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The Vatican II Soundscapes: Post-Conciliar Inculturation in Nigerian Liturgical Music and the Jude Nnam Phenomenon

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Abstract

This study investigates how the Second Vatican Council's pastoral and aesthetic directives – centered on Sacrosanctum Concilium and Musicam Sacram – have shaped contemporary Nigerian liturgical music through Sir Jude Chika Nnam's works. Employing ethnographic observation in select southeastern cities, interviews with clergy and music ministers, and targeted musical analyses, the paper tests the following questions: (1) How do Nnam's call-and-response structures, ostinati, and pentatonic melodic tendencies align with or challenge post-Conciliar inculturation? (2) What implications do these practices have for liturgical solemnity and the boundaries between sacred and popular idioms? (3) What institutional supports are needed to sustain compositional standards and formation? The analysis demonstrates that the Jude Nnam phenomenon fosters broad congregational engagement while provoking ongoing debates about liturgical dignity and cultural identity. Placing Nnam within the broader Nigerian church music trajectory – from early missionary suppression of indigenous forms to the post-1965 recovery of local expression – the study offers practical recommendations for diocesan training, collaboration between composers and liturgists, and avenues for future research that honor liturgical reverence while affirming Nigerian worship identities. The study's significance lies in advancing inculturation theory with a concrete Nigerian case, using a robust mixed-methods approach to show how local idioms interact with liturgical norms. Practically, it offers actionable guidance for diocesan training and composer–liturgist collaboration. Contributions include detailing post-Conciliar inculturation in Nigeria, clarifying the role of call-and-response, ostinati, and pentatony in liturgy, and proposing a framework for future regional and longitudinal research.

Keywords: Liturgical music, Post-Conciliar Inculturation, Liturgical solemnity, Vatican II, Jude Nnam phenomenon

Introduction

The renewal of the sacred liturgy inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council marked a decisive turning point in the Church's understanding of worship, culture, and musical expression. Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963) called for a liturgy that was at once faithful to the Church's heritage and genuinely responsive to the cultural contexts in which the People of God live and pray. Subsequent documents – most notably Musicam Sacram (1967) – reaffirmed that sacred music is not a supplementary aesthetic element but an integral component of the liturgical action, possessing the unique capacity to shape, elevate, and interpret the Church's prayer. Central to the post-Conciliar vision was the mandate that musical forms, languages, and instruments rooted in local cultures could be admitted into worship, provided that they fostered active participation, doctrinal integrity, and the dignity of the sacred rites.

Nowhere has this call for inculturation been more dynamic – and more contested – than in the Nigerian ecclesial landscape. The encounter between the Roman rite and

the rich musical cultures of Nigeria has produced a complex history marked by tensions, innovations, and evolving pastoral priorities. Early missionary activity tended toward the suppression or marginalisation of indigenous musical genres, privileging European hymnody and choral models as normative paradigms of sacred music. With the Council's permission for the "native genius" to find legitimate liturgical expression, Nigerian Catholic communities began to develop forms of worship that engaged local melodic patterns, rhythmic energies, and communal performance practices. Yet the process has been neither linear nor uncontested; debates persist concerning the limits of adaptation, the proper relationship between sacred and popular idioms, and the criteria by which inculturated music should be evaluated.

Within this broader narrative, the works of Sir Jude Chika Nnam have emerged as one of the most influential and widely disseminated contributions to contemporary Nigerian Catholic worship. His compositions—marked by accessible melodic formulas, antiphonal structures, and rhythmic vitality—have gained remarkable traction across dioceses, choirs, and parish communities, shaping the soundscape of the liturgy for a generation of worshippers. For many, Nnam's music represents a successful embodiment of participatory, culturally resonant worship envisioned by Vatican II. For others, it raises questions about the nature of liturgical solemnity, the boundaries between sacred and entertainment forms, and the pastoral implications of musical styles that blur these categories.

