

**INCULTURATION OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR AND THE
SELECTED IGBO TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS**

Emmanuel Chinedu ANAGWO*¹

Abstract

*This paper underscores that liturgical year is partly anchored on the Scripture and conventions established along with history and tradition. In the spirit of the liturgical inculturation, **symbols, postures, gestures, and rites may need to be adjusted in accord with the seasons of the year in the local Church.** This is in consonance with liturgical norms, whereby local Churches could institute veritable feasts derived from their traditional and other established practices. Accordingly, this paper attempts to bring four selected Igbo festivals, of New Yam Festival, Iwa Akwa Festival, Ofala and Masquerade Festivals, into the liturgical year and composes euchological prayers (such as collect, prayer over the offerings, and post communion prayer) for these celebrations. Though the compositions are primarily intended for academic study, pastoral experimentation, critique, and eventual adoption as forms of public prayer of the Church, worshippers are to embrace them as catalyst towards holistic understanding of the liturgical year.*

Keywords: Inculturation, Liturgical Year, Igbo Traditional Festivals, Scriptures, Tradition, Conventions

1. Introduction

Liturgical year is one of the basic frameworks for the church's liturgical activities. It is an embodiment of cycle of all the liturgical activities. The essence of all the Christian activities that accompany the liturgical year is for an inward encounter with God and for one's spiritual

¹* PhD (Sacred Liturgy), PhD (Philosophy of Education); Senior Lecturer and Dean of Students' Affairs, Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt (CIWA), Nigeria; Chairman, CIWA Publications' Committee; Catholic Priest from Nnewi Diocese Nigeria, Tel: +2348034072064, Email: ecana2011@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2762-9718>.

transformation. The knowledge of the nature of the liturgical year helps an individual to appreciate the liturgical seasons and other church's activities. In the spirit of inculturation, Victor Jamahh Usman notes that this '...goes back to the origins of the peoples and helps to constitute their personal as well as their collective identity and collective *communicative memory* which serves the transient moment and immediate existence.'² Inculturation normally takes place within the framework of approved liturgical books, whereby the substantial unity of the Roman Rite is preserved. Hence, the inculturation of the liturgical calendar does not result in a totally new calendar that is an alternative to the typical edition of the Roman Rite.

Nonetheless, one needs to acknowledge that inculturation might not always be sufficient to address certain local needs. Hence, it would not preclude the creation of particular liturgical calendars while retaining the register of feasts of the Roman Rite. Roman traditional liturgical symbols may need to be adjusted in accord with the seasons of the year in the local Church. This would be applicable, for example, to liturgical feasts such as Christmas and Easter whose original symbols do not correspond to existing seasons of the year in a particular Church. Inspired by liturgical history, the writer recognizes the role of local cultural and social traditions in the institution of some liturgical feasts such as the Chair of St. Peter in Rome, which originated in the ancestral feast of ancient Rome called *parentalia*. Christmas was a pagan festival adapted by the Church to replace an ancient Roman celebration of the god, Saturn. December 25th was chosen because it was the birthday of sun god, a false deity worshipped by many people.

This is in consonance with liturgical norms, whereby local Churches could institute feasts derived from their traditional and other established practices. Festivals in Igboland are yearly feasts celebrated. Every Igbo community normally looked forward to their celebrations. The reality

² Victor Jamahh Usman, 'The Role of the Liturgy in the Formation and Sustenance of Christian Cultural Memory in the Family: An Impulse from Early Christianity for the New Evangelization' in *Nigerian Journal of Religion and Society (JORAS)*, Vol. 5, 2015, 39.

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is to unveil and rediscover the elements proper to the local culture, as liturgical year would be better appreciated when the feasts and rites therein have local coloration and flavour. The challenge here is how to enrich the liturgical year with cultural values, orations, and genius of Igbo people for better effect on the participants. Accordingly, this paper attempts to bring four selected Igbo festivals, of New Yam Festival, *Iwa Akwa* Festival, *Ofala* and Masquerade Festivals, into the liturgical year and composes euchological prayers (such as collect, prayer over the offerings, and post communion prayer) for these celebrations in Igbo-Nigerian context.

