the title of the song, were written and pronounced as in Igbo language, which in some measure is very close to Latin in pronunciation but not in meaning anyway.

adjectives. Many adjectives would of course overload a text, rendering it more difficult and its meaning less accessible to the comprehension of an ordinary person. Therefore, Igbo indigenous composers prefer to re-write a heavily loaded text into a simple textual form that is catchy. Simple sentences consist of more verbs and nouns than adjectives. In the first stanza of the hymn *Anyi ga-eje n'iru Jesu*, for instance, there are 23 words and the translated English version has 22. Out of these 23 or 22 words, as the case may be, only one adjective was used and that is (*ifunanya*) "*na-enwero ube*," "infinite" (love). The rest are nouns, verbs and prepositions. The same is the case in the second stanza, in which "*ka*," "greater" is used as a comparative adjective. This simple word-order in which few adjectives are used in a text, and nouns, verbs, prepositions etc., predominate, facilitates easy and immediate dialogue between the listener or singer and the text.

Musical Forms and Analysis

Igbo composers write new tunes to old Igbo liturgical and prayer texts, though with proper revision and restructuring of the texts to enhance the grammatical aspects and to foster textual comprehensibility. Sometimes they write new texts using a predominant music pattern or form called recitative and chorus. These questions already present the idea of form in Igbo liturgical music. First, writing new melodies to old words gave rise among the Igbo church composers a musical form known as "*Igbo hymns*". The effort to compose new and original lyrics created avenues for exploration of some Igbo traditional music idioms, such as *solo-chorus* and *singing-speaking* practices, in writing songs for worship. The analysis, in individual song, of these two features that are often common in African music, will help shed more light on the form distinctions in Igbo liturgical music.

Musical form, according to Jan Michael Joncas, can be defined as "the structural intelligibility of a particular musical event unfolding over time."[54] Musical forms are further classifiable into two types: free or fixed. Free musical forms are not readily accessible to musical analysis because of irregular patterns of repetition and contrast of musical motifs, rhythm, harmony etc which they present. In fixed forms, such as one finds in western musical idioms, repetition and contrast are the basis for structural distinction of forms such as binary, ternary, or mixed. Of these three fixed musical forms found in western music only the first type, binary form (for example, Igbo call-response patterns), is predominantly found in Igbo liturgical songs.

[54] JAN MICHAEL JONKAS, "Liturgical Music as Music. The Contribution of the Human Sciences", in *Liturgy and Music. Lifetime learning*, pp. 220-230.

Strophic form with verse-variation

The most common and simple form of Igbo worship music is known as "Igbo hymnic free-form." Now the word hymnic does not have to be confused with the western musical form "consisting of a number of stanzas sung to the same melodic line."[55] The Igbo free-form hymnody excludes the idea of a *strophic hymn form*, a "self-enclosed form" with balanced metrical text such as one finds in the translated Latin hymnody brought to Igboland by the Irish missionaries or in the liturgical hymnals typical of the churches of the Reformation.

However, Igbo hymnody basically manifests a binary form structure, which, though strophic, exhibits a great deal of melodic variations. We identify this musical form as *Strophic form with Verse- variations*. Strophic form with variations in the verses is the most widely diffused musical form in Igboland. It is the offshoot of the responsorial or antiphonal form. It differs from western hymnody because of the melodic variations in the verses.

Thus, based on certain techniques in the arrangement of the refrain and the verses, Igbo hymnody can be subdivided into two types. The first group is characterized by verses that repeat at the end a melodic fragment of the refrain before taking up the refrain again. To this group belong *Obi nso Maria* (*Immaculate Heart of Mary*) by C.C. and L. Iwobi, *Macula non est in te* by Dorathy Ipere and *Otito diri Nna* arranged by Bigard team of composers. The text and music of *Obi Nso Maria* is a good illustration of the first group of the *strophic form with verse-variations*. The original text has a structural form different from the musical form. Here are the original melodic form and the re-written form by the composer. Only one verse and refrain are shown

