

# Body Symbol in Christian and African Worship: Challenges For Celebrants And Participants Today

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## **Abstract**

This paper is entitled, "Body Symbol in Christian and African Worship: Challenges for Celebrants and Participants Today". The work underscores that it is fitting that the participants and the liturgical assembly would use their bodies to worship in accordance with the ancient practice of the Church. The need to integrate the body symbol in Christian worship is very important. This is evident in the various liturgical and sacramental rites being performed in unthinking, mechanical manner and disparity of gestures with the body. To remedy the situation, the study employs the descriptive and analytical approaches of body symbol in worship. The findings shows a high level of ignorance by some celebrants and participants on the teachings of Second Vatican Council for active, conscious and full liturgical participation. To this end, the paper recommends catechesis for a renewed zeal on the African ritual symbolism of the body since it is not alien to them. Both celebrants and participants must conduct themselves becomingly with liturgical decorum by responding, praying and worshipping. For if Christian worship is to have its full effects, those who come to it must have proper dispositions, tuning their minds, bodily movements and voices in prayer form to cooperate with the heavenly grace.

**Keywords:** Ritual, Body, Symbol, Christian, Catholic, Worship, Celebrants, Participants

## **1. Introduction**

In his classical book, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, Ejizu (1986, p.166) rightly observes that, "there is need to pay greater attention to the field of religious symbolism and rituals as a whole since these play key roles in the socio-religious experience of the traditional African... they provide very valuable entry-points into the heartland of the respective cosmological ideas, belief systems and value scales which they enshrine." One common feature in both natural and revealed religions is the observance of rituals and bodily movements. Together with myths and symbols, rituals and bodily movements not only define the belief

system but also provide the pathway to direct the liturgical life of the worshipping community. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, in his celebrated work, *Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*, engages the reader in a discussion on the notion of human movement in general, integrating bodily movements as worship of God that involve the whole person. He (Uzukwu, 1997, p.41) calls rituals "unquestionable 'source documents' of any society." Uzukwu (1997, p. xi) puts across proposals of how the patterns of movement or gestural experience that belong to the Africans can become the Christian worship pattern for Africans.

Today, more than ever, the beauty of the mainstream Christian worship (especially Catholic) is seriously at a cross road. The uniformity of gestures and bodily postures during the liturgical celebrations in the Catholic liturgy which distinguish the Catholic Church (from other denominations) is being swept under the carpet. This scenario has forced the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), after its Second Plenary Meeting held in Akure from 8th to 16th September 2016, to issue a communiqué which strongly condemns and prohibits liturgical aberrations rocking havoc on Catholic worship in Nigeria. As decorum and orderliness are gradually fading away in the liturgy of the Church; today, liturgical celebrations witness manifestations of conflict of symbols and disparity in the actions, gestures and bodily postures. They all point to the liturgical ignorance in Nigeria and beyond. It is not just of high level of illiteracy, resulting in distorted understanding of the Christian practices, but blinded acceptance of stereotyped values and worship patterns. This is because many worshippers are ignorant of the doctrines, rituals and rites of the worship. Ejizu, quoted in Anagwo (2012<sup>a</sup>, p. xv), prophetically notes: "With liturgy invariably feeding into and oftentimes determining the tenor of people's spirituality, the need for a text like this that clarifies, at the same time as it refreshes our understanding of a key aspect of genuine religious experience, cannot be over-emphasized."

This paper therefore examines the body symbol in Christian and African worship and draws the challenges for celebrants and participants today, using the Nigerian situation as a case study. This is because if liturgy is to have its full effects, those who come to it must have proper dispositions, tuning their minds, bodily movements and voices in prayer form to cooperate with the heavenly grace (SC no. 11). To this effect, we shall begin by delineating the significance of body symbol in Christian worship. Afterwards, we shall discuss the human body as a cultic symbol in African worship. The challenges are real and urgent to understand the body symbol present in worship in order to participate actively, spiritually and responsibly in its celebration; hence, there is the clarion call for active participation to attain a more disciplined worship in Nigeria with the body symbol.