The present study situates the Jude Nnam phenomenon within the wider theological, historical, and cultural trajectory of Nigerian liturgical music. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with clergy and music ministers, and detailed musical analysis, the paper seeks to assess the extent to which Nnam's work advances—or complicates—the Conciliar vision of inculturation. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on how the Church in Nigeria can cultivate a liturgical music practice that is both authentically Catholic and authentically Nigerian, held together by the dual demands of pastoral effectiveness and the inherent dignity of the sacred rites.

Post-Vatican II Challenges in Nigerian Liturgical Music

The implementation of Sacrosanctum Concilium's theology of inculturation in Nigeria unfolded within a landscape marked by deep historical memory, divergent aesthetic expectations, and the absence of established evaluative frameworks for liturgical composition. Although Vatican II acknowledged that the Church "esteems the treasures of the nations" and encouraged the adaptation of indigenous musical forms "provided they are consonant with the spirit of the liturgy" (SC 37–40; Flannery 1982), its directives left considerable room for interpretation. The result, in Nigeria as elsewhere in Africa, was a field characterised by creativity and tension in equal measure (Ekwueme 2004; Omojola 1995, 2021; Agbo 2012).

Defining "Sacred Music" in an African Context

One of the earliest and most persistent challenges concerns the very definition of sacred music. Pius X's *Tra le Sollecitudini* had insisted that liturgical music must possess holiness, true art, and universality—criteria formulated largely within the Western art-music tradition (Pius X, 1903; Hayburn 1979; Cole 1993). Musicam

Sacram later softened these criteria, allowing for “noble simplicity” and pastoral suitability, yet it retained the requirement that liturgical music be “distinct from secular forms” (MS 4–7). Nigerian composers and liturgists, therefore, faced the task of discerning how African idioms—built on repetition, rhythmic density, call-and-response, and danceability (Agu 1999; Agawu 2003; Nzewi 1997)—could be rendered “sacred” without losing their cultural integrity.

Conservative voices in diocesan liturgical commissions often argued that sacred music must originate in a context of explicit worship and must avoid melodic or rhythmic patterns strongly associated with secular entertainment (Ronan 1967; Gelineau 1978; Umezina 2010). Liberals countered that African musical systems do not map neatly onto Western divisions between sacred and secular, and that the sacrality of music is primarily determined by liturgical text, intention, and ritual context (Nzewi 1999; Ekwueme 2004; Agbo 2012). This conceptual tension remains unresolved and forms the backdrop against which Jude Nnam’s music is both embraced and critiqued. A case study of a debate in an online platform of Nigerian Musicians and Composers presents a concatenation of opinions to be examined.

Instrumentation and the Question of Inculturation

The use of indigenous instruments presented another major challenge. Missionaries had discouraged or prohibited local drums and idiophones partly due to their association with traditional ritual and dance (Ekwueme 1974; Omojola 1995). Even after Vatican II, dioceses varied widely in their openness to percussion. Musicam Sacram permitted indigenous instruments “provided they suit the dignity of the temple” (MS 63–65), yet this clause required contextual interpretation.

Scholars have shown that many African instruments—udu, ekwe, ogene, omele, shekere, and various slit or tension drums—can be adapted for liturgical moderation if played with rhythmic restraint (Uzoigwe 1998; Onyeji 2004). Others argue that certain instruments intrinsically evoke performance contexts incompatible with the desired ethos of the Eucharistic liturgy (Nzewi 1997; Umezina 2011). In practice, Nigerian parishes adopted a wide range of hybrids: organs and keyboards supplemented by ogene and udu; African drums muted with cloth; or percussion restricted to “joyous” sections like the Gloria, Alleluia, Sanctus, or recessional rites.

