

NEW MEDIA AND THE CATHOLIC LITURGY: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NIGERIAN CHURCH

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Abstract

The advancement of social communication tools, commonly referred to as new media, has significantly impacted every aspect of human society in recent times. In many ways, new media serve as a powerful resource for enhancing Catholic liturgical celebrations and promoting faith and social justice, aligning with the Church's commitment to social action. However, it is essential to recognize that it also presents challenges, particularly its misuse, which often occurs without proper guidance from wisdom and a sense of responsibility. Much literature has been written on the intersection between new media and Catholic liturgy; however, a greatly overlooked area is the long-term implications of misusing new media in Catholic liturgical life. This paper is based on the hypothesis that while new media have potential benefits for the Catholic Church in Nigeria, there are also possible abuses of their use within its liturgical experience. By examining Catholic liturgical life in conjunction with new media through a critical reading of relevant texts and data gathered from concrete observations and random interviews on the subject, this paper discusses the ethical and theological implications of using new media in sacred liturgy. The significance of the study lies in the fact that very little has been done on how digital media techniques are likely to affect the identity of Catholic liturgy in Nigeria and how the consequences could be addressed to preserve the dignity, sacredness, and future of Catholic liturgy.

Keywords: New Media, Catholic Liturgy,...

Introduction

As the Church continues to cooperate with God in the furtherance of his plan for the salvation of humanity through the great command of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations (Mtt. 28, 19-20), she recognizes that communication is an essential constituent of the daily life of the human person. As such, it is impracticable for humanity to flourish without communication, as it pervades all procedures involved in the construction of human society. The Church equally understands that, for communication to be effective within the human environment, it must employ the language of the human person. Little wonder that God, in His relationship with humanity, utilizes elements within the human context to communicate Himself, as exemplified in the Incarnation.

Throughout history, the Church has utilized available modes of communication within its specific context to advance its mission. That is why, having read the signs of the times, the Church has also adopted the current mode of communication, known as new media, in its liturgical activities. However, despite the Church's positive disposition in adapting to every context, she is equally conscious of her mission to preserve the human person in all its dignity and to renew human society in the light of Christ (Vatican Council II, 1965). Hence, every adaptation to new cultural elements is scrutinized and interpreted in the light of the Gospel (Vatican Council II, 1965). That is to say that, while the Church is eager to align with some changes in the society, she is equally conscious of the fact that even though she is "present in this world, she is not at home with it" (Vatican Council II, 1963, par. 2; cf. Jn 17,16). Hence, as the Church continues to find herself in the web of technological innovations and fast-growing trends in new media technology, with its attendant implications, she admonishes that people must be properly instructed and guided by the "norms of morality" (Vatican Council II, 1963, Section 4) associated with the use of new media.

Irresponsible engagement with new media can be detrimental to both human society and the Church (Vatican Council II, 1963). Therefore, exploring the intersection between new media and the Catholic liturgy is imperative. Although the use of new media in Catholic liturgy in Nigeria is not yet as widespread a phenomenon as observed elsewhere, particularly in the West, this research is apt because new media, as we know, is a culture that is evolving, and its implications cannot be fully perceived at the

moment (John Paul II, 1990). So “a stitch in time saves nine.” An Igbo proverb advises that it is more appropriate to start searching for a black goat during daylight, as finding it may be difficult after the sun sets. Despite the small percentage of people skilled in and utilizing new media in Catholic liturgy in Nigeria, there are already some apparent abuses in its applications. Some constitute distractions, chaos, and obvious displays of impiety, especially during significant liturgical celebrations involving large crowds, like ordinations, religious professions, and wedding ceremonies. On those occasions, everyone literally becomes a photographer with their various devices, including some ministers at the sanctuary. Some even answer calls, send text messages, and watch games during liturgical ceremonies.

Despite the noticeable challenges the Catholic liturgy in Nigeria faces in its interface with new media, scholarship has primarily focused on prescribing the need for new media and its importance in enhancing Catholic worship, ensuring that the Catholic Church in Nigeria does not miss out on the global digital market (Dyikuk, 2022; 2019; Dyikuk et al., 2021; Musa, 2019; Ihejirika, 2018; Adeyoyin et al., 2016; Danaan, 2016).