2. Expository Nature of the Liturgical Year

Liturgical year, which is also called ecclesiastical year or Christian year, is among what is known as ‘liturgical time.’ It means the calculation of the year according to the Church’s tradition. While the secular calendar begins on the 1st of January and ends on the 31st of December, the liturgical year starts from the first Sunday of Advent and ends on the 34th (thirty-fourth) week of the Ordinary Time. Liturgical year is the Church’s seasons and feasts which celebrate and express the central events of our salvation, namely, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The basis of the liturgical year are the periods of Easter and Christmas which are devoted to celebrations of all aspects of the mysteries of Christ. Periods of preparation precede each of them, before returning to the Ordinary Time in-between them and after them. Advent is the period of preparation before Christmas whereas Lent is the preparation before Easter.

Generally, liturgical year is a 52-week time plan with a list of commemorative celebrations or events. Over the course of the year, it covers the saving deeds which God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. It is also believed to be partly anchored on the scripture and partly on conventions established along the liturgical history and tradition. They are determinant of the scheduling of the commemorations of the Lord’s saving action. Through the liturgical year, the faithful consolidate their faith and salvation history. The calculation of the liturgical year commemorates the salvation history and its actions accomplished

already as well as directing worshippers to the future where they look in hope to the coming back in glory of the Lord. The liturgical year re-enacts the story of the life of Jesus Christ with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, thereby helping the faithful to commemorate and celebrate these events of redemption.

3. Inculturation of the Liturgical Year

Any discussion on the need of inculturation will only state the obvious. There is, in fact, no objection to its relevance and the need; yet there are palpable apprehensions with regard the process and how far this can go. The renewal and updating of the liturgy practically would mean inculturation. Inculturation, a relationship between Christian faith and different cultures, has come into great prominence in recent times, owing to the growing awareness of plurality of cultures in the world.³ After all, Catholicity is one of the marks of the Catholic Church. It means her universality and openness to admit into her fold everybody irrespective of one's culture, status, language, or race. Admittedly, inculturation is the double process of inserting the Gospel into a particular culture and inserting the culture into this Gospel so that both the Gospel and the culture are challenged and enriched by each other. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council assert that if the Church is to be able to offer the peoples the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, it must implant itself among them the same way that Christ by his incarnation bound himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived.⁴ Similarly, St. Pope Paul VI was emphatic that by now, Africans should be missionaries to themselves. The Church of Christ should truly be

³ One must remark that in modern times, inculturation has emerged as a popular theme and acceptable avenue for evangelization. Inculturation calls for dialogue between faith and culture and it leads to positive transformation. Inculturation normally takes place within the framework of approved liturgical books, whereby the substantial unity of the Roman Rite is preserved. Hence, the inculturation of the liturgical calendar does not result in a totally new calendar that is an alternative to the typical edition of the Roman Rite.

⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) [henceforth SC] in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) 37-40.

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planted in Africa and they must make it African through honest and result-oriented dialogue with African cultures and values.⁵

Liturgy should attempt to aid Africans to be truly Christians and authentically Africans. Additionally, Alyward Shorter notes that: ‘Africans have a legitimate desire to reformulate the truths of faith in accordance with their own cultural forms of expression. They need not and should not replicate the intellectual history of Europe to understand what the Gospel says about Jesus.’⁶ The history of the liturgical year shows that the calendar of feasts has been constantly adjusting itself to political, cultural, and religious environments of the local Churches. There is a dialectical relationship between Christianity and cultures, which means that Christianity cannot be identified with any culture and therefore is for all cultures. Every culture has the capacity to impact on Christianity in a positive way, thus bringing Christianity closer to the people of the culture.

In Christian worship, seasons are yearly marked with ceremonies, memorials, rituals, celebrations, gestures, and festivities. Some of these celebrations were adaptations made to mark the seasons of that time. The universal Church has some of such feasts that she is accustomed to celebrate but may be less suitable to the local Church due to difference in traditional and socio-political milieu. The celebrations that pertain to the mysteries of Christ fit in well both for the universal and local Church. Nonetheless, feasts that concern celebration of saints and other special needs are more suitable at their places of origin. The local Church is replete with some special needs in their tradition and culture that could be inculturated according to the principles of being compatible with the Gospel as well as being in union with the universal Church and more importantly, celebrated within the liturgical seasons. The prospect of creating liturgical rites and calendar to suit the needs of the local Church should not be ruled out. Accordingly, we singled out four festivals in Igbo land of Nigeria to highlight, before proposing

⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, (Nairobi: Paulines, 2007) 16.