The challenge is not simply one of sound but of meaning. Instruments carry social, symbolic, and ancestral associations (Agawu 2003; Nzewi 1999). The task for the post-Conciliar Church, therefore, is not merely technical adaptation but hermeneutical discernment of which associations can be baptised and which cannot—a tension vividly illustrated in the reception of Nnam’s instrumental arrangements. See musical excerpt below:

OLISA

Jude Nnam

Refrain

SOPRANO
K'a-nyi ke-lee, ke-lee O - li - sa, k'a-nyi jee jaa Ya mma k'a-nyi ke-lee, ke-lee

ALTO
K'a-nyi ke-lee, ke-lee O - li - sa, jee, jee jaa Ya mma To - be

TENOR
gha ke-lee Ya jee jaa Ya mma To - be

BASS
Ku - nie k'a-nyi ke-lee Ya n'o - ru - o-lu Ya ke-lee Ya n'o-kwe-si-ri Ya

O - li - sa nk'i-gwe Chi - ne - ke mo! O - gba a-ka e-je o-gu O-bu Ya n'e - le-ko-ta

O - li - sa nk'i-gwe O - bu Ya kam ji a - ba! O-bu Ya n'e - le-ko-ta

O - li - sa nk'i-gwe ke-lee Chi-ne - ke nk'i - gwe n-di a - gha le ke-n'i - he O-ma ni - le

ke-lee Ya n'o - zi-e-re Ya ke-lee Ya N - na! le ke-n'i - he O-ma ni - le

A look at the above musical excerpt of *Olisa* by Jude Nnam shows a combination of highlife movements and rhythm with his theology of praise and thanksgiving. The bass line (at bars 1 to 7) is a recurrent popular highlife ostinato from Osita Osadebe, one of Nigeria's most popular highlife maestros. The melody supplies a voice over on this bass line while the remaining inner parts form a strong and interesting rhythmic density characteristic of the highlife genre and African music in general. A YouTube link of Jude Nnam's live performance of this work in a quartet singing style is provided here and is paradigmatic of what instrumental accompaniment can be within the post-Vatican II purview. Another YouTube link of the performance of the same song by St John Bosco's Choir Aba provides a coterie of contrasting opinions. Samuel Ezugwu¹ is of the opinion that as long as the guitarist played improvisatory excerpts capable of taking the congregation's mind away from worship to the original Osadebe highlife music, which Jude Nnam adapted, then the integrity of liturgical music has been compromised. See the link to this performance by St John Bosco's Choir Aba below.

Dance, Body Movement, and Liturgical Kinetics

Perhaps the most contested element of Nigerian inculturation is dance. Whereas traditional African worship is inseparable from bodily movement, Western liturgical theology historically emphasised interiority, sobriety, and contemplative poise (Gelineau 1978; Ronan 1967; Cole 1993). Vatican II opened the door to cultural adaptation but offered no detailed guidelines, leaving episcopal conferences to discern appropriate gestures. Against the argument of Benedict Agbo in the afore mentioned social media platform about the Old Testament origin of dance in the liturgy as epitomized in King David's dance during the installation of the ark of the covenant in the temple, Jerome Obar² contends that the dance expressed by King David in the temple that day was a one - off display that in no way depicted the old

¹ Samuel Ezugwu, Online Interview with authors 22 October, 2025.

² Jerome Obar, Online Interview with authors 22 October, 2025.

testament liturgical practice as dance oriented. Basil Okeke³ is of the view that religious music includes 'dance' while liturgical music may not include 'dance' in the real sense of the term. He opines that the nature and form of the Old Testament liturgy are not very clear. His distinction into religious and liturgical music is still, in some measures, therefore relevant today.