This study contributes to the existing rich corpus of literature on the relationship between new media and the Catholic Church, as well as its importance for Catholic worship in Nigeria. It goes further by bringing a new critical perspective to bear on this relationship. Surprisingly, in the Nigerian context, there is a notable absence of systematic literature addressing the adverse effects of new media use on Catholic liturgical activities. The paper acknowledges this and addresses it. The goal is to propose ways of avoiding excesses and aberrations, thereby establishing a fruitful nexus between new media and Catholic liturgy, whereby new media serve as a necessary supplement rather than a substitute for the traditional method of liturgical celebration in Nigeria. We shall also attempt to provide insights into how we can ensure that the use of new media does not diminish the sanctity of the Sacred Liturgy.

Centrality of Liturgy in Catholic Worship and the Church’s Position on New Media

In Catholic worship, the liturgy expresses everything the church is and lives for. Liturgy is at the core of the Church’s life, standing at the heart of the Church’s identity in relation to the propagation of Christ’s salvific mission. Vatican Council II (1963) expresses more loudly the centrality of the sacred liturgy in the life of the church by stating that it is the “summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; and the font from which all her power flows.” It goes to say, then, that in the worship of the Church, liturgy is the climax. It is the expression of Jesus Christ’s priestly activity, as well as the communion of all faithful in union with Christ the head.

The liturgy is the ground on which the Church is nurtured and nourished by the life-giving power of God. In the liturgy, the Church perpetuates the priestly mission of Jesus Christ, which is also carried out as she administers all the sacraments and offers daily prayers of praise and adoration. Thus, in the liturgy, the entire mystical body of Christ engages in public worship with Christ as its head (Pius XII, 1947; Vatican Council II, 1963). The significance of liturgy in the life of the church cannot be overemphasized because it is the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father.

Our exposition of the meaning of liturgy, above, underscores that it is both a solemn worship and the celebration of the people of God who approach God according to their conditions and contexts. Hence, as society evolves, the Church remains equally in continuous need of renewal—*Ecclesia semper reformanda est* (Vatican Council II, 1965)—even in her liturgical celebrations. The Church is eager to welcome and promote with enthusiasm any new idea concerned with and directed towards human development. That is why she is poised to continually interact with various cultural materials and embrace some positive currents in society that are necessary for the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the growth of human society (Vatican Council II, 1963). The Church is ever determined to devise new missionary strategies to invigorate Christians in their spiritual journey (Vatican Council II, 1963) as well as new ways of transmitting the gospel message and making it more intelligible to contemporary human

society (Vatican Council II, 1965). It is against this background that the Church is not remaining on the sidelines, but has taken an active role in the digital media world.

New media today have a profound influence on the human person, reshaping human culture, redefining beliefs, and shaping personal identity (Danaan, 2016, p. 62). Hence, the church recognizes the need to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape, leveraging its potential for the effective transmission of the gospel. New technologies have brought about cultural shifts that alters the very nature of communication (Benedict XVI, 2011; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1992), the Church cannot but make use of this human ingenuity gifted by God, as refusing to do so is tantamount to an offence against God (Paul VI, 1975; John Paul II, 1990).

The Church understands that social media is essential for the effective functioning of contemporary society (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1971); as such, social media platforms are also missionary territory for the spread of the good news of salvation (Vatican Council II, 1963). More profoundly, digital media has come to be described as a modern and effective version of the pulpit, through which the church succeeds in reaching a vast majority of people worldwide (Paul VI, 1975). The Church has discovered a great deal of power and potential in new media for her evangelical mission and liturgical life. As such, she is enthusiastic about complementing the traditional means of evangelization, catechesis, and liturgy with the diverse voices offered in the digital marketplace (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1971; Benedict XVI, 2010).

Despite the numerous opportunities inherent in new media, the Church also understands that, as a human invention, it is associated with some ambivalence, which can present worrisome concerns for the Church's worship. It is therefore vital that, while the Church appreciates the numerous benefits new media bring to her worship, she admonishes that moral responsibility should be applied when using them in liturgical activities to avoid overuse that would impinge on the tenets of Catholic liturgy (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002).

New Media and Opportunities for Catholic Liturgy in Nigeria

New media, as described, offer numerous beneficial potentials that can significantly enrich Catholic worship. We shall be presenting some areas where new media use has positively impacted liturgical activities in Nigeria. These include, among others, attracting young people, didactic effectiveness, increased creativity, vibrant liturgy, wider outreach, and global recognition.