Verse 1: Obi nso Maria kach'ihunanya
anyi na ndi Muo Oma n'ekele gi n'ekwe,

Refrain: Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

Melodic Form given to the text by the composer

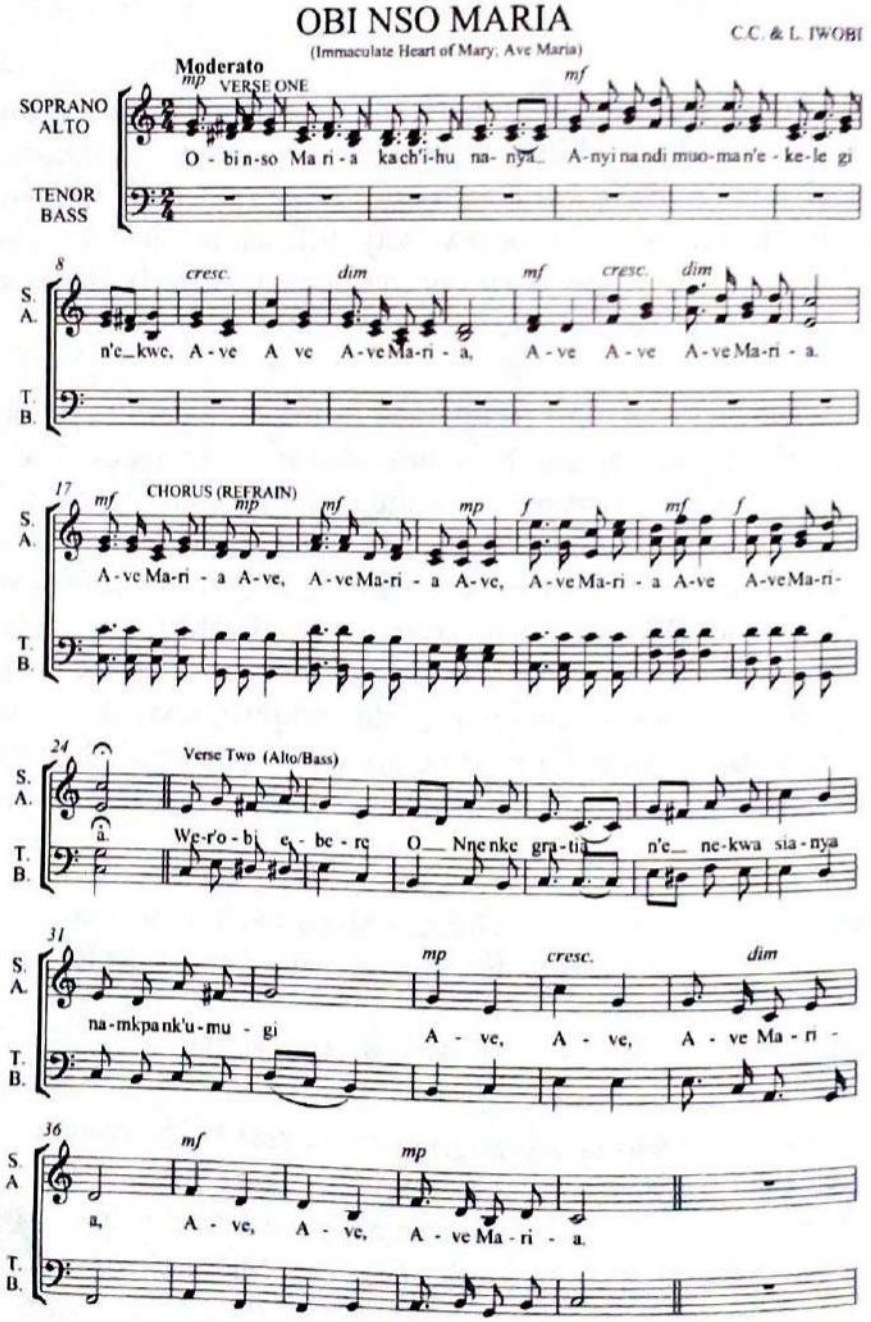
Verse 1: Obi nso Maria kach'ihunanya,
anyi na ndi muo oma n'ekene gi n'ekwe,
Ave, Ave, Ave Maria, Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

[55] FRANK C. QUINN, "Liturgical Music as Corporate Song 2. Problems of Hymnody in Catholic Worship", in *Liturgy and Music. Lifetime learning*, p. 309.