We know that there isn't a straight or direct evidence of the descent or link of Christian worship form to Jewish/ Old Testament worship form. For instance, the nature and form of the O.T liturgy are not very clear, and to argue that David's dancing before the ark makes dancing in the liturgy permissible is a little confusing. Again, there was no direct evidence that Jesus and his apostles danced at the Last Supper, which is the direct origin of the Christian Eucharistic liturgy, since the musical form known as "Hymn" mentioned does not really depict the concept of 'dance'. He however, submits that, the only space left for us to argue for the use of native 'dance' in the liturgy today is provided by the subject of liturgical inculturation(cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*), but then one has to be cautious about the full meaning of authentic inculturation according to the mind of the Council Fathers (i.e., liturgical adaptations). He concludes that this is not a one-day task of a priest or a lay faithful but of the Episcopal conference of a nation, region, or a Local Ordinary in his diocese. Therefore, additions or subtractions individual composers, liturgists or liturgical scholars, theologians, pastoral agents, etc, make on their own in the liturgy through music, arts and gestures do not depict the original meaning of liturgical inculturation intended by the Council Fathers but could be a serious abuse of the Church's liturgy.

But be that as it may, Nigerian bishops have generally permitted controlled forms of liturgical movement—processional steps, offertory dances, and restrained swaying during joyful hymns—while discouraging full-bodied dance forms associated with masquerade, entertainment, or social festivals (Ehusani 2012; Umezina 2010). However, these boundaries remain porous. Energetic worship movements, particularly in charismatic and adoration contexts, have normalised forms of dance that sometimes spill into Sunday Mass (Agbo & Sylvanus 2020; Ngobili 2021).

Composers face pastoral pressure: congregation-friendly music almost inevitably invites movement, especially when structured around ostinati, syncopation, and short responsorial refrains (Agu 1999; Agawu 2003). The challenge is to craft pieces that harness rhythmic energy without tipping into performance-oriented spectacle. Jude Nnam's "Alleluia Omeso," "Oji Chukwu Eji Eme Ogo," and "Oba Nla" illustrate precisely this tension: widely embraced for their joyful dynamism, yet occasionally criticised for encouraging exuberance perceived as bordering on the theatrical. See video links below.

Tension Between Scholarly/Aesthetic Standards and Pastoral Reality

A fourth challenge concerns formation. Unlike Europe, where cathedral music programs have centuries of institutional support, Nigerian dioceses only recently began to standardize training for choirmasters, organists, and composers (Omojola 2021; Ekwueme 2004). Many composers work intuitively, drawing from indigenous

³ Basil Okeke, Online Interview with authors 24 October, 2025.

idioms and popular gospel styles without formal grounding in liturgical norms. This leads to immense creativity but also uneven quality control (Umezina 2010; Agbo 2012).

Pastorally, however, congregations gravitate toward simpler melodies and accessible refrains—features abundant in Nnam’s repertoire. The tension between scholarly expectations for polyphonic refinement and pastoral demands for singability appears in numerous diocesan debates (Agbo & Sylvanus 2020; Ayeotan 2022). Scholars such as Nzewi warn that superficial mimicry of African rhythms—without understanding their cultural logic—results in “misfitted hybrids” (Nzewi 1999). Conversely, pastoral theologians argue that overly “classical” liturgical music alienates ordinary worshippers (Agbo 2021, Ehusani 2012; Uche 2020). Jude Nnam’s *Obi Eze Chukwu* fits into a good hybridisation of highlife and calypso with native air in a most solemn and acceptable liturgical form. The YouTube link below shows a studio performance of this piece that has enjoyed so wide circulation in the Nigerian Sacred musical space. See musical examples below:

OBI-EZE CHUKWU DI NSO

Moderato ♩ = 75 JUDE NNAM

REFRAIN

Doh is Db | d'. d'. s. s. | l. l. s. | m. :- | : m. s. | d. d. | l. f. s. m. | r. r. :- | : m'

SOPRANO

E-be a bu e-be di e- gvu! N-ke a bu U-lo N-so Chu kwu, O-

| s. s. m. m. | f. f. m. | d. :- | : d. t. | l. :- | d. d. d. d. | d. d. t. s.

ALTO

E-be a bu e-be di e- gvu! O bu U-lo N-so Chu kwu, O-

| m'. m'. d'. d'. | d'. d'. :- | d'. d'. s. | m. :- | r. m. :- | l. l. l. l. | s. s. :- | : d'

TENOR

E-be a di e-bu-be! E-be di e- gvu! U-lo N-so Chu kwu, O-

| d'. d'. d. d. | f. f. :- | s. s. m. d. :- | m. d. | r. r. r. r. | s. s. :- | : d.