⁶ Alyward Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) 20.

orations for them. They are New Yam Festival, *Iwa Akwa* Festival, *Ofala* Festival and Masquerade Festival.

New Yam Festival

New Yam Festival (*Iwa Ji, Iri Ji, Ike Ji*), as an annual celebration among Ndigbo, is a good example how Igbo calendar is calculated. As an annual cultural festival, it is held by Igbo people at the end of rainy season in early August. It symbolizes the conclusion of a harvest and the beginning of the next work cycle. The principle behind the New Yam Festival is linked to the covenant between the soil and man since humanity is dependent on the soil for their survival and existence. Like the Jewish understanding of the link between man (*adam*) and the soil (*Adamah*) whereby the benevolence of the soil upon man resulted to the feast of Harvest. This is to acknowledge God for granting fertility to the soil. This event is important in the calendar of the entire Igbo land and beyond. Hence,

The harvest of yam and the celebration of the gods of the land through the New Yam Festival is an epitome of the people's religious belief in the supreme deity. The coming of the new moon in August marks the preparation of the great '*Iri Ji Ohu*' festival, but the time and mode of preparation differs from community to community.⁷

Admittedly, the celebration is a cultural moment unifying individual Igbo communities together as agrarian who are dependent on yam. Accordingly, New Yam Festival is a celebration that brings both the sons and daughters of Ndigbo home, a unifying celebration. Until this festival is celebrated no one is allowed to taste the new yam. In the olden days, a typical Igbo society makes routine sacrifice to the gods. People are encouraged to bring yams, fowls, etc. for the sacrifice. For instance, during the New Yam festival, it is a celebrated event in Nnewi town in *Odo ogwu* (village square), characterised with music, song and dance. Men bring yams and jars of palm wine. Women peel and cook

⁷ 'Significance of New Yam Festival in Igbo Society of Nigeria – Igbo Union Finland' from (<http://www.igbounionfinland.com/significance-of-new-yam-festival-in-igbo-society-of-nigeria>), www.igbounionfinland.com. Accessed on 10th November 2023.

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the yams. Children are sent on errand. When all the food is cooked, all participate in the *Oriko* (communal meal), young and old, male and female alike. The eating and conviviality make for the solidarity greatly cherished in the Igbo culture. In-laws use such moments for happy reunion. Friendship is renewed. Negative feelings are eschewed. Each person returns home feeling better and fulfilled. Even after the ritual offering and celebration, that bond of solidarity, togetherness and love still remain with the people as they disperse.⁸

Among Ndigbo, New Yam Festival is celebrated to mark the victory of the people and to thank God for his provision. Thus, the importance of harvest in the Church cannot be over-emphasized. Harvest thanksgiving is an annual celebration in the Church through which all the faithful express their thanks to God after the harvest of produce. Unfortunately, this celebration is fast losing its value in the sense that it no longer reflects what it symbolizes. Instead of the presentation of food items, some prefer to use money or as it is pungently and banally said ‘to monetize.’ This is something one cannot find in the New Yam Festival among the Igbo. Annual Church Harvest and Thanksgiving can be planned in such a way that it coincides with the New Yam Festival such that the people bring their Yams and other farm produce for blessings, thereby checkmating the barbarism that is associated with some Harvest ceremonies. When this value is truly integrated in Igbo land, it can equally promote Christian unity. Borrowing a leaf from the Catholic Diocese of Ahiara where it is already celebrated on August 15th every year, it can be integrated all over Igbo land and those in diaspora.

Iwa Akwa Festival

Iwa Akwa (cloth-wearing) is part of the rite of formal presentations of boys sent for initiation into adulthood. Initiation designates the complex of sacramental rites which make up the process by which an individual comes to full membership in the community. In his seminal book *Rites of Passage* in 1907, French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep refers to those rituals that mark the passage of the individual through various

⁸ Emmanuel C. Anagwo, *New Trends of Fundraising in Christian Worship: The Nigerian Pastoral Experience* (Berlin: Peter Lang International Publisher, 2022) 184.

stages in his/her life cycle. He describes initiation as having a formal structure of separation, transition, and incorporation. He further explains that the rite of separation could involve preliminary rites, and those executed during the transitional stage are liminal (or threshold) rites while the ceremonies of incorporation are postliminal rites.⁹ For the candidate involved in this initiation process, temporal and symbolic adjustment are implied in the period of transition, as in betrothal. In essence, one is reintegrated into one's own society with a new social status, for example as in the traditional Igbo rites of marriage.