## 2. Body Symbol in Christian Worship

Respecting the wise counsel of Aristotle's rendition which says: *Initio disputandis definitione omnis est* (before any discourse, it is good to begin with the definition of terms), let us first explicate the basic term, body. By body we mean the whole physical structure of a human being or an animal. It is part of man's mysterious nature to possess life; he is described as a "living soul". For sure, he is alive only through the body. It is by means of body that life is perceptible and man can enter into relationship. According to Guardini quoted by Kunzler (2001, p. 99), "The quintessential symbolic relationship is that of body and soul. The human body is the analogy of the soul in the visible-corporeal order. If one were to wish to make bodily visible what the soul is to the spiritual, then the human body would be the result. This is the deepest meaning of the formula: *anima forma corporis*. In the body the soul translates itself into the corporeal, into its living 'symbol'."

From the perspective of biblical scholars, body is always one with the totality, an expression of the entire personality. The Old Testament has no single word for body. Words like *Belly* (cf. Mic 6:7) and *Flesh* (cf. Prov 5:11; Isa 10:18) were used interchangeably in translations. Hence, they do not use the word 'body' to express such ideas as a corporate body. Instead, 'people,' 'nation,' 'tribe' were more often the words used. For instance, Prophet Isaiah pictures the people of Israel, with 'vine,' not a body (Isa 5:1-7). However, the New Testament uses only one Greek word, *soma*, for body. It has one clear meaning, the physical body. We have some instances of this usage, for instance, the woman with the haemorrhage (cf. Mark 5:29) and the anointing of Jesus by Mary (cf. Mark 14:8). Thus by body we mean the centre of the total manifestation of a person in gestures. One cardinal element of gesture (both verbal and non-verbal) is that the self reveals itself, from head to toe, as one complex reality visible yet invisible, but also the centre of a complex universe of interaction.

There is the general understanding that Christian worship as a public offering of God expressed through postures, gestures, rituals, signs and bodily movements. Christians are people who have faith in Jesus Christ and the Most Blessed Trinity; they carry out worship to God, and bear witness to the One they believe in by living in love, service, forgiveness, community life, and virtuous living. The reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (1987, no. 7) emphasizes that the sacred liturgy is the public worship of the Church, Head and Members. It is an exercise of the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ who associates the Church with himself in his offer of adoration, praise and thanksgiving to God through the Father. When translated literally, "*worth-ship*", worship denotes honour, dignity, reverence and veneration. In its highest and now usual sense, it is the respect and reverence the human person gives to God

(Cooper, 1996). Christian worship thus refers to the due public respect, reverence and veneration rendered to God through Christ in form of rituals.

These rituals, in signs, postures and gestures, and whose deep meanings are expressed in worship, are often best couched in biblical inspirations and are not left to spontaneous inventions of the individual. But they are determined by the constant liturgical laws and norms which are based on the Apostolic and Christian practice (Nwabekee, 1995, p.29). Very importantly, Christian worship is a celebration that is enshrined in signs and bodily symbols, and displayed in actions and postures. Both celebrants and participants need to perceive the value at their deepest level of significance. This is true because they "not only presuppose faith, but by words and the elements of the rite they also nourish, strengthen and express it" (SC no.59). The Council Fathers through the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in *Celebratione Missae* maintain that, "in the celebration of Mass, all in the assembly gathered for Mass have an individual right and duty to contribute their participation in ways differing according to the diversity of their orders and functions. It means that every member of the assembly is called to a "full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations" (SC no.14).

The body is destined for glorification of God since it is already the temple of the Holy Spirit by virtue of baptism. It is in line with the human body that the Bible refers to believers as "the body of Christ" which embraces both the sense of a "body" being in a congregation or assembly and in a figurative sense. One of the phraseologies denotes "Body of Christ" as the symbol of the Church (worshipping assembly). Paul expresses this understanding in some of his letters thus: "Now you (the Church) are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor 12:27). "He (Christ) is the head of the body, the Church" (Col 1:18,24; see also Rom 12:4-5; Eph 1:23). Lang (1989, p.452) rightly affirms that the phrase 'Mystical Body of Christ' refers to the reality. He uses it to identify the Catholic Church founded by Christ as an expansion and continuance of the Incarnation.

