

# The Beauty of the Cross: A Sacramental Aesthetics of the Crucifix in Liturgical Art

*Cosmas Ohufemi Aina*

## Abstract

The Cross is central to the liturgical setting in our Churches. This means that for any liturgical celebration, especially the Eucharist, to possess '*integritas*' (aesthetic perfection sacramentally), there should be a Liturgical Cross, which fulfills the criteria of the sacramental beauty, displayed prominently. This can assist the worshippers, as they attend Mass, to connect to the love of Christ who gave them his body and blood in the Eucharist remembering that he is the One who sacrificed himself for them on the Cross. To realise this, there is a single proposal to African liturgical artists: the crosses they carve and paint must fulfill the Thomistic criteria of '*claritas*,' '*proportio*,' and '*integritas*' since the Cross is not meant simply as a decorative ornament. It must depict the suffering Christ. The Cross not only conceals the glory of God, in its stark ugliness, but it also reveals it. The tendency to shy away from the suffering Christ is manifest in the preference for the figures of the resurrected Christ found in many of our sanctuaries today. Nigerian liturgical artists are challenged to represent to us the "man of sorrows, who is familiar with suffering." The passion and death of Jesus was necessary for him to enter into his glory and this must be clearly revealed in our depiction of the Cross.

## Introduction

There is also to be a Cross, with the figure of Christ upon it, either on the altar or near it, where it is clearly visible to the assembled congregation. It is appropriate that such a Cross, which calls to mind for the faithful the saving passion of the Lord, remain near the altar even outside of the liturgical celebration (GIRM, 2002, no. 308).

Since the Mass of the Catholic Church is focused on the representation of the sacrifice of Calvary, the sanctuary of each church is required to have a crucifix. This image can be very simple but realistic such as is seen in some old churches in Nigeria, or it can be of high artistic quality such as in great churches of Europe. Unfortunately, the crucifix has almost disappeared from many contemporary 'American-style' Catholic Churches. In many cases it has been replaced with a 'Resurrected Christ' (often without wounds), which does not fulfil the liturgical requirements, or it has been reduced to a simple processional Cross tucked discreetly in the corner once the procession has ended.

Pope Benedict XVI recently insisted on having a rather large and realistic crucifix placed near the altar when he celebrates Mass in St. Peter's Square and at other venues. For instance, during the World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, in 2005, the Holy Father insisted that a large crucifix be placed near the altar. To better appreciate this papal insistence, this article shall present the classical theology of the Cross especially as it is evocative of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. By focusing on the liturgical Cross depicting Christ in his unfathomable agony, we are drawn into his Passion as represented in the Eucharistic Mystery.

The Cross has a spiritual beauty even if the book of Isaiah describes him as the man without beauty. The Cross is beautiful because it reveals the divine love which motivated Christ to go to the Cross for us. When we see him, almost totally disfigured, we behold the ugliness of our sin and the glory of his love, shining through. It is when we "behold the Man", hanging on the Cross, that we are lifted up to contemplate heavenly realities and a glory which is beyond all created beauty. It is when evil did its worst in reducing the most beautiful of the 'sons of men' to a common criminal and outcast that we are most perfectly joined to the angels in the sanctus of Trinitarian praise.

### **The beauty of the Cross**

Ratzinger (2005) observes that the Scriptures offer us a paradox when it first describes Jesus as the most beautiful of the 'sons of men': "You are fairest of the children of men and grace is poured upon your lips" (Psalm 44), and then as the most unattractive: "He had neither beauty, nor majesty, nothing to attract our eyes, no grace to make us delight in him" (Is. 53:2). Ratzinger continues, "The appearance of the 'fairest of the

children of men' is so wretched that no one desires to look at him. Pilate presented him to the crowd saying "Behold the Man" to rouse sympathy for the crushed and battered Man, in whom no external beauty remained" (*ibid.*). This paradox is, of course, the key to a deeper kind of beauty than what can be perceived with the senses alone, although our Christian theology of beauty is Incarnational and appreciative of the human form of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints. Hence, Ratzinger refers us to the spiritual beauty or "Doxa" which emanated from Christ hanging on the Cross. What is revealed is Divine love shining through the crushed human form of the word made flesh.