BASS

E-be a di N-so! E-be di e- gvu! O bu U-lo N-so Chu kwu, O-

5 | m'. d'. s. s. | l. l. l. | s. :- | d'. s. l. s. | f. l. m. f. | r. r. :- | d. d. :- | : -

n'u - zo n-ke e-li - gwe. A-g'a-kpo ya, O-bi - e - ze Chu-kwu di Nso.

| s. s. m. m. | f. f. f. | m. :- | d. :- | - d. d. d. t. | t. t. :- | s. s. :- | : -

n'u - zo n-ke e-li - gwe. O - bi - e - ze Chu-kwu di Nso.

| d'. d'. d'. d'. | d'. d'. d'. | d'. :- | s. l. ta. | l. l. l. l. | s. s. :- | f. m. :- | : -

n'u - zo n-ke e-li - gwe. O - bi - e - ze Chu-kwu di Nso.

| d. m. | f. f. | d. :- | r. m. :- | f. f. f. f. | s. s. :- | d. d. :- | : -

n'u - zo nk'e - li - gwe. O - bi - e - ze Chu-kwu di Nso.

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Looking at the musical excerpt of *Obi Eze Chukwu* provided above bar 1 - 4 show a beautiful repetition of *ebe di egwu* (the theme of solemnity of the temple/ place of worship in such a beautiful and gracious way that suits the *vox et mens* (sound and meaning) of the liturgy while still adopting a gentle calypso rhythmic style.

Unregulated Circulation and Canonisation of Popular Pieces

Finally, the digital age has accelerated the dissemination of compositions far beyond diocesan oversight. WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels, and choir social media networks now function as de facto publishing houses. As DeNora's work on music as "social technology" suggests, songs that circulate widely can quickly shape collective religious consciousness, regardless of theological vetting (DeNora 2000). Jude Nnam's meteoric rise exemplifies this phenomenon: his pieces spread through choir workshops, online platforms, and informal networks long before diocesan liturgical commissions could evaluate them. See below also Jude Nnam's *Obi Eze Chukwu* circulated in Social media apps like Spotify.

The result is a de facto canon of popular Nigerian Mass music—much of it orthodox, some of it needing refinement, all of it deeply influential—emerging from the bottom up rather than from hierarchical approval. The tension between charismatic popularity and institutional regulation remains one of the defining pastoral challenges of Nigerian post-Conciliar liturgical music.

The Jude Nnam Phenomenon

Stylistic Signatures

Jude Nnam's music is often described as "African Catholic minimalism." His trademarks include: Call-and-response between cantor and chorus; Ostinato refrains that anchor congregational participation; Pentatonic/modal melodies common in Igbo folk idioms; Economy of melodic material, avoiding excessive complexity; Hybrid textures blending Western harmonies with African rhythms.

These features align with what Nketia (2005) describes as Africa's "participatory music model," enabling choirs and congregations to internalise melodies quickly. Another very good example for our study here will be Jude Nnam's most popular Communion Song "Naranum Rie". The YouTube link is provided below.

Pastoral Impact

Across dioceses such as Onitsha, Enugu, Nsukka, and Port Harcourt, Nnam's compositions have achieved extraordinary acceptance. His settings of the Gloria, Sanctus, Great Amen, and Offertory pieces ("Olisa Buluwa", "Omelum", "Chineke Mee Ka Mụọ Nso") are staples of choir repertoires. Choir directors praise his music for its learnability, theological clarity, and cultural resonance (Agu 2016; Ofoego 2020).

Theological and Aesthetic Questions

Despite his popularity, Nnam's works provoke critical questions:

- i. Do repetitive African rhythmic patterns risk reducing solemnity?
- ii. When does dance exceed "ritual expression" and become performance?