Remarkably, the body symbol in Christian worship encompasses the Eucharistic bread which represents the Body of Christ. Thus we hear Jesus explaining to his followers, "Truly, I say to you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Here the Eucharist represents the Body of Christ which nourishes for eternal life. The body is also expressed as representing the temple. Paul and others comment that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; "for we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1-5). He corroborates this understanding when he states that: "You are the temple of God, and that the

Spirit of God dwells in you. If any man defies the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy and you are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16-17) [Stephen, 2015, p.49].

Generally, the use of bodily gestures in prayer among the Christian assembly is a symbolic imitation of Christ Himself who in prayer lifted His eyes in heaven, knelt down to pray and also used gestures as a means to perform His miracles. He taught by means of such gestures as the washing of the feet of the disciples, and who finally offered His entire body in the perfect act of worship on the Cross. Christian prayer demands a profound engagement of the human body, not only because of the composite and social nature of man, but also because the Word became flesh and gave man a share in the social life of the Trinity, expressed in the communal life of the mystical body.

### **3. Forms of Body Language in the Liturgy**

Body language expresses how one feels by the way one sits, stands, moves, dances, bows etc as opposed to oral communication, by words. They are filled with a lot of symbolic expressions, projecting deeper reality about the faith celebrated in worship. Thus the expressions of these postures resulting to gestures used, speak out meaningful messages for the worshippers and their theological bases are found in the Scriptures.

Dance, for instance, is a remarkable act of bodily expression in the liturgy. Music is more often than not demonstrated through body movement otherwise called dance. Dance is to move the feet and body rhythmically in time to music. The gesticulation with body movement speaks volumes of the joy of the person(s) who is rendering the music or song. Old men and women have a way of dancing, so also youths and children. Each age bracket has a peculiar way; although, there is no hard and fast rule about this mannerism. Dance can be of two forms, namely, for profane celebrations and sacred functions. The latter is termed sacred dance. Sacred dance is therefore linked with sacred functions in the exercise of worship. The body movement is in a dignified manner to the rhythmic sound of the praise of God being rendered at the moment of adoration. Liturgical music situates the dance in the lifting of the heart and mind as the gesticulation of the body gives ascent to the service of the Christian worship. For Anagwo (2012<sup>b</sup>, p.232-233), dance would rightfully find a place within worship, engaging the assembly in a revelation of the divine, thus engendering a deeper and more natural communion between the assembly and God.

Standing is an outstanding act of bodily expression and is not just arbitrary. The posture of standing symbolizes respect, reverence, resurrection as well as joy. For instance, in 1 Samuel 1:26, Hannah said: "I am the woman who was standing

here in your presence, praying to the Lord." There is a symbolic association between prayer and body gestures or postures. Psalm 141 speaks about the "lifting of my hand" at the evening sacrifice. In the New Testament and in the time of Jesus, standing was the ordinary posture for prayer among the Jews. It is the posture of those who await the return of Christ and the chosen in heaven who stand and give thanks to God (Rev 7:9; 15:2). It is used at the beginning and end of the Eucharistic liturgy as a gesture of respect for the clerics who represent Christ and during the proclamation of the Gospel. Generally, all prayers at the liturgical celebration in the Catholic Church are said standing. In all, standing is observed at the entrance hymn through the opening prayer, at the Alleluia before the Gospel, during the proclamation of the gospel, during the Creed and prayer of the faithful and from the prayer over the offerings until the end of the celebration.

Another bodily expression is sitting. The posture of sitting at the Catholic liturgy is used to dispose one to be attentive, in order to listen and meditate. Sitting signifies attentiveness. Sitting should be at the service of recollection. Our bodies should be relaxed, so that our hearing and understanding are unimpeded. This is predicated on the witnesses of the early Church where preaching is listened to while sitting down (cf. Acts 20:9). Those who practice yoga meditation advance their meditation and auto-transcendence with the posture. At Eucharistic (Catholic) liturgy, it is used during the readings before the Gospel, the responsorial psalm, at homily and during the offering of the gifts. After Communion, it is fitting for one to sit down too during the silent period. Interestingly, the pulpit used to be called "preaching chair" (*Predigtstuhl*) in German which connotes that preachers used to preach from their chair. This is understandably situated within the context of a bishop as he teaches from his "*cathedra*."