In the traditional African worldview, life is a continuous initiation—a transition from one level of existence to another. Thus, among the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Igala, the Benin, the Ashanti, and other African groups, a physical person does not necessarily possess a legal personality. The legal personality is not a result of a human relationship but arises only when he/she is received and initiated as a newborn child, a member of their family, and can be counted as a member of the greater community. In this sense, the phrase 'initiation rites' is often erroneously taken to refer exclusively to rites that mark the passage from childhood to adult life, or what has been called 'puberty rites.' But this should not be the case. In fact, initiation rites could accompany admission into an age group, secret societies, the ordination of a priest or medicine man, the enthronement of a king, the consecration of monks and nuns or sacred prostitutes, and so on.¹⁰

Here, the initiation rite of *Iwa Akwa* ceremonies confers on the boys the adulthood. The initiation marks the passage of an adolescent from the social of a boy child to the social status of an adult. An initiate goes through a transformation whereby he gives up one (lower) identity for another (higher) identity as an adult. An adult is a person who has reached the age of maturity. Initiation to adulthood in African culture is traditionally intended as a teaching institution to prepare young males for the responsibilities of manhood. It has been practised for centuries

⁹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) 2.

¹⁰ Gennep 5.

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in parts of Igbo land as one element of a rite of passage. Victor Laima rightly states that, ‘The significance of the initiation rites is the incorporation into manhood. To be initiated into adulthood implies that the young men have acquired a recognizable social status in the community.’¹¹

Due to its symbolism, infant boys are not circumcised until they reach puberty. It entails the process of seclusion whereby the person will go through the initiation processes into different stages and taken through the rudiments of their duties in the future as adults. Those who are seeking initiation into the cult or consecrated as a priest of the cult spend money extravagantly. His self-introduction to the high priest alone requires that he presents a bull, beer, locust beans and palm wine. This is followed by numerous other lavished gifts throughout the entire process which may span several months. Relatedly, material wealth feature in Igbo Traditional Religion in the form of ritual meals. Such meals are often part of the rituals or they follow after everything has been concluded. The *Iwa Akwa* (initiation into adulthood) involves sumptuous feasting that lasts for several days. The rite of consecration of a priest also involves days of ritual feasting which often drains the family all their resources in the end. In both instances, the last days are usually marked by more lavish celebrations for which cows and goats are often killed and prepared.¹²

With *Iwa Akwa* Festival, young boys now bear the image of maturity, can face challenges, and are able to marry and keep a family. In the spirit of inculturation and evangelization, a sense of maturity is projected at *Iwa Akwa* Festival. It can be integrated as part of the Confirmation rite. It can be done on the eve to the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation proper with the proposed rite composed for it.

¹¹Victor Laima, *The Waja People of Gombe State in Nigeria* (Zaria: Jodda Commercial Press, 2003), 34.

¹² Anagwo, *New Trends of Fundraising in Christian Worship* 184.

Ofala Festival

Ofala (coronation) Festival is celebrated within two days mostly in October by the Obi (English: king) and is a customary obligation that must unfailingly be done every couple of years. It is practised by Igbo people, particularly the indigenes of Onitsha, Umueri, Umuoji and other neighbouring communities such as Aguleri, Nnewi and Ukpo in Dunukofia Local Government Area. It serves as a rite of renewal of the king or Igwe or Obi and it is like the *Igue* festival in Benin and Ine, *Osi* or *Ogbanigbe* festival in many mid-West Igbo communities of Nigeria. As a yearly feast, it was always celebrated with much cooking and eating of assorted food and drinks. As every community looks forward to it, they invite friends and relatives from neighbouring villages. Ogbalu affirms that:

This is an Onitsha custom. It is an anniversary of the reign of the ruling Obi of Onitsha. It is performed with festivities, entertainments and shows of all kinds once a year. It is being copied by nearly half a dozen *homo novo bourgeois* chiefs in the surrounding towns and may spread still further.¹³

In the spirit of inculturation, the festival can be celebrated on the solemnity of Christ the King, being 34th Sunday of the Ordinary Time. As a liturgical celebration in Nigeria and other African countries like Ghana, it is combined with the solemnity of *Corpus et Sanguis Christi* (Body and Blood of Jesus Christ). The latter would have been celebrated with the Eucharistic procession, but the risk of having rainfall for the Church in Nigeria warranted it to be transferred to the solemnity of Christ the King, with the permission of the Holy See. The solemnity is a double-edged celebration with the kingship taking the lead since it gives more credence to the Body and Blood of Christ in question. To describe Christ as King is as old as the history of mankind's salvation. At the birth of Christ, the three wise men sought to worship the '*Prince of Peace*' born to the world. On Palm Sunday, Christ was acclaimed as the King of Kings. During His crucifixion,

¹³ F. C. Ogbalu, *Igbo Institutions and Customs*, (Onitsha: University Publishing Co. 1994) 72.