The future Pope quotes from St. Augustine, Plato, and finally Nicholas Cabasilas in order to fathom the depth of this attraction of the wounded Christ for the human soul: "when men [sic.] have a longing so great that it surpasses human nature... it is the bridegroom who has smitten them with this longing. It is he who has sent a ray of his beauty into their eyes. The greatness of the wound already shows how the arrow has struck home; the longing indicates who has inflicted the wound" (*ibid.*). Ratzinger goes on to reflect on this beauty of the wounded Christ in the light of Hans Urs Von Balthasar's theology of beauty, stating "Being struck and overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction..... we must rediscover this form of knowledge" (*ibid.*).

Ratzinger maintains that Von Balthasar's theology of beauty was precisely focused on rediscovering this form of spiritual knowledge. Von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*, his seven-volume *opum*, is the key to his theological aesthetics. Hence, we will be drawing from there. Gawronski (2003) helps us to see the "Doxa" or glory which flows from Christ and his Image or Icon in Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics:

The heart of the passion of his work is beauty, but a transcendent beauty which is more properly called "glory". Glory, *Herrlichkeit* - Slava in the languages of much of Eastern Christianity: the search for what happened to the lost transcendental drives Balthasar's efforts. We find the word 'glory'- *kabod*, *Doxa* - running like a broad current throughout the Bible, both old and new testaments: the glory of the Lord at the ark, or on mount Sinai; the Glory of the Lord at Jerusalem Temple. In the new testament, the angels sing their "Gloria" at the birth of Jesus, and his glory is seen on Mt. Tabor, and then he

speaks of the glory to be revealed in His death and resurrection (37).

This idea of 'glory' has often been linked to the pouring of the Holy Spirit or the manifestation of the divinity of Christ as a radiation from his finite humanity. Gawronski comments, "Glory radiates from the incarnate one even as it has hovered over the loci of holiness in the Old Testament, but now it is a glory that will shine through the wounds of the Cross" (2003, 37). Here we see a partial resolution of the paradox of the glory of a man without beauty, which had nothing to attract us to him. It is a beauty that is Divine, but released from within and even necessarily manifested by the crushed human form of the Man/God Jesus. It is a beauty that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Indeed, the beauty is only perceived fully by those who have the eyes of faith: "who have eyes to see and ears to hear" in the expression of Jesus.

We can see the beauty of Christ revealed in two distinct but related ways in the Gospels: in the Transfiguration of Tabor and the Crucifixion of Calvary. The liturgies of both East and West are focused on these two mountains because the Glory of the Lord proceeding from those events is an anticipation of the fullness of glory revealed by the Resurrection of Jesus. And inasmuch as the Eucharistic liturgy is both the representation of Calvary and the foretaste of the Heavenly Liturgy, we will explore how the light of Tabor and the darkness of Calvary point to the lumen-Gloria of Heaven where we will see Christ as he is and be transformed from Glory to Glory by the spirit of God.

On Mt. Tabor, we see a pre-Passion manifestation of Jesus' Glory. For example in the Gospel of St. Luke we read,

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered and his raiment became dazzling white. And behold two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in Glory, and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they awakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him (Lk. 9:28-32).

This beautiful passage has often been used as a model, especially in the East, for the *Theophany* or glorious revelation of Divine Liturgy. On Mt.

Tabor, the Holy Spirit shines out from the glorified body of Christ and even from the glorified bodies of Moses and Elijah. This experience is similar to the Divine Liturgy where the icons of Jesus and the saints, the incense (the cloud), and the presence of the Father's voice in the liturgy reminds us that we have already entered into the life of heaven on earth. Yet these 'sacramental' images of the heavenly liturgy in our churches, the Holy Pictures, are precisely that – images. Through them we truly enter into communion with the divine, but heaven itself remains veiled and we await death and the light of glory so that we will be able to see God face to face in his Trinitarian Mystery.