There is also the bodily expression of kneeling. It symbolizes adoration, reverence, supplication and total submission. Kneeling grafted in the Roman liturgy was borrowed from German culture to express humility, penance and adoration. Instances abound in the Scriptures where Christ prayed while kneeling (cf. Luke 22:41; Mark 14:35). It is also used during Catholic worship at the solemn part of the liturgy especially at the Eucharistic prayer and for the reception of Communion. We also have the bodily gesture of a simple or a profound bow. It points to the internal dimension of acknowledgement, adoration, veneration and submission. This is the gesture of the tax collector, who cannot endure the gaze of God and so bows before God. The gesture of humble love, in the washing of feet, in which He kneels at our feet is essential to faith (cf. John 13:12-14). All in all, Christian worship does not celebrate emptiness instead it finds meaning in the mystery it celebrates. As every action, posture and gesture in liturgical celebrations are symbolic and not left to

spontaneous inventions of the individual but determined by constant laws of the Church. In the Catholic pattern of worship, there is a trend towards conformism and uniformity. Yet, in the *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa*, Pope Saint John Paul II (1995, no.103) invites Africans to develop their own ideologies and liturgies through sharing and publishing as a way of promoting inculturation of the Christian faith on the continent. Thus liturgy is not to be produced for the people but with the people.

#### **4. The Human Body as a Cultic Symbol in African Worship**

According to Ejizu (1986, p.2), "In African traditional world, symbolism equally occupies a position of signal importance. And for Africans, symbols are mostly religious since they point to something real or to a structure of the world." Indeed Turner (1981, p.19), in his description of symbol, affirms that: "The symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains its specific properties of ritual behaviour; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context." African religion has a rich tapestry of symbols, prayers, rituals, attitudes, sacrifices, beliefs and worldview. Authentic liturgical inculturation must focus on them. Inculturation in Africa and within the Catholic Church will stay with or without globalization and that only the methods would change according to the context. Each culture has something positive to enrich the Christian message by way of liturgical inculturation, in order to permeate the being of the believers who must necessarily worship God. The cultural values and genius of the people have a role to play. Specifically, in Africa, the body is the primary cultic symbol. Evidently, the body, the mind and soul constitute a human person and whatever the body does or undergoes affects the integrity of the whole person. When the body undergoes certain ritual purity, it goes beyond the physical to integrate spiritual undertone. In Christian liturgy, ritual dancing, prostration and kneeling are all carried out by means of the body.

An African experience of body differs from both the Greco-Roman antiquity and its adaptation in medieval Christendom. Africans do not experience the body as a prison for the soul, an indicator of "fallen-ness", and consequently, an instrument of sin. The African experience of bodily gestures displays how humans in the universe grasp as a totality. In African worship and cultures, people undergo bodily rituals such as circumcision, the tattooing of the face, removing of the upper or lower incisors, shavings, smearing of the entire body with ashes, soil, cow dung or oils during puberty or at other significant rites. The shaving of the hair during mourning of a deceased relative, the cleansing ritual, the wearing of masks and charms, protective beads around the neck, arms or the waist are for the therapeutic and consecratory purpose according to the belief of some cultures in Africa (Lukwata, 2011, p.14-15).