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Pontus Pilate wrote on the cross '*Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*' (Jesus Christ the Nazarene king of the Jews). His Ascension and Pentecost confirmed his glorification and enthronement as the king par excellence.

One may ask: If this kingship is so old, why do we celebrate the obvious? An adage says: 'There is never a smoke without fire.' Historically, it was instituted by Pope Pius XI of Blessed memory in 1925. He instituted the solemnity of Christ the king to counteract the air of totalitarianism in vogue. That was during the regime of Mussolini in Italy; Lenin has just died, and Hitler was at the eve of unfolding his devilish blueprint. Even in Germany and Britain, the national Anthem sounds like divinizing the states. The kingship of Christ was relegated to the background. So, Pope Pius XI instituted this title of Christ that has always been there to situate things on right perspective.

Liturgically, this solemnity establishes the centrality of Christ as the universal king that must reign in the lives of His people. He is the king that must reign because of what He is and what He did for them. He is the only begotten Son of God. He was with God at the beginning of creation. He has been reigning with Him. Evidently, He sacrificed His life for the sinful humanity to raise their status to the divine level. Zechariah 14:9 addresses Him as king of all earth. Matthew 2:2 recognizes Him as king of the Jews. In Luke 23:38, His executioners confirmed Him as the king of the Jews. John 1:49 calls Him king of Israel. John 17:14 addresses Him as Lord's king of kings. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the word 'Christ' is from the Greek word '*Christos*', which is a Hebrew translation of *Messiah*, meaning 'anointed.'¹⁴ That is, he is the anointed one chosen by God as the king of the universe. We must remember that the original application of 'Christ' was only as a title appended to his name to depict one anointed as the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. One popular and charismatic hymn speaks volume about this when it says: 'You are the Lord let your name be glorified. We give you glory and honour, you are

¹⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1994) no. 436.

the Lord, let your name be glorified.’ Like Christmas celebrated on the Birthday of the Roman Sun god, we can also celebrate this *Ofala* festival on the higher level to accord Christ as the King of Kings (*Eze ndi Eze*), with all the prayerful and social fanfare that accompany the procession later, after the Eucharistic liturgy.

***Mmanwu* Festival**

Mmanwu (Masquerade) festival is a traditional ceremony of the Igbo people of Southern Nigeria. They are performed only by male exclusive secret societies and usually integrate the use of elaborate colourful costumes that are meant to invoke ancestral spirit. The Masquerade Festival has various purposes to convey, such as performing elements of epic drama, derived from community cosmology and lore, ushering in new months and seasons, honouring totems and ancestral spirits, enactments of parables or myths, entertainment, and community building. In the past, they are used to ensure judicial, social regulatory and policing powers of the community. Today, they are used more for entertainment activities, such as singing, joking, and dancing.

As part of inculturation strategy, the Church can respond and react to history and signs of the people, using ceremonial masquerade (*mmanwu*), devoid of any devilish or spiritual powers. They can be integrated as part of social entertainment outside the liturgy, such as during an investiture of patrons/patroness of the parish/station, the reception of a new priest, parish priest, religious profession, anniversary of the patron/patroness of the parish, etc. Also, during Christmas and Easter celebrations, a Mid-day Mass can be celebrated to herald these social entertainment sector. In the midst of hardships and economic stress the Igbo-Nigeria people go through, they can serve as a form of entertainment and to cool off tension and anxiety.