This anticipated glory of our liturgy is hinted at in two ways in the Gospel passage cited above. Firstly, because Peter, James and John are heavy with sleep, and secondly because the cloud descends as Jesus is lost to their earthly vision. What is signified here is that without the keeping of vigil and prayer, we can miss the glory of the Lord even when He is present because of the heaviness of sleep (the same three apostles will sleep in the garden of olives). Even the Transfiguration is only an imperfect vision of the ultimate glory of Christ in heaven. Gawronski comments on this aspect of Tabor as it relates to the Divine Liturgy:

The Eastern Church tended to become the primary repository of the glory, as seen in the liturgy; even as it's spiritually focused greatly on vision, the Taboric light. But this light itself could become just a living museum of glory once seen, and celebrated 'gloriously'- yet somehow missing the living contact with the living God and living humanity. Although this overemphasis on the liturgy was countered by a radical monasticism, still that tradition focusing on the Taboric light, has run the risk of becoming, and times has become, a spiritually technologised Gnosis, an a-historical ontologism that sees the Cross dissolve in the light of resurrection (2003, 39).

This is not a heavy criticism of the Eastern liturgy whose focus on the Glory of Tabor is needed to counterbalance the secularism and rationalism of the modern world. However it introduces a note of caution so that we do not confuse the heavenly images of the liturgy with full entrance into heaven itself – the full vision of God which is beyond time where there is no need for a liturgy of meditation and imperfect images. It is for this reason that Eastern emphasis on the Glory of Tabor needs to be counterbalanced by the Western emphasis on the Holy

Sacrifice of the Mass. It is on the Cross that Jesus glorifies the Father by showing the depths of his love in the passion (John 17), and this glory radiates from the wounds of the Crucified Son - smiting us with a glory that is deeper than images. As Pope John Paul II reminded us, the church needs to breathe with both lungs of the East and West (*Redemptoris Mater* 34).

Hans Urs Von Balthasar was one of those who meditated deeply on the beauty and the glory of the Cross. For him it was the central point of the revelation of God, revealing the depth of the kenosis of the Son who did not "deem equality with God something to be grasped at" (Phil 2.6). The Son's kenosis is a manifestation of his Trinitarian love of the Father in the economy of salvation since the Father did not spare even his own Son, but gave him to us. The incarnation then is ordered to the crucifixion and to that ultimate abasement of the Son in death and the descent into 'hell'. Therefore, it is the Glory of the Son in Heaven which is manifested by the outpouring of his love on Calvary, the "glory which I had from you from before the beginning of the world" (John 17:5). The coincidence of this maximum of love (flowing from the very heart of the Trinity) with this maximum of evil (flowing from the black heart of hell and the collective human "NO!" to God) is what brings forth the glory at the crucifixion. Only God could have loved this much (to the end). Finally, Jesus breathed forth his spirit and from his wounded heart came out the blood and water of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist respectively. Von Balthasar (1986) writes,

The earthly close, which John terms the 'fulfillment' has been attained, is the giving forth of all that still lies most deeply within Jesus, the central point of the Eucharist of the Cross: the giving forth of the spirit on the one hand, and of the open and liquefied heart on the other. At Mk 15 :37, the spirit is simply breathed forth (Mt 27.50); Luke underlines this, when the Dying Son accomplishes his deed in prayer, 'father into your hands I commend my spirit' (Lk 23: 46a, following Ps 31.5); John is more explicit still; 'he bowed his head and gave up the spirit' ( John 19:30)... At the same time, 'blood and water' are set free in his pierced heart; in John, this is without any doubt understood sacramentally, and is joined with the spirit to form a triad (1 Jn. 5:6-8) that bears witness to Christ and to the church that has its birth from him. The place of his heart is open, empty, for all to enter: in this self-emptying, the kenosis has reached its fulfillment. Christ's body is Ezekiel's new Temple, from which

the spring of life streams forth (Ezek 47, cf. Zech 13:1, Rev 22:1); and the lifeblood of the slaughtered lamb, hitherto reserved for God alone, will for the future become the nourishment of the new Israel (226-227).