Uzukwu (1997, p. 265-321) introduces the various African gestural experience of God and how they can become homely enough as the ideal for African

Christianity. Initiation rite, for instance, is done to awaken the person to the surroundings, for example, the facial and bodily markings as well as one's exposure to the general hazards of nature (Lukwata, 2011, p. 160). The body is swayed forward and backward, jumping up and down or from side to side. These movements create concentration in singing and during prayer. The laying of hands on the human body symbolizes a transmission of power, blessing or exorcism. It is practised especially during initiation rites, in the course of prayer of healing and in marriage rituals, etc (Lukwata, 2011, p. 161). Elsewhere, we argued that in the Igbo traditional marriage passage rite in Nigeria, for instance, there is an analogous image that is sometimes created in the process of the rite. The bride and groom sit on and off the laps of their parents as a symbol of the rites of new birth (Anagwo, 2016). A new rhythm of life starts when the parents pass on the drumbeat of life, through the symbolic handing down of the torch of life. From now on, the two may begin their own family (Chibuko, 1999, p.167).

Lukwata (2011, p.15) avers that to obtain favours such as bodily healing, offspring, a rich harvest and long life, traditional Africans are required to fast and abstain from certain foods and drinks. For instance, those who officiate at traditional rituals are required to temporarily practice sexual abstinence. Expectant mothers or those undergoing initiation may abstain from eating certain foods, for the sake of remaining wholesome. Human beings make symbols and rituals in the sense that they construct meaning from them as they construct sentences. In the tropical regions of Africa, there is the bodily gesture of silence at worship with raffia palm in the mouth. Bodily movements in the cajoling of the spirit in Africa abound. In South Africa, a man must not touch his wife in bed with his right hand. If he does, it is believed that he will have no strength to fight a war. It is a tradition among Arabs not to allow the left hand touch the food, because it is used for unclean purposes, and the right for all honorable purposes. In Igbo land, during the sacrificial meal, each participant (worshipper) dips his/her hand in the meal. 'Aka' (Hand), among Igbos of Nigeria, is a significant part of the human body located at the end of the arm, including the fingers and thumb. Its uses and applications vary, but greatly to aid man/woman in carrying out their daily activities and enhance living as well as a language tool. When people are invited to give a hand, it could easily mean positively to give applause for something done. It points to acceptance, approval, and acknowledgement. Negatively, to give somebody a hand could be to slap the person, showing disapproval, annoyance, be an accomplice, to mention but a few. To engage in a lasting bond of marriage, one uses the expression "Giving your hand in marriage". It is a pledge that they would be faithful to each other in their contracted covenant. To give a hand-shake is a form of greeting which could be interpreted as a form of forgiveness or welcome/acceptance.

Every human person has not merely a need but a right to worship God in an integrated manner, using culture and worldview as the instrument into the general way of life of the people, their culture, history, their joys and sorrows as well as their hope. They have the right to talk and relate to God in their own language, symbols, values, songs, gestures, postures, etc. Understandably, African Christians see worship as a means to display their deep reverence of the mystery revealed in the economy of salvation. Turner (1981, p.59) argues that there has been a recent revival of interest in what Durkheim designates as "primitive forms of classification," a revival where prominent names like Levi-Strauss, Leach and Evans-Pritchard had been recurrent. Attention has been focused on the dichotomous classification in kingship and religious systems. As *homo religiosus* (religious being) within the purview of Christian and African religions, man/woman always desires to worship the divine, through ritual language expressed in postures, gestures, symbols, signs, formularies and bodily movements. For Pope Benedict XVI (2000, p. p.19), "The bodily gesture itself is the bearer of the spiritual meaning which is precisely that of worship. Without the internal disposition at worship, the bodily gestures would be meaningless, while the spiritual act must of its very nature, because of the psychosomatic unity of man, it must express itself in the bodily gesture ... when kneeling becomes merely external, a mere physical act, it becomes meaningless." Certainly, the means and use of bodily movements are purposeful because they are rich in meanings and are meant to teach something vital for worship through the act of reverence, thanksgiving and praise.

## **5. Body Language and Active Participation**

One of the laudable aims of the liturgical reforms is the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council that the faithful (*fideles universi*) should join in the liturgical celebration in order to be led to transformation through full, active, conscious and socio-communitarian participation. To be "full" in this sense means to be engaged, alert and attentive with the entire faculties. Another adjective of participation is "plenary", that is, full. It presupposes involvement with every component of one's humanity. One must respond to the demands of the celebration by giving assent to the reign of God in his/her life. Active participation demands the whole being (body, soul and spirit) in the worship. The participants are not simply spectators or silent observers but doers in action by responding, praying and worshipping.