4. Proposed Orations for the Selected Igbo Traditional Festivals

By oration we mean prayers offered at the Eucharistic liturgy when there are specific needs and occasions in the life of the faithful. Liturgically, Masses for Various Needs have been an essential part of worship, from the beginning of the Roman liturgy. For instance,

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orations used include: the needs of the Church, human beings, and the world with the Eucharistic celebration as the centre of the entire work of redemption. Accordingly, through these Masses, connection is made between liturgy and life, heaven, and earth, the divine and the human, the spiritual and the material, the internal and external, the interior and the exterior, the religion, and the society. The Third Typical Edition of 2002 *Roman Missal* maintains that every event in life is sanctified by the divine grace which flows from the Paschal Mystery and because the Eucharist is the sacrament of sacraments. Reading through *The Roman Missal*, it provides examples of Mass *formularies* for the needs of the Church, whether universal or local. We can do the same by proffering some orations. Here, our attention is only for minor euchology embracing opening prayer, prayer over the offerings and post communion prayer. Below, the writer sequentially proposes the orations for the selected Igbo Traditional Festivals under study, namely, i. New Year Festival, ii. *Iwa Akwa* Festival, iii. *Ofala* Festival, and iv. Masquerade Festival:

Collect:¹⁵

New Yam Festival	<i>Iwa Akwa</i> Festival	<i>Ofala</i> Festival	Masquerade Festival
Priest: i. O God, provident Father, who blessed the yam we planted on the	Priest: ii. Pour out your gracious blessings on our brothers, Lord God, who through your	Priest: iii. Almighty ever-living God, in your beloved Son, we recognize the King of	Priest: iv. Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we, who glory in the beauty of the world and

¹⁵ The composition considers the constituents parts of the Roman Liturgical Collect (Opening Prayer, *Collecta* in Latin), namely, Invitatory Introduction/Invocatory Introduction (whereby God is invoked with or without his attributes), Relative Pronoun (like who, that describes the nature of God and his works), Intention (the finality of intention is stated), and Long Trinitarian Doxology (it concludes the prayer). [For a detailed study, see Patrick C. Chibuko, ‘Rudiments of Euchological Composition’ in *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1999, 165-166].

<p>earth, grant, we pray, that with the fruits harvested, we may continue to praise and bless your name. May we recognize your help and by eating them, they will nourish our body and soul. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. All: Amen.</p>	<p>goodness have reached the age of maturity for <i>Iwa Akwa</i>, grant them wisdom and sense of purpose in life, so that they will continue to contribute meaningful to the society and grow in the way of probity and love. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. All: Amen.</p>	<p>Kings and the Lord of Lords, grant we pray, that every nation and authority will continue to acknowledge Him for what He is through worthy service. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. All: Amen.</p>	<p>things of positive enjoyment in them, may we be made worthy to be entertained, using masquerades and other social events, as well as being happy to participate in them as we make our pilgrim journey to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. All: Amen.</p>
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Prayer over the Offerings:¹⁶

Offertory

The gift of bread and wine for the Eucharistic sacrifice and other gifts are carried in procession and brought forward to the altar by little children. This is to signify the innocence and purity of the worshipping community, amidst choral chants in praise of God’s gifts of the Igbo traditional festivals.

New Yam Festival	Iwa Akwa Festival	Ofala Festival	Masquerade Festival
<p>Priest: i. Gracious and Loving Father, who is the giver of every good gift such as the bountiful harvest of New Yam Festival. You provided them for our sustenance and summoning us to return praise to you. Be pleased to accept these gifts</p>	<p>Priest: ii. Grant your Church, O Lord, we pray, the gifts of wisdom and strength, whose signs are to be seen in the maturity of</p>	<p>Priest: iii. As we offer you, O Lord, the sacrifice by which humanity gives you honour due to you, we humbly pray that your Son who is the King of Kings and</p>	<p>Priest: iv. Look mercifully, O Lord, we pray upon the sacrificial gifts of your people on this day of entertainment with the masquerades, and that they may become acceptable to you. We beseech you</p>

¹⁶ The composition considers the constituents parts of the Roman Liturgical Prayer Over the Offerings (*super oblata* in Latin). Structurally, the oration has the unity of six elements: Identification of the action taking place which is the offering of gifts; Identification of whom the action is directed; Identification of who is performing the action, the Church (It is sometimes called the Praying Subject); it has the supplicatory terminology like ‘We beseech you/give/grant/conceive it; Identification of the major intention of prayer; It ends with Christological conclusion: ‘(We ask this) through Christ our Lord.’ [For a detailed study, see Patrick C. Chibuko, ‘Rudiments of Euchological Composition’ in *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1999, 166].