### **The beauty of the Cross reveals the sacramental truth of the sacrifice of the Mass**

What Von Balthasar describes above as the Eucharist of the Cross is significant in as much as the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist, is the very re-representation of the sacrifice of Calvary in sacramental form. Consequently, we see that the glory of the Cross, that kenosis of suffering which reveals the love of the Eternal Father through the wounded Heart of His Son, is also the glory of the Holy Eucharist. That is why the Church insists that a prominent crucifix be placed in the sanctuary of every Catholic Church (General Instruction of the Roman Missal *GIRM*, 308). Be it ever so humble or even roughly inartistic, the crucifix is that image which wounds the heart of human sinners and fascinates us with the love and the glory of the Divine King who humbled himself to die for love of us.

If the crucifix is pushed aside or forgotten in the liturgy, the Mass can be misunderstood as more than a foretaste of heaven (an Eternal Tabor) and less than the full kenosis of the Divine Son on Calvary and in the sacrifice of the Mass (which is rendered a mere communal meal). This popular liturgical trend to de-emphasis of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as understood by the whole tradition of East and West, in post-conciliar times has inevitably led to the trivialization of the liturgy in the west, the abandonment of the sacrament of penance, and the introduction of a profane spirit into the very sanctuary of God. As Jesus told Peter on his insistence that he should not be going to the Cross: "Get behind Me Satan!" (Mt.16:23), so we need to recognize that this flight from the Cross in trendy post-conciliar theology and liturgy is a sign of the demonic. This is not to say that the Holy Eucharist is not also a participation of the Heavenly Liturgy in which we join the worship of the angels and saints. Yet, if we as the pilgrim Church are on this side of death and judgment, it is the glory of the Cross which will inspire us to grow in Charity so as to be glorified with Him on the last day. The prominence of Christ Crucified in the sanctuary during the Holy sacrifice of the Mass helps us to participate actively by offering up our prayers, works, joys and

sufferings in union with His perfect sacrifice: “in the celebration of the Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people whom God has made his own, a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the spotless victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, and so that they may learn to offer themselves” (*GIRM*, 95).

There is another way that the image of the crucifixion is central to the understanding of the liturgy, which results from the fact that Heaven is in itself beyond all images and can only be reached by going through darkness. We saw how the cloud descended upon Jesus at the Transfiguration, and how He was lost to sight. This has been a central theme of the mystical tradition (e.g. *The Cloud of Unknowing*). If Heaven is beyond all concepts and forms, then we must travel through mystical darkness to arrive at the dawn of Easter Sunday and eternal life. Hence the light of Tabor must be engulfed by the dense darkness of Calvary and the night of sin. This darkness was referred to by Jesus as the “hour” of darkness, and it reached its culmination on Calvary where “there was darkness over the whole land” for three hours “while the sun's light failed” (Lk. 23:44). Such darkness is not only the result of moral evil or the sin of the world, but it is also the mystical night of lovers. Hence, the crucifix leads us into this Mystical night of darkness where we must leave behind us all to join our beloved in His death of love.

Von Balthasar (1986) reflects on this beauty of the Cross under the aspect of the dark night according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross. St John of the Cross was a poet who loved images, and a man who delighted in carving crucifixes. Yet he was a man who suffered for the love of God and went out to meet our Crucified Lord in the dark night of the soul. St. John wrote: “Whoever refuses to go out at night in search of the Beloved, but rather seeks him in his own comfort will not succeed in finding Him” (p. 120). The sacrifice of the Mass joins us to this mystical darkness of the Lord on the Cross, and we go out to meet him when we are intimately joined with him in Holy Communion.