Refrain: Ave Maria Ave, Ave Maria, Ave,
Ave Maria, Ave, Ave Maria.

Figure 10

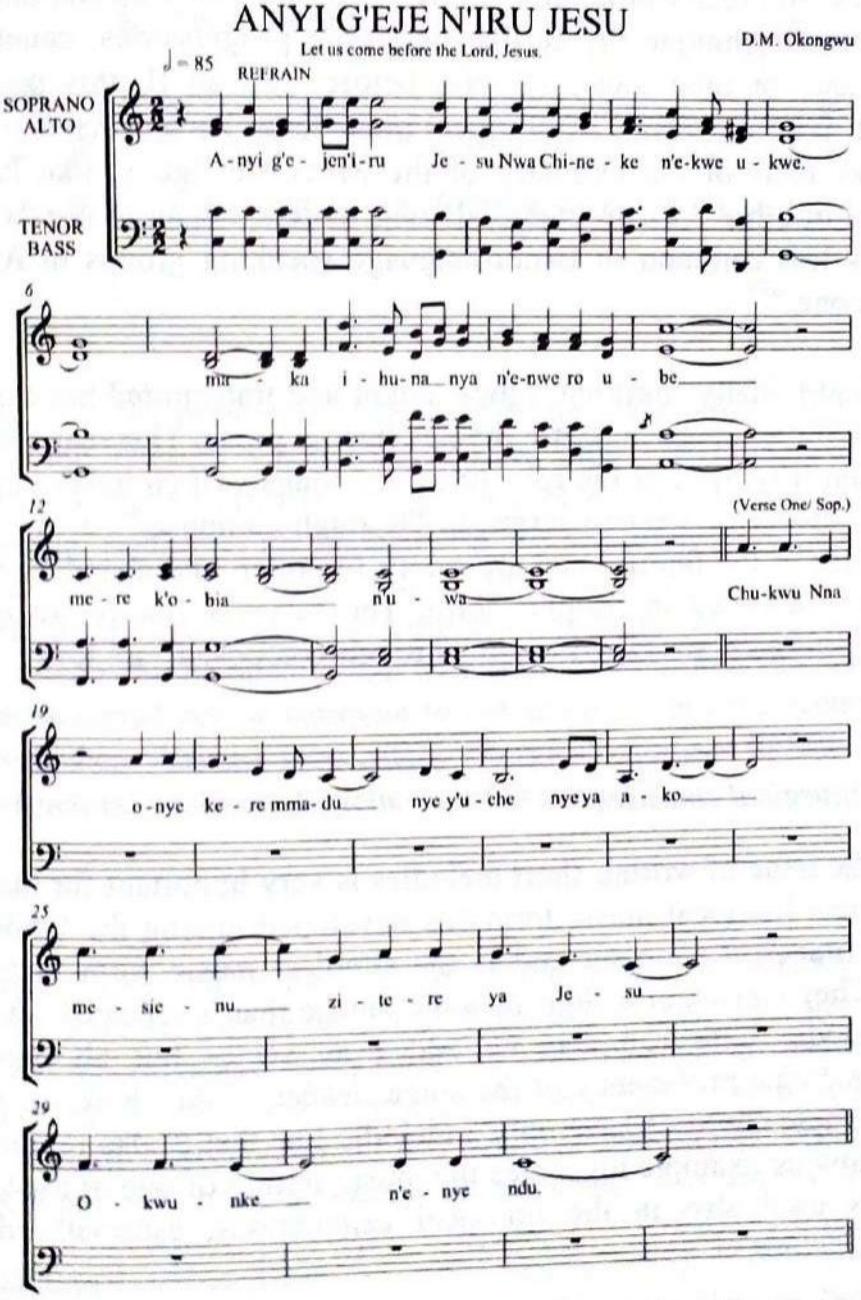
As the musical arrangement above illustrates, the original textual refrain now makes up in the re-written form the last of each verse.[56] Besides, the refrain is restructured and repeated.