First, Catholic liturgy in Nigeria is benefiting greatly from the use of new media, as it encourages young people to attend liturgical activities. John Paul II noted the advantage of new media in this direction (John Paul II, 1990). We understand that the younger generation is the indigenous population of the digital world (Musa 2019). Notwithstanding that both the old and young have access to these technologies in Nigeria as in other parts of the world, it suffices to say that the use of the internet and modern gadgets in Nigeria is prevalent among the youth. Some of them have had no experience with a world without internet access and smartphones (Gan, 2010). Hence, they are more active in using media platforms. That is why, as the Catholic liturgy in Nigeria is transitioning into the digital realm and vocabulary, young people are inspired and stimulated to participate in liturgical activities, such as singing in the choir, reading at Masses, and serving at the altar.

The use of new media in Catholic liturgy in Nigeria, while intensifying the active participation of young people in liturgical celebrations, also promotes their spiritual growth. We can rightly say that there is hope for a vibrant future for the Catholic Church in Nigeria, as the emergence and use of new media in Catholic liturgy are drawing more young people into the Church. Although we are not advocating that the Church should embrace every societal ideal, or lose its values in the bid to be conventional, nevertheless, it is indeed a move in the right direction that liturgical activities in Nigeria are becoming more flexible and maintaining some intergenerational equilibrium, thanks to new media.

Second is the didactic effectiveness of new media. New media are serving as an excellent incentive for new evangelization in Nigeria, as they are used as avenues to repackage the message of the gospel through the liturgy. Some priests, especially in cities, have distinguished themselves as Media Personalities and are effectively using new media for evangelization and catechesis. They achieve this by

creating multimedia content that conveys the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church. In fact, new media have afforded Nigerian Catholics the opportunity to join the clarion call for new evangelization. Thus, with the use of new media, Nigeria is meeting the Church's desire to herald the gospel with fresh vitality and in a style and language that resonate with contemporary society.

Third, new media have also fostered greater creativity in liturgical celebrations in Nigeria. This is made possible by the use of projectors and screens, which help to carry everyone along in singing and praying, as the words are displayed. The virtual space provided helps people become better integrated into the liturgy because what is transmitted becomes more impactful, easily imbibed, and internalized. Equally, sound systems that are digitally empowered give more vitality to the liturgical celebrations in Nigeria. These digital devices engage the intellectual, emotional, and auditory senses, thereby creating an opportunity for a deeper understanding and appreciation of what occurs during liturgy. Furthermore, the use of these digital gadgets also fosters media literacy and compliance among the clergy and lay faithful, as more people are trained to operate these devices.

Finally, new media permit more rapid communication and a broader outreach, helping to overcome geographical obstacles, limitations, and isolation (Benedict XVI, 2009). Catholic liturgy in Nigeria is benefiting from this because it is enjoying faster networking through many new media channels of distribution that enlarge and enrich the worshipping community. The use of new media in liturgy makes it easier for more people to interact from various parts of Nigeria and beyond, thus saving people the time and resources of having to gather in one place. Livestreaming of liturgical activities also provides those who are sick or incapacitated with the opportunity to participate in worship with others. Moreover, digital media also affords dioceses and parishes in Nigeria global recognition, as they can post information about their various dioceses and parishes on their websites and other social media platforms. As such, people everywhere can read about, learn from, and participate in their liturgical events. Additionally, dioceses and parishes in Nigeria can also enrich their liturgy through accessing other online websites. They can also refer their members to these websites through which they can get responses to questions about faith, scriptural texts, prayer books, and even theological reflections. This leads to growth in media literacy and compliance, even among the older generation in Nigeria, who are immigrants to the digital era.

Challenges of New Media to Catholic Liturgy in Nigeria

Just as new media presents numerous opportunities for enhancing liturgical celebrations, the interface between new media and the Catholic liturgy in Nigeria is not without limitations. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications (1992) acknowledges that, although the advent of new media has opened up numerous possibilities for the growth of the Church's mission, emerging pastoral problems are also arising in relation to its use. We have already highlighted above that the liturgy expresses everything the Church is and lives for. Hence, the liturgy is sacrosanct and should always be celebrated with utmost solemnity, reverence, decorum, imbued with active participation in communion with every member of the worshipping community. Apparently, new media are exerting a pervasive influence that impinges on these fundamental characteristics of Catholic liturgy. In what follows, we will examine how the influence of new media is leading to an erosion of reverence and solemnity in liturgical celebrations in Nigeria.

The use of projectors, screens, and sound systems made possible by new media, despite its positive impacts, is susceptible to impropriety and a lack of decorum. Creativity is acceptable in liturgy, but what one sees in some churches in Nigeria today is an apparent lack of prudence in the way some of these devices are used, to the extent that the liturgical celebrations are turning into a theatre of social events and a mere amusement show. People, including some clerics, have lost sight of the difference between liturgical celebration and social event, thus acting like entertainers while using these digital gadgets in worship. This leads to distractions that disrupt the serenity that the liturgy requires. As a result, the core contents and value of the liturgy are lost.

The rate at which people do not apply moral restraint on the use of these devices during liturgical activities is also a matter of great concern. Sometimes, some members of the worshipping community, instead of concentrating on the liturgical celebration, are seen to engage more with their devices during

worship. Understandably, the liturgy is the celebration of the people of God, in which persons are free to express themselves and approach God in their complete humanness. Nevertheless, this should not lead to a loss of awareness of the sacred. We should always be conscious of the fact that the liturgy is also a solemn act of worship. Even in the use of new media, the “mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church” (Vatican Council II, 1963, par. 2), which the liturgy represents, should not be devalued. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (2024) cautions that creativity in liturgy should not be allowed to degenerate into people inventing or modifying the liturgy at will.

Another area of great concern is the rate at which some parents are implanting in their children a sense of irreverence in God’s presence by allowing them to play with phones and tablets during liturgical activities. Such an act, if left unchecked, portends a bleak future that may result in a generation of uncommitted Catholics, with numerous implications for liturgy in Nigeria. We are not proposing that worshippers return to the Old Testament disposition, where people feared to look at Yahweh *facie in faciem* (face to face). Nevertheless, we are not supposed to become nonchalant in God’s presence on the ground of the privilege accorded to us to call God Father (Gal. 4:5). Our unity with the divine through the incarnation should not lead us to play down the sense of awe, reverence, and adoration which are fundamental attitudes that should accompany our relationship with God.

The presence of new media is also creating a misconception that a valid sacrament can be administered via social media platforms. On the first count, some people support such an assumption from the point of view of God’s nature, which is not space-bound. Secondly, some argue that if Christ can incarnate in every culture, and the media is also a form of culture, then incarnation can also occur digitally. After all, during the COVID-19 era, liturgy and the sacraments were validly celebrated online. Undoubtedly, God is not limited by space, as he is present everywhere. Moreover, what happened during the COVID-19 era was an extraordinary occurrence necessitated by the state of emergency, which was authoritatively sanctioned by the Church’s Magisterium (teaching office). Furthermore, the online liturgical activities, which involved people participating from their homes during the COVID-19 period, received a one-off approval. Otherwise, it is wrong to substitute physical presence at liturgical celebrations with online worship, or incarnational, sacramental reality with virtual reality (Benedict XVI, 2007).

New media use has also given rise to theatrical displays in the celebration of liturgy in Nigeria. Indeed, new media bring some dynamism that enlivens the traditional nature of the Catholic liturgy, but caution must be exercised in what is imported into the liturgy. Some priests have been seen, while conducting online adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, asking viewers to place their hands on the screen to receive miracles. There have been occasions where holy water and incense have been similarly used on social media, while assuring viewers at home that they had been sprinkled with holy water and incensed.

Noteworthy is also the gradual development of overdependence on the use of new media in some Catholic Churches in Nigeria. This is almost leading to the obliteration of the traditional mode of liturgical celebration. Some Catholic adherents, including the clergy, are easily forgetting that new media are supposed to serve as supplements to the rich traditional forms of liturgical celebration. For instance, in some churches and chapels in Nigeria today, one notices that liturgical books, such as lectionaries, missals, breviaries, and other prayer books, have been taken over by dust as people prefer to use their phones, iPads, e-notebooks, and other devices for liturgical celebrations.

Indeed, virtual