The Church as the bride of Christ must share in the suffering of her beloved in the depth of her heart as Mary did at the foot of the Cross. For those who love, suffering becomes sweet and the absence of the beloved causes the lover to want to die from love. So our participation in the sacrifice of the Mass as the sacrifice of the church atones for our sins, joins

us in intimate friendship with Christ, and calls us forth to enter into His heart and the darkness of the mystical union. Von Balthasar writes of how Christ's glance wounds us and calls to us in the dark vision of St. John of the Cross:

If the night is the flight of love, then it is the opposite of immobility. In the twilight gloom of this world we may still plot love's mobility by reference to the disappearing features of the earth's landscape. In the midnight of faith, however, love no longer has any such markers and can appear as pure soledad (solitude) and *pura y oscura contemplacion* (pure and dark contemplation). Nevertheless, the greater the privations, the more the flight press on towards the beloved, as the Canticle shows... the night is a drama, the most intense kind of activity in the darkness. This fullness of night, which is at once both pure faith and contemplation, is in itself a vision, inchoatio visionis. It is the non vision that comes between the initial vision - when we hear the gospel preached and recognize that this is the truth and that God died on the cross for us - and terminal vision, to which unseeing faith directly flies, and it is the anticipation of such terminal visions that enables us to withstand the darkest dereliction by God. Only thus is the Beauty of this night comprehensible; only thus do we discover the transcendent spring from which the tremendous power of this lyricism flows. The spring is 'beyond all beauty (*sobre toda hermosura*) of what is, was, or will be' (146).

This "dark night" is not permanent; it will pass with the dawning of the Resurrection and the light of Glory. Yet it must be passed through to arrive at the pure light and glorified realities (no longer mere icons) of our Heavenly homeland.

Consequently, our images of the Heavenly Liturgy are only provisional, as is our attempt at singing the song of the host of Heaven. It is after the darkness of faith that the new light dawns, and it is beyond the silence of death that we hear the faint stirrings of the heavenly chorus. This truth does not deny the importance of the beauty of the Liturgy, but that artistic beauty of the "Heavenly Liturgy" on earth is not an end in itself. Rather the glory of heaven is paradoxically more present in the inglorious Cross than in our imagination and representations of Heavenly realities. As Gawronski comments, "the ultimate beauty is that perfect self- giving revealed in the bleeding wounds of Christ, an

endlessly drawing stream of life, a mutual ecstasy of selflessness pouring out from the Cross, pouring down into the world from the Trinity” (2003, 45).

### **The sacramental aesthetics of the Cross in St. Thomas Aquinas: Inspirations from Umberto Eco's *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas***

St. Thomas Aquinas says that something which is truly beautiful should possess three qualities: *Claritas* or clarity, *Proportio* or due proportion, and *integritas* or wholeness (Eco, 1988, 64-121).

Clarity is the fullness of communicability and knowability of an object in relation to the knowing eye (p. 119). The beauty of the Cross, for instance, hanging behind the altar, reveals to the one looking at it the truth about the death and resurrection of Christ, celebrated at Mass. If the beauty of the Cross reveals this Sacramental truth of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it does so only in the context of the Resurrection and the life of the perfect vision of God in Heaven (*Claritas*).

Proportion (*proportio*), might mean a couple of things in the context of this article. First, it might mean that the aesthetic object (in this case, the crucifix) rationally fits the truth being presented (i.e. the cruel and humiliating route Christ took to redeem us). Second, it might mean, still following Aquinas' thought, that the crucifix is proportional simply because it exists i.e. it has been 'created' to be seen. In other words, it has due proportion as a material thing to the thought of the creator, i.e. to the extent that it is able to pass the message for the reason it was made in the first place (pp. 84-85). Therefore, the crucifix should be prominent, proportional to the size of the church, and geometrically positioned above or near the altar.

*Integritas*, wholeness (*sive perfectio* or perfection) refers to the formal character of beauty (p. 99). This means that the aesthetic object refers the knower not only to the immediate message being passed, but also points the knower to the overall context of its meaning and *raison d' être*. In other words, the aesthetic object takes its form, or its inspiration, to use a contemporary term, from a central idea. Hence, the object is beautiful if it completely realizes whatever it is supposed to be (ibid.). The crucifix, will therefore, be perfect if it points the knower to the message that the Paschal mystery is linked to what Aquinas refers to as *our reditus* (our

going back to God where we came from). Hence, for the crucifix to have *integritas*, there should also be heavenly scenes high above it, such as in the dome, which point the worshippers to their Heavenly homeland. This can also be done at a side altar in honor of Mary's coronation and so on.