To be "conscious" is another form of responsible participation. The participant must be engaged in the liturgical celebration, fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by its effects (Anagwo, 2009, p.123). Lastly, "socio-communitarian participation" means that the active, full and conscious participation must be exercised within the community of

believers. Its effects should over-flow into the society where the fruitful participation is tested to know the worth and value. Balanced pattern of liturgical participation is an aid to realize this objective. In this sense, the thrust of liturgical theories and praxes is that the observance of rituals and symbols will not only define the belief system but also direct the liturgical life of the worshipping assembly. So, active participation means sharing or taking part in something. The liturgical assembly is encouraged to fully, actively and consciously take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons and songs as well as by actions, gestures and bodily movements (SC 30). In the spirit of liturgical participation advocated by the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, there is always need for it to be all-involving. "The participants are not simply spectators or silent observers but doers in the action by responding, praying and worshipping. The Council Fathers insist that one who attends liturgical worship should be actively involved in the celebration" (SC 14). The participation must engage the whole person with all the faculties required: mind, heart and soul as well as body with tongue and lips, hands and feet, arms and legs, etc.

The severity of the crisis we are faced with today on passive participation, evidenced in the various liturgical and sacramental rites being performed in unthinking and mechanical manner with the body, challenges us to undo the liturgical ignorance, imbalance and misguided priority. Disparity in bodily gestures and actions does not only distort the essence of the liturgical celebrations, but also affect the beauty of the liturgy. Whereas proper gestures are followed during liturgical celebrations, the unity of the liturgy is manifested. Invariably, it leads to the unity of the sacrifice being offered. To achieve this, an indepth liturgical consciousness is possible through liturgical catechesis and formation on the true meaning of active participation. Every liturgical celebration ought to be understood as the lifting up of creation to God, the living memory of both creation and redemption as well as the sacrament of the cosmic Christ. The expression of the soul, if it is genuine, seeks at the same time an external physical manifestation and vice versa, the inner life is sustained by external acts, liturgical acts. In fact, body language plays vital role in this religious rite of Christian worship. As "liturgical", the "body" is first of all sacred before it qualifies for use in worship. As "worship", the "ritual" celebration should be reverential to all intents and purposes. As "public", the bodily movements, gestures, signs and symbols should not be left at individual's whims and caprices. With the spirit of Classical Roman Catholic Liturgy, body language in Christian worship should not be sacrificed on the altar of craze for post modernity. Decorum should be the moving principle for all liturgical bodily movements both for the celebrants and participants today. They should not be preferred to chaotic and meaningless bodily movements at worship. According to Hilary Okeke (2014, p.67), "Nothing therefore should

stand in the way of the liturgical celebration that is worthy, orderly, smooth, beautiful and spiritually-enriching."

## 6. Challenges for Celebrants and Participants Today

From the foregoing, Christian and African worship are characterized by a great variety and richness of bodily gestures, postures and symbolic expressions. They are direct and simple ways of giving expression to the heart and to one's commitment to live out African Christianity. The *Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments* (2002, p.25) states: "Without this interior aspect, symbolic gesture runs the risk of degenerating into empty customs or mere superstitions, in the worst cases." In the *Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, Fink (1990, p.504) affirms that "uniformity of posture is demanded by the communal nature of liturgical worship, the uniformity in standing, kneeling to be observed by all taking part is a sign of the community and unity of the assembly; it both fosters and expresses the spiritual attitude of those taking part." The Second Vatican Council on the Constitution on the Liturgy (SC no.30) states that: "To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes ..." It follows that bodily movements in Catholic worship have far-reaching significant challenges for the pastoral *cum* liturgical worship to the Church in Nigeria. To ensure that the ignorance surrounding the value is conquered by an in-depth liturgical mystagogical catechesis evolved, we are drawing out some challenges for the celebrants and participants today.