[56] Note that the song has five verses in all but for the purpose of illustration of what a strophic form with verse variations resembles only two are transcribed.

The second type of *strophic form with verse-variations* is represented by the song *Anyi g'eje n'iru Jesu*[57]. In this form-type, the verses, though vary melodically; do not repeat any melodic fragment that appeared already in the chorus or refrain.

Figure 11



[57] See the two verses of the text of this piece under the section on textual analysis.

Prose-musical form

We now come to the second musical form prevalent in Igbo liturgical songs which can be described as *prose-musical form*.[58] This musical form, as the name suggests, is a musical structural arrangement that begins and ends with no indication of anything like chorus-refrain or call-response. But conversely, this musical genre combines in a single form other musical forms, techniques and styles. In other words, in a single form, one can find cantilation/recitative, responsorial technique, hymn-like harmonic progressions, counterpoint, duet, quartet, etc. In Igbo music culture, before Vatican II, this practice was not diffused. With the arrival of liturgical prose texts, such as *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo* and other texts of the Ordinary of the Mass, the Igbos, like Paul van Thiel observed of other African liturgical song writers, began to use "a musical form which is less common in Bantu-language speaking groups in Africa than the strophic one."[59]

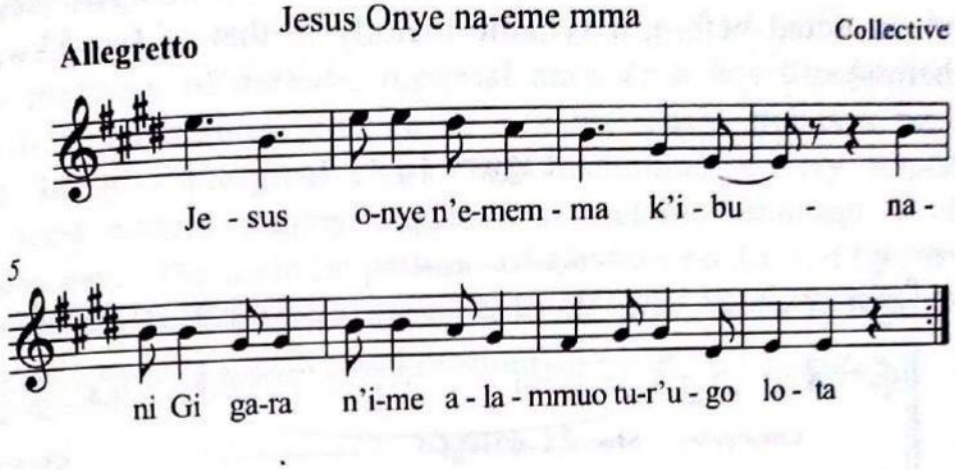
Traditionally speaking, Igbos taught and transmitted most of their values to their children more in poetic rhymes than in prose. This may also account for the reason why most of the Igbo liturgical songs written today in prose form or what is known in western terms as "through-composed" or *durchkomponiert* appeal less to the faithful and are easily forgotten and abandoned in favour of the ones composed in strophic form. The survival chances in Igbo churches today of liturgical songs written in "through-composed" are low.

Catchy liturgical choruses

The issue of writing short melodies is very important for the Igbos that is why a new liturgical music form has developed among the Igbos. It is called *Catchy liturgical choruses* and is the simplest music form in Igbo liturgical songs. They consist of a short melodic phrase that is repeated several times. A few melodic lines can also be added as verses but all depends on the improvisational proficiency of the singer-leader of the choruses. But generally most of these choruses have only a melodic line that is also repeated as chorus. The following example illustrates the music setting of one of the Igbo liturgical choruses used also in the liturgical celebrations, especially during Easter Masses.