In addition, it would be advisable, for the sake of the *integritas* of the Liturgical art, to display Jesus as Resurrected or in the Glory of the Transfiguration. Still on this, Churches should also have a scene of the Last judgment, signifying that we always find mercy through faith in the Cross and the sacrament of penance, even if divine mercy does not cross out divine justice (cf. CCC, no. 1470). Strict judgment, depicted partly in the scene of the Last Judgment, will apply if while on earth one failed to ask for mercy or show mercy to the poor and others. In medieval Churches, the judgment scene was commonly placed at the West door. There are some churches that have the scene of the Final Judgment above the sanctuary and the crucifix to show the connection between the Cross, the Eucharist, and judgment. Indeed, on the Cross Jesus was judging the world from his throne of Mercy. Our lives and our consciousness are continually being revealed in the merciful light of the Cross of Christ in Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Penance and our subsequent configuration to Christ Crucified will determine our salvation and degree of glory in eternity. Therefore, the crucifix is also normally placed above the kneeler in the Confessional, as well as near the altar.

For the critical reader, there is a question that might have come up at this point. Let me formulate it thus: What is the relevance of the preceding discourse on the beauty of the Cross, especially Aquinas' sacramental aesthetics, to the Pastors and faithful in the Church in Nigeria? The answer to this question which addresses contextual relevance shall be articulated forthwith in the final section below.

### **The discourse on the beauty of the Cross: Relevance to the Church in Nigeria**

The Cross with the figure of Christ is required by Liturgical Law to be present in the sanctuary of Catholic Churches especially during the offering of Holy Mass. The Crosses in our Churches' Sanctuaries are not, therefore, optional or simply aesthetic ornaments. Perhaps, for some

parish priests and good-intentioned Church benefactors, the Cross is another ornament for decoration or beautification of the Sanctuary. Hence, we experience situations where Crosses are put up or removed and replaced according to the whims and fancy of parish priests and their benefactors. How many really pay attention to or are aware of the formal criteria for sacramental aesthetics? In other words, how many of us really care or know that there are three fundamental criteria for an object to be aesthetically 'beautiful' in the Church? Liturgical arts must comply with these criteria.

We should understand the statement above within the context of the words of Joseph Ratzinger (2000), that 'religious art' in Western Europe took inspiration from the Council of Trent, which emphasized that works of art must have "didactic and pedagogical" value which can lead to interior renewal (pp. 129-130). This theological pedagogical perspective became part of the Church's liturgical tradition, especially with regard to liturgical art. Therefore, as we continue to receive the post-conciliar liturgical renewal, pastors and the faithful alike must reorient themselves on their attitude towards and spiritualities of the Cross. Ratzinger (2000) succinctly articulates this point:

Therefore the icon of Christ is the center of sacred iconography. The center of the icon of Christ is the Paschal Mystery: Christ is presented as the Crucified, the Risen Lord, the one who will come again and who here and now hiddenly reigns over all. Every image of Christ must contain these three essential aspects of the mystery of Christ and, in this sense, must be an image of Easter. At the same time, it goes without saying that different emphases are possible. . . . But whatever happens, one aspect can never be completely isolated from another, and in the different emphases that Paschal Mystery as a whole must be plainly evident. An image of the Crucifixion no longer transparent to Easter would be just as deficient as an Easter image forgetful of the wounds and the suffering of the present moment. And, centered as it is on the Paschal Mystery, the image of Christ is always an icon of the Eucharist, that is, points to the sacramental presence of the Easter mystery (132-133).

The glory of Christ is revealed at every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and we truly participate in the Mass by offering our lives and the Divine victim back to the Father. Through the beauty of his Cross, we experience the depth of his love and so anticipate the Liturgy of heaven where Christ is

already the Lamb once slain and the lamp of the New Jerusalem. There we who have shared in His passion through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass will be transformed from glory to glory by the Holy Spirit in the eternal beauty of the vision of the Most Holy Trinity.