of bread and wine that represent all your goodness. May they assist us to see your Provident Hands in our lives and lead us to always render you praise and worship. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.	brothers to adulthood in the offerings we here present. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.	Lord of Lords will accept our gifts, like the sacrifice of Abel the just. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.	that our joy, merriment, and thanksgiving will continue to draw us nearer to you. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.
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4.3 Prayer after Holy Communion:¹⁷

New Yam Festival	Iwa Akwa Festival	Ofala Festival	Masquerade Festival
Priest: i. Renewed and nourished by the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of your Son, we ask of grace of thanksgiving, O	Priest: ii. Having been made partakers of this heavenly delight, O Lord, we pray, so that, bound to you	Priest: iii. Having received the food of immortality, we ask, O Lord, that glorifying in obedience to the commands	Priest: iv. Graciously be present to your people, we pray, O Lord, and lead those you have imbued with heavenly

¹⁷ The nature of Post Communion Prayer (*Post Communionem*) is that of thanksgiving after communion. Structurally, the oration has the following parts: Reference to the Eucharist; Introduces supplicatory terminology usually in the form of 'We beseech you O Lord; It identifies what is being asked/petitioned; It identifies the eschatologies or futuristic dimension of the prayer which invariably points not only to the future, but underscores the extreme liturgical activity in the world in terms of preaching and championing the cause of social justice and a leaven in the wider society; It concludes with short Christological doxology/praise which is typical of Roman Euchological formulary. [For a detailed study, see Patrick C. Chibuko, 'Rudiments of Euchological Composition' in *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1999, 166-167].

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Lord, that what we celebrate with constant devotion will have help us to appreciate your gifts of New Yam Festival. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.	in lasting charity to life of maturity in you, we may bear fruits that lasts for ever. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.	of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. May His <i>Ofala</i> Festival continue to prepare us to honour Him eternally. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.	mysteries, manifested in the joy of masquerade festival, that they may pass from former ways of life to newness of life. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.
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5. Implications of Igbo Traditional Festivals as Tools for Evangelization

As can be adduced from the above compositions, creation of rites, alternatives and orations is a possibility the universal Church has given to every culture, if balanced and genuine liturgical inculturation must evolve. After all, one of the missionary activities of the Church is to evangelize the people. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council state that ‘having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be ‘universal sacrament of salvation,’ the Church in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men.’¹⁸ This new understanding of the mission of the Church is well-articulated by St. John Paul II in the document *Redemptoris Missio* as follows: ‘Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ’s explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the ‘Good News’ about their being loved and saved by God.’¹⁹

The basic pastoral principle for action is expressed by St. Paul VI: ‘What matters is to evangelize man’s culture and cultures ... in a vital

¹⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], in *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987), 1.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1975), 44.

way, in depth and right to their very roots ... always taking the person as one's starting-point.²⁰ This means beginning not where we think the people should be, but where they are. This requires considerable sensitivity to and deeper understanding of the power of the Igbo traditional festivals as tools that can serve for evangelization on the part of all Christian workers. Every society in the world has its own cultural values and festivals which give it its identity among others. Festivals essentially have to do with transformation that has been a central component of African traditional cultures. Unfortunately, at times, there is the possible misunderstanding and confusion with the traditional festivals and feasts as a process that is negatively cultic, secretive, deadly, or devilish. According to the Fathers of the African Synod in *Ecclesia in Africa* (EA), a true and balanced inculturation is necessary to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast-evolving society.²¹ This would be controlled through an indepth pastoral *cum* liturgical mystagogical catecheses. This is against the backdrop that although Western Euro-Christian civilisation has made a lot of impacts on the Igbo, these festivals are still celebrated with pomp and pageantry even the converted traditionalists.

Additionally, the need to have Christianity rooted in the culture of the people cannot be over-emphasized. This is against the background that the Church in Igbo land is relatively young, given the fact that the more enduring attempt at evangelizing Igbo land is less than two centuries old. There should equally be a dialogue between Christianity and traditional worshippers in line with the demands of the Synod for Africa which observed that a severe and prudent dialogue with African traditional religion will be of great benefit. Such a dialogue would, on one hand, protect Christians (Catholics) from negative influences which derail their Christian way of life, and on the other hand, foster the assimilation of positive values and festivals. Such values in African traditional religion, like family solidarity and human relations; the sense of ritual and festivity; the sense of the sacred and religion; the primacy

²⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1975), 20.

²¹ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1995).