- iii. How can dioceses regulate quality without suppressing creativity?
- iv. To what extent may vernacular idioms reshape Eucharistic atmosphere?

These questions mirror Vatican II's tension: unity of worship vs. cultural diversity.

While the preceding sections have demonstrated that Jude Chika Nnam's liturgical output represents a significant response to the post-Vatican II call for inculturation in Nigerian Catholic worship, his popularity and stylistic distinctiveness also invite critical theological and aesthetic scrutiny. Inculturation, as articulated by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent magisterial documents, is never a license for unregulated creativity; rather, it is a disciplined process that seeks a faithful integration of cultural expression and ecclesial normativity (Sacrosanctum Concilium §§37–40; Chupungco, 1992). Within this framework, Nnam's works raise important questions that mirror the broader tensions of post-conciliar liturgical reform—particularly the balance between vitality and reverence, participation and contemplation, cultural expressiveness and ritual restraint.

Do repetitive African rhythmic patterns risk reducing liturgical solemnity?

Repetition, when evaluated within African musical epistemologies and Catholic liturgical theology, does not inherently undermine solemnity. Vatican II emphasizes that sacred music must serve the liturgical action and promote the “full, conscious, and active participation” of the faithful (Sacrosanctum Concilium §14). In many African musical traditions, repetition functions as a contemplative and participatory strategy that facilitates communal synchronization, embodied prayer, and sustained attentiveness rather than monotony (Nketia, 1974; Nzewi, 2007).

Concerns about diminished solemnity arise primarily when rhythmic density or performative intensity overshadows the sacramental focus of the rite. Liturgical discernment, therefore, requires a functional mapping of rhythm to ritual moment. Repetitive rhythmic patterns are most pastorally appropriate in processional contexts and congregational acclamations—such as the Gloria, Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation, and Great Amen—where they reinforce collective assent and praise (General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM], §§48, 79). By contrast, moments that demand heightened contemplative stillness, particularly the Eucharistic Prayer and Consecration, call for musical restraint, text-centered delivery, and reduced rhythmic propulsion (Benedict XVI, 2007).

Safeguards for preserving solemnity include fidelity to approved liturgical texts, ensuring doctrinal clarity (Redemptionis Sacramentum §38), gestural discipline that subordinates musical energy to ritual meaning, and structural balance that alternates rhythmic vitality with contemplative spaciousness. When governed by these principles, repetitive African rhythmic patterns can deepen reverence and participation while preserving the transcendence intrinsic to Eucharistic worship.

When does dance exceed “ritual expression” and become performance?

The distinction between ritual expression and performance is determined by intention, context, and liturgical orientation. Ritual movement in worship is ordered toward prayer, participation, and symbolic enactment of the rite, whereas

performance becomes problematic when it is self-referential, exhibitionist, or distractive (Sacramentum Caritatis §42). Within African religious cultures, bodily movement is integral to worship and functions as an extension of sung prayer and communal response (Mbiti, 1990; Onyeji, 2004).

Nevertheless, Catholic liturgical norms consistently stress that no form of movement should compete with or obscure the Eucharistic action itself (GIRM §§42, 160). Consequently, dance-inspired gestures may be appropriate during entrance processions, offertory rites, or recessional moments, but they are theologically inappropriate during the proclamation of the Word or the Eucharistic Prayer (Redemptionis Sacramentum §79). Proximity to the altar and the moment of consecration thus becomes a decisive criterion in discerning legitimacy.

A sustainable pastoral response requires diocesan governance structures involving liturgists, clergy, and musicians who collaboratively articulate norms, review new practices, and provide formation rather than punitive restriction. Such an approach reflects the guidance of *Varietates Legitimae*, which insists that inculturation must proceed under episcopal authority and ecclesial discernment, not individual preference (§§37–40).

How can dioceses regulate quality without suppressing creativity?