In the light of the discourse in the previous sections, the Cross is part of the Liturgical setting in our Churches. This means that for any liturgical celebration, especially the Eucharist, to possess '*integritas*' (aesthetic perfection sacramentally), there should be a Liturgical Cross, which fulfills the criteria of the sacramental beauty discussed earlier. This, according to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (*GIRM*), can either be on the altar or near it. But it must be in a place that the faithful can easily see (no. 308). This can assist the worshippers, as they attend Mass, to connect to the love of Christ who gave them his body and blood in the Eucharist with the One who sacrificed himself for them on the Cross.

If this will happen, there is a single proposal to African liturgical artists. The crosses they carve and paint must fulfill the criteria of '*claritas*,' '*proportio*,' and '*integritas*' since the Cross is not meant simply as a decorative ornament. In fulfilling these criteria indigenous liturgical artists will be able to address a common anomaly about the crosses in our churches. Quite a number of these crosses or crucifixes do not represent faithfully the historical Jesus who suffered and died on the Cross and who was manhandled prior to his crucifixion. The image of the historical Jesus on the Cross should realistically depict his bruised body with various wounds. However, a lot of the crosses we see are aesthetically beautiful and theologically sterile. We see only few dots of blood on the palms, feet and side. Yet, in reality when the executioners were removing his clothes, in all likelihood, they did not do this gently. A lot of the wounds inflicted and possibly dried up would have been opened. And this is the man who hung on the Cross. However, we do not see and contemplate this realistic figure on our crosses.

Accordingly, indigenous liturgical artists have to move beyond this 'humanistic' art that prides aesthetics over and above realistic art of the Cross. These artists should start providing us, in the light of the principal arguments of this article, with crosses that reveal the historical Christ that was severely bruised and crucified. We should be able to see through the figure of the Christ on the Cross, the Redeemer who was in

pain and agony, bruised and disfigured, in atonement for our sins. In my opinion, this is the major challenge posed to indigenous liturgical artists. If and when they do this, they will be making a tremendous improvement on those crosses imported from the West that only present the image of a man hung on the Cross. These Western crosses actually do not depict the historical and real Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

The ancient Rites of both East and West mention the Holy Sacrifice. The liturgy of the West since the 13th century has given more emphasis in its spirituality and liturgical art to the holy sacrifice. This may be partly due to the emphasis on sacrifice in the sacramental theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, I have argued in this article that Renaissance representations of the Crucifixion of Jesus in western art are not merely pious. They are fundamentally liturgical means for entering more deeply into the sacrifice of the Mass.

However, the imported crosses hanging in our churches today are far from fulfilling the criteria of sacramental beauty: '*claritas*,' '*proportio*,' and '*integritas*'. They are also not faithfully depicting the figure of the bruised and disfigured Christ who hung on the Cross at Golgotha. Hence, the article concluded with a challenge to indigenous liturgical artists to provide us with liturgical crosses that fulfil the criteria above and are nearer to the historical Jesus who hung on the Cross at Calvary.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Though no Church in Nigeria, at least to my knowledge, has this, some Churches in the West, from the mediaeval period, have this scene directly above the Crucifix behind the Altar. A notable example is St Mark's Church, Peoria, of the Catholic Diocese of Peoria, USA. Behind the altar and high above the Crucifix, there is the Last Judgement scene to show the connection between the Cross, the Eucharist and the divine Judgment.

## REFERENCES

- Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica* (1995). New York.
- Eco, U. (1988). *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (H. Bredin, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gawronski, R. (2003). The Beauty of the Cross: The theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs Von Balthasar. In K. D. Whitehead (Ed.), *The Catholic Imagination* (pp. 30-49). South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press.
- General instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)* (2002). Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- John Paul II, (March 25, 1987). *Redemptoris Mater*: Encyclical Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church.
- Ratzinger, J. (2000). *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_(August 2005). 'The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty': Message to the Communion and Liberation (CL) Meeting at Rimini (24-30 August 2002) Retrieved 29.01.2012, from <http://www.vatican.va>.
- Von Balthasar, H. U. (1986). *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics (Vol. 3 Studies in the Theological Style: Lay Styles)* (Vol. 3). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.