Firstly, there should be an appreciation of the bodily rituals by both the celebrants and participants who take part in the liturgical celebration. They should be recognised as sacred acts in worship exercised in the Church during celebration. The African (Nigeria in particular) liturgical background is richly endowed with spiritual values, rituals and symbols. Ostensibly, for some people, the Christian liturgies have not taken root in the African cultures because they neglected the cultic and spiritual life of the people on which their religion is actually rooted. It may therefore be necessary to reiterate that the Nigerian traditional religious background should be the basis for the spread of Christianity among Catholics of Nigeria.

Secondly, in all the bodily expressions and actions, there should be uniformity and orderliness in the exercise of these postures and gestures in worship. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) [2002, no.142] says "The uniformity is encouraged in standing, kneeling or sitting to be observed by all taking part is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the sacred liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those taking part." The practice of some kneeling while others are

standing should be discouraged. "Order," they say, "is the first law in heaven." There can be no better place to experience this than in earthly liturgy which is a foreshadowing of the heavenly liturgy.

Thirdly, in order to convince all the participants especially the clergy and the laity of the theology behind body language, there should be ongoing mystagogical catechises on the liturgical renewal and reforms as recommended by the Second Vatican Council. Proper use of this means will go a long way to carry everybody along, according to the mind of the Church who desires all to come to worship with full knowledge and participation in worship. If liturgy is to have its full effects, those who come to it must have proper dispositions, tuning their mind, bodily expressions and voices in prayer form to cooperate with the divine unction. Sluggish bodily movement, lacking decorum, should be eschewed to have the desired result. Full import of the spirituality of the body language should be enunciated to the faithful.

Fourthly and finally, the goal of Christian worship is the return of all created things to God their source (Rom 8:18-25). In Christian worship the mediator is Christ, but the full, conscious and active response of the participants are also required as the Second Vatican Council demanded (SC no.14). All the faithful who are baptized whether ordained or non-ordained are expected to explore this means of liturgical worship. By virtue of sacramental Baptism, which is the strongest theological basis of priestly people, they all share in the common priesthood of the faithful being part of the Mystical Body of Christ. In attendance at the liturgical worship, the venerable teachings of the Church emphasize this role of the priesthood by being actively involved. Pope Pius XII (1947, no.10) rightly puts it thus: "And there is no wonder that the faithful are accorded this privilege: by reason of their baptism, Christians are in the mystical Body and become by a common title members of Christ the Priest; by the "character" that is graven upon their souls when they are appointed to the worship of God, and therefore, according to their condition, they share in the priesthood of Christ Himself." There is therefore the need for a renewed zeal in the ritual symbolism of body with catechesis on it for celebrants and participants as a divine offering of the self in worship.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this paper, it has been pointed out that Christian and African worship do not only use mental prayers, but are also ritually expressed orally and with bodily movements. Most of the liturgical rites and rituals are made more meaningful by postures and gestures; thus, the words of the celebrants and participants are more intelligible. The paper also reveals that abuses and distractions of bodily movements harm the worship and the fruits of celebration in general. However, they can be handled with measures that include adherence to guidelines

regulating celebrations and catechesis on the dignity of the worshippers as priestly people, holy nation and people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into His own marvellous light (see 1 Pet 2:9). Bodily expressions and actions must be done with decorum, nobility, simplicity and solemnity.

The paper maintains the value of body symbol in Christian and African worship, as a contributory factor to genuine worship especially to all who wish to participate actively, responsibly and intelligibly. In the words of Uzukwu (1997, p.322), "Africans tune into the rhythm of life in the world bodily; the self in all its complexity is manifest bodily ... Consequently, the emerging Christian liturgies of Africa emphasize intense community participation with appropriate gestures." The task of liturgical inculturation according to Second Vatican Council (SC 37-40) is a challenge that calls for a good understanding of body symbol in Christian worship and a good history of human body as a cultic symbol in African worship, a ritual symbolism that is not new to them. Both celebrants and participants must conduct themselves becomingly with liturgical decorum by responding, praying and worshipping with the body rituals. For if Christian worship is to have its full effects, those who come to it must have proper dispositions, tuning their minds, bodily movements and voices in prayer form to cooperate with the divine grace.

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