Post-conciliar liturgical theology envisions regulation not as artistic repression but as formative guidance that safeguards the sacred while enabling authentic cultural expression. John Paul II (2003) affirms that creativity, when properly oriented, belongs intrinsically to the Church's living tradition. The challenge for dioceses is therefore to develop evaluative mechanisms that uphold theological integrity, musical dignity, and ritual coherence without enforcing stylistic uniformity.

Effective regulation rests on three interrelated strategies: formation, governance, and collaboration. First, sustained liturgical-musical education for composers, choir directors, and clergy – integrated into seminaries and diocesan programs – ensures informed creativity grounded in sacramental theology (Ruff, 2007). Second, diocesan liturgical music commissions can evaluate compositions for textual accuracy, theological clarity, and ritual suitability in line with *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §121. Third, structured partnerships between composers and liturgists – through workshops, commissions, and peer review – encourage innovation within ecclesial accountability (Westermeyer, 1998).

Rather than stifling creativity, such frameworks foster what Chupungco (1992) describes as “disciplined inculturation,” preserving cultural vitality while maintaining the sacred character of the rites. Transparent review processes and opportunities for revision further prevent arbitrary exclusion and encourage artistic maturation within ecclesial communion.

To what extent may vernacular idioms reshape Eucharistic atmosphere?

Vernacular language and musical idioms stand at the heart of Vatican II's pastoral vision, enabling intelligibility, participation, and cultural resonance (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* §36). When carefully integrated, vernacular idioms can deepen Eucharistic engagement without compromising sacramental mystery. The decisive

issue is not their use but their theological precision, musical dignity, and ritual framing.

Magisterial directives emphasize that vernacular texts must remain faithful to the Latin *editio typica*, doctrinally precise, and musically suitable for prayer (*Liturgiam Authenticam* §§20–25). Musical settings should support reverent pacing and avoid trivialization through excessive popularization detached from sacred ethos (Benedict XVI, 2007). Continuity with chant principles—such as textual primacy, modal stability, and restrained ornamentation—anchors vernacular music within the Church’s liturgical soundscape (Saliers, 2007).

In the Nigerian context, vernacular inculturation offers significant pastoral benefits, including enhanced comprehension, stronger communal identity, and deeper affective participation. These benefits must, however, be balanced by rigorous review processes, pilot implementations, and catechetical accompaniment to prevent fragmentation of Eucharistic prayer (Chupungco, 1992). Properly governed, vernacular idioms do not diminish the Eucharistic atmosphere but enable the liturgy to “take flesh” within local culture while remaining fully Catholic (*Varietates Legitimae* §21).

Taken together, these theological and aesthetic questions underscore that Jude Nnam’s liturgical significance lies not merely in stylistic innovation but in the broader ecclesial challenge of negotiating fidelity and creativity in post-conciliar Nigerian worship. His work thus becomes a lens through which the ongoing task of liturgical inculturation may be critically and constructively evaluated.

Nnam as a Hermeneutic of Inculturation

Nnam demonstrates that inculturation is not merely the insertion of African instruments, but the crafting of a theologically conscious musical language. His compositions maintain liturgical clarity even when borrowing from folk forms, embodying Shorter’s (1988) insistence that inculturation requires “critical adoption, not mere absorption.”

Sir Jude Chika Nnam: A Brief

Sir Jude Chika Nnam (PhD), born on November 10, 1965, in Umunnaugwu, Amechi, Awkunanaw, Enugu State, Nigeria, is a transformative figure in Catholic liturgical music. Raised in a devout Catholic family, he displayed an extraordinary musical gift from an early age, composing melodies and harmonies before formal training. His faith and discipline, woven into daily life, shaped his identity as a composer, conductor, educator, and cultural ambassador.

Jude Nnam is one of the most influential composers of contemporary Catholic liturgical music in southeastern Nigeria. Trained primarily through choir practice, parish workshops, and sustained engagement with indigenous Igbo musical traditions, Nnam emerged within the post-Vatican II generation of composers shaped by the Church’s call for inculturation. His works gained prominence from the late 1990s onward through diocesan choir seminars, liturgical celebrations, and later digital platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp, which accelerated their circulation beyond local ecclesial boundaries.