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of the person; the sense of music, song, and dance; hospitality; and life can be seen as a fertile ground for the Gospel (*preparatio evangelica*) because they contain precious *semina verba* and will surely help for inculturation of the liturgical year.²²

Again, the above compositions are primarily intended for academic study, pastoral experimentation, critique, and eventual adoption as forms of public prayer of the Church. In his celebrated four-volume treatise titled: *The Church at Prayer*, Martimort asserts that the Church is always at prayer in her various ministrations, ranging from the celebration of sacraments to sacramentals. Accordingly, worshippers should be able to read the renewal text, and even more, to discover the meaning of the rites by participating in them.²³ This is because by meditating on the texts and by participating as fervently as possible in the liturgical celebration, they will be able to enter with understanding into the mysteries of the praying Church where Christ himself is present and active. In such situations their faith is ably manifested and captured by an outstanding liturgical principle which opines the intimate relationship between the *lex orandi* (the law of prayer) and the *lex credendi* (the law of believing). Admittedly, it is extended to the *lex vivendi* (the law of living). This gave rise to the slogan of what the Church believes and popularized by Prosper of Aquitaine. It reads: '*lex credendi, lex celebrandi, lex vivendi*' (what the Church believes, she celebrates, and she lives out). After all, this is in consonance with liturgical norms, whereby local Churches could institute feasts derived from their traditional and other established practices.

Pointedly, festivals and rituals in Igbo land are preceded by a period of preparation designated as a period of peace. The eating and conviviality make for the solidarity greatly cherished in the Igbo culture. In-laws use such moments for happy re-union. Friendship is renewed. Negative

²² See Emmanuel C. Anagwo, 'Christianity and the African Culture: Integrating the Vision of Liturgical Inculturation,' in *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 56, No. 4, December 2014, 289.

²³ Aime G. Martimort, *The Church at Prayer, Volumes 1-4* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987).

feelings are eschewed. Each person returns home feeling better and fulfilled. The understanding is that this period assists the people to heal all old wounds and be reconciled with one another. Misunderstandings and disputes are settled between men and men, or between men and the gods. Accordingly, it implies that such celebrations must also be prepared with the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the worshipping community. The goal of the sacrament is conversion, *metanoia*, and a healing of the relationship between God and the penitent; a relationship that was ruptured through sin. It shows the importance of communion or community-relationship in Christ before festivals. The human person is a relation being who does not live in isolation but in community along with others. Accordingly, sinful actions are not simply personal but have effect on the entire community who must be at peace with one another and their God, to enjoy the maximum benefits of rituals, feasts, and festivals. After all, festivals create and recreate the community. Spiritually, special provisions and arrangement should be made for the Sacrament of Reconciliation for each parish/station. Just as we have Christmas Confession, and Easter Confession, etc, we should have New Yam Confession, *Iwa Akwa* Confession, *Ofala* Confession, Masquerade Confession, etc. to herald these festivals spiritually and liturgically.

6. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, as evident from the facts and analysis extemporized above in the liturgical year, the Church is made present in each place and time by the local Church. We can never over-emphasize the fact that in reference to the local Church Catholics do not say the Church *of*, but the Church *in*. This is because it is the one Church that finds realization in the different localities. That means that even in the process of inculturation the local Church must remain united to the universal Church of which it is a part. Any form of inculturation that would isolate the local Church from the universal Church is inauthentic. Adhering to this principle, the paper discussed some Igbo traditional festivals and composed some orations that can accompany such wonderful celebrations. These feasts, festivals and celebrations in Catholic liturgy are anchored on the commemoration of God's

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intervention in the people's salvation history. They provide the avenue to create and recreate such marvellous works of God in human history.

We must reiterate that any inculturation that identifies with the liturgy and claims it as its own is a welcome development. This is possible when the liturgical texts, postures, gestures, symbols, and feasts evoke something from people's history, tradition, and cultural patterns. The ability of the liturgy to evoke local culture is a sign that inculturation has taken place. Consequently, inculturation fashions a unique form of worship that is culturally oriented and suited for the local people; a liturgy that is people oriented. Such brings about a liturgy for the local Church. That remains the outstanding merit of this paper to enhance full, active, and conscious participation which springs from the people's conviction of faith, to claim the liturgy as their own. Employing the proposed compositions of the euchological prayers in the Igbo-Nigerian context, each occasion they participate in yearly feasts, festivals, and celebrations in Catholic liturgy, let them embrace it them as praiseworthy act of faith from above.