[58] The term *prose musical form* is our invention. It is preferred here to avoid equiperation with the western notion of through-composed form.
[59] VAN THIEL, "African Religious Music. Text, Tone and Tune", p. 181.

Figure 12



However, it is the performance technique that makes this unitary form a bit attractive to the listeners. Choruses that have similar rhythmic patterns are performed in cyclic manner, that is, one after the other, following the same and steady instrumental rhythm at the background. To be able to lead the assembly to sing correctly these choruses, the *singer-leader* must be thoroughly acquainted with the different rhythmic patterns of as many choruses as possible. Otherwise, he or she will be obstructing, with short break at intervals, the steady flow of the instrumental accompaniment to the singing. Thus the beauty of the whole genre vanishes. Perhaps Igbo catchy liturgical choruses fit into Michael Hawn's own structural analysis of cyclic worship songs.[60]

Musical Analysis

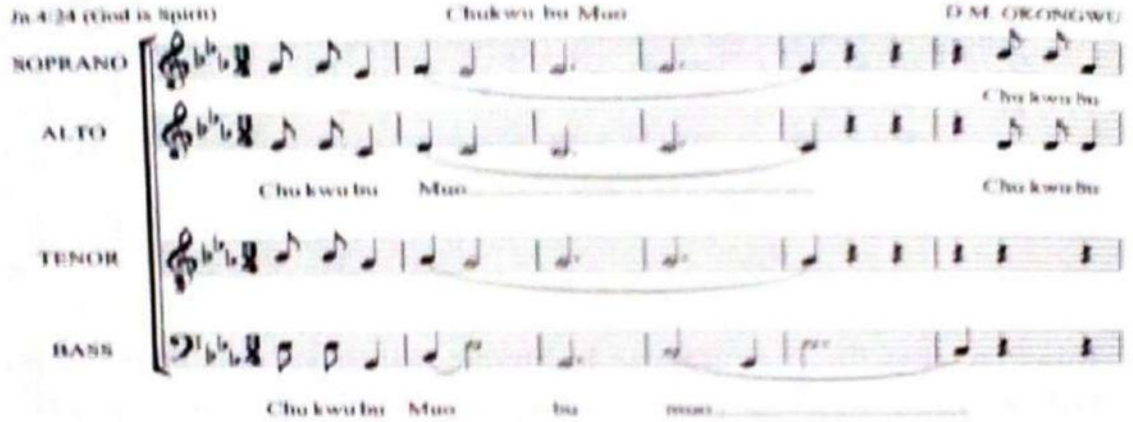
Most Igbo liturgical songs, greatly influenced by different hymn-traditions, as we have already seen, characteristically exhibit melodies that are very syllabic and repetitive and rarely admit melodic lines that are *melismatic* or largely ornamented. At the same time melodic structure in *recto tono* style, recitational, is equally unacceptable for this would amount to total neglect of the Igbo language tones. When the melody is ornamented,[61] it is usually done with

[60] See MICHAEL C. HAWN, *One Bread, One Body. Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship*, Bethesda, The Alban Institute, 2003, p. 128.

[61] There does exist in Igbo liturgical chants ornamentations, much similar to what one would call in western music: diminutions, passing notes, neighbouring notes, *appoggiaturas* and *acciaccaturas*. But because of the absence of a codified music theory in Igbo music culture, this claim remains only on the level of suppositions.

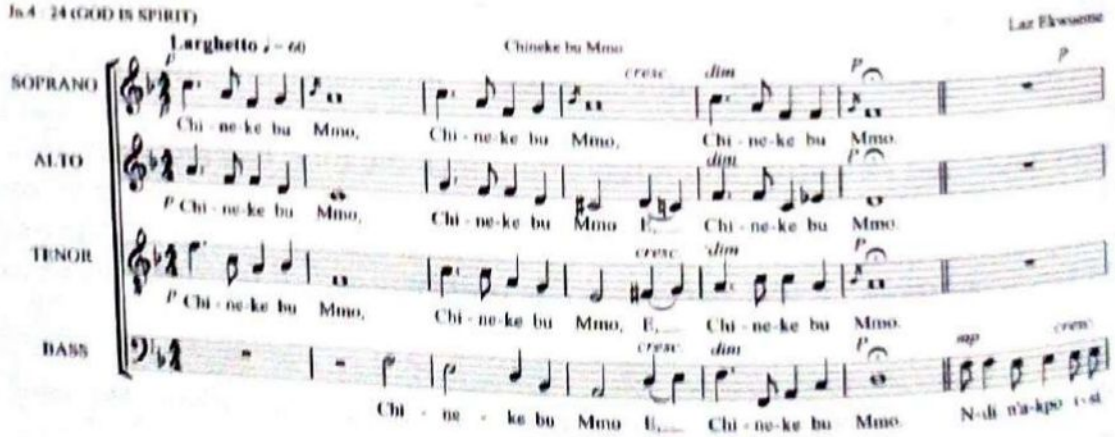
maximum care and in the simplest way very approximate to a syllabic type to avoid a distortion of the lexical tones. We have a good example of melodic *melisma* or ornamentation in *Chukwu bu Muo* of David Okongwu (see figure 13 below) and, as noted before, a syllabic melody in that of Laz Ekwueme (see figure 14 below).

Figure 13



In figure 13, on the word *Muo* (spirit) the melodic line, in all the voices (especially that of the Bass) is well-ornamented. If the proceeding word *bu* (is) were to be ornamented also (or the one after) the meaning of the text would have been disfigured and lost. The effects of *melisma* are, therefore, best enjoyed when, in a word of two, three or more syllables, only one syllable is ornamented.

Figure 14

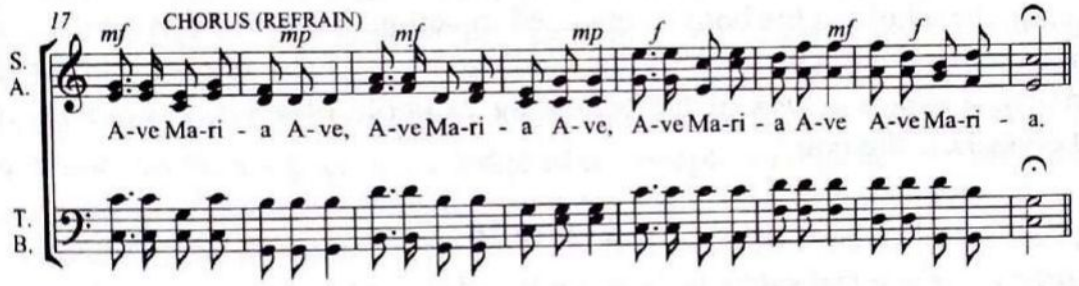


In the above melodic structure every syllable is sung to a note except in few instances like in bars 2, 4 and 6 where a note (in form of *acciaccatura*) was used to help bring out the textual tone *mmo*. The ornamentation on the word

"E" is very important also. Without it, the word, which is often written as *"Ee"* or *"Eye"* with two syllables, has no meaning; but when it is sung to two musical notes tied with a slur, the meaning is clear and precise.

The imitation of melodic material once or a few times on a higher or lower pitch is a common practice in western music and is a highly artistic technique. In Igbo liturgical chants this technique is very important. Igbo liturgical song writers employ sequence or melodic imitation to enhance the textual eloquence. The melodic patterns of *Chukwu bu Muo* of David Okongwu, (figure 13) and of the following example in *Obi Nso Maria* (arranged by C.C. & L. Iwobi) are basically constructed on sequential pattern.

Figure 15



The above example shows the melody and other voices of the song's refrain. As one may observe, a melodic pattern running from bar 1 to bar 2 was repeated with little melodic variation up to bar 6.

Another important recurring melodic feature is the tonal range. Here the phrase 'melodic range' specifies exclusively the limit of the rising and falling of melodies used in Igbo liturgical celebrations. Igbo melodies are usually not pitched so high, otherwise one would notice during singing a bit of coarse-cracking voices and a tonal fluctuation from one key to another. Melodies are constructed on the voice texture of an average Igbo man or woman who may not sing comfortably and exactly within the stipulated ranges of the voices (SATB) as in western musical practice.

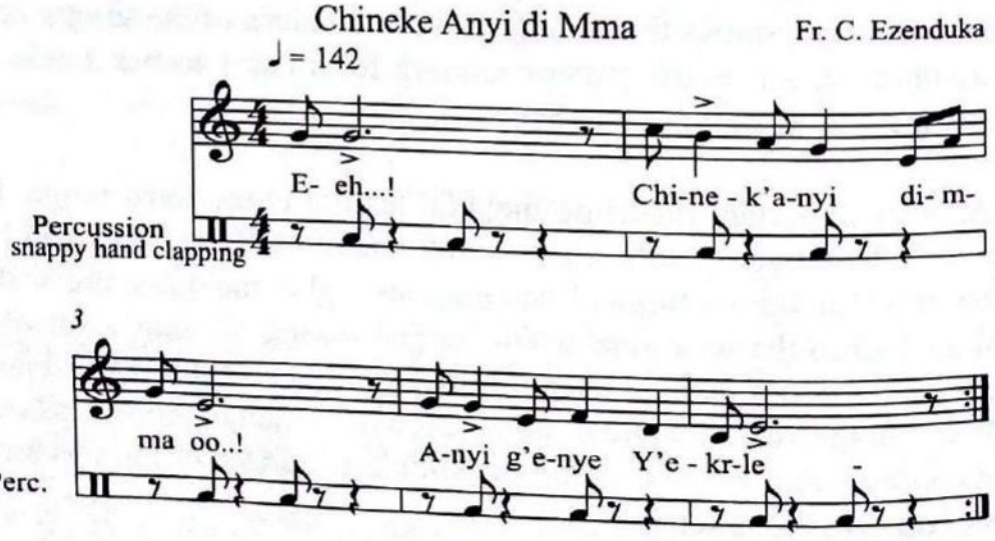
Difficult arrangement of different degrees of intervals around the tonal centre is a rare practice in composing melodies for Igbo liturgical celebrations. Such arrangement usually occurs in works where the tonal centre changes as many times as possible like 'a cycling of keys' before the reaching of the final double barlines. A shift of tonal centre on the interval of augmented fourth, referred to by the late medieval theorists as "*diabolus in musica*" (the devil in music) would be considered not only absurd but also out of place. Hence,

melodic patterns are generally thought of in terms of major scales, which present less difficult degrees of intervals. The use of minor scales is a less frequent practice in Igbo songs of worship because of the instable nature of the 7th degree of a melodic minor scale and the other difficult intervals that don't favour simple melodic lines. In the long run, only natural minor scales are interwoven with major scales in the construction of Igbo liturgical melodies. However, in the works of some professional Igbo composers the occasional application of a temporal modulation (which still remains within the song's tonal centre) may often be noticed.

Rhythmic Organization

Igbo agility, as partly treated in this work, is very much expressed in terms of rhythmic sensibility. When an Igbo man or woman is singing or dancing, the whole of his body is engaged in action. Thus one can rightly regard rhythm as an important underlying element in all Igbo music, traditional or Christian. Perhaps a look at the following example of an Igbo liturgical song will crystallize the point.

Figure 16



This liturgical song shows an Igbo liturgical song written in a typical Igbo native style and rhythm. The percussion line shows also a peculiar rhythmic pattern of an Igbo native dance known as "*akwunechienyi.*"