Nnam pursued formal music study at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), where he honed composition, orchestration, and choral arrangement under renowned Nigerian scholars. To deepen his mastery of Western classical music, he further trained at Trinity College of Music, London, focusing on theory, conducting, and performance. He continued his academic journey at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, where he graduated with a doctor of philosophy, specialising in African music and ethnomusicology, exploring how indigenous sounds could enrich contemporary worship.

Nnam's compositional output includes Mass settings, communion hymns, acclamations, and devotional songs widely used across dioceses such as Onitsha, Enugu, Aba, Nsukka, and Port Harcourt. His music is characterised by concise melodic structures, antiphonal textures, pentatonic and modal inflections, and rhythmic patterns influenced by Igbo folk music and Nigerian highlife. While largely composed for SATB choir with instrumental accompaniment, his works are frequently adapted for varying parish resources.

Beyond composition, Jude Nnam functions as a cultural mediator within Nigerian Catholic worship, negotiating between pastoral accessibility and liturgical expectation. His music has attracted both enthusiastic endorsement and critical scrutiny, making him a central figure in contemporary debates on liturgical solemnity, popular idioms, and ecclesial authority in post-Conciliar Nigeria.

Conclusion

The renewal of Catholic liturgical music in Nigeria remains among the most dynamic outcomes of Vatican II, a vitality that continues to shape worship, pedagogy, and cultural imagination. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC 119) catalyzed a spectrum of responses—creative experimentation and principled resistance alike—embodied in the Jude Nnam phenomenon. Nnam's compositions render African musical idioms accessible within liturgical spaces, inviting congregational participation, while simultaneously provoking sustained reflection on solemnity, decorum, and ecclesial regulation. This tension is not a destabilizing rupture but a productive dialogue between inherited Roman forms and lived Nigerian sacramental life.

Viewed through the lens of inculturation, Nnam's work can be read as an authentic realization of the Council's vision: a liturgy that is culturally intelligible and theologically robust. His approach demonstrates that inculturation need not erode reverence; with clear ecclesial guidance, transparent norms, and ongoing artistic integrity, it can enrich the worship life of the faithful. The resulting soundscapes make the mystery of the Eucharist more intelligible to contemporary worshippers without sacrificing doctrinal clarity or liturgical order. This aligns with the broader Nigerian church music trajectory, situating local creativity within a shared ecclesial plane rather than in opposition to it (Anizoba 2004; Ekwueme 2018; Ofoego 2020).

Nigerian Catholic liturgical music now stands at a decisive crossroads. The path forward must weave structured choir formation with sustained collaboration between composers and liturgists, clarifying episcopal norms on dance, instruments, and performance practice. It also requires robust scholarly engagement

with indigenous musical forms to inform policy, pedagogy, and pastoral practice. The Jude Nnam example points toward a mature synthesis: a liturgy in which Nigerian worshippers hear the voice of Christ in their own musical language, within the living tradition of His Church. This synthesis does not amount to cultural capitulation but to a faithful adaptation that honors both ecclesial reverence and African expression.

If the Church is to steward this discernment responsibly, formation initiatives must be prioritized. Diocesan-level programs for choirs and liturgical ministers should be complemented by formal channels for ongoing collaboration between composers and liturgists. Episcopal guidance on permissible musical idioms and gestures – especially in relation to dance and instrumentation – needs continual refinement in dialogue with regional practice. Finally, sustained scholarly inquiry into indigenous musical forms will strengthen normative decision-making and enrich the broader conversation on inculturation. The Jude Nnam phenomenon thus illuminates a future in which African Catholic liturgy is neither a mere imitation of European models nor an uncritical adoption of popular culture, but a mature synthesis – one in which Nigerian worshippers reverently hear the salvific voice of Christ in a genuinely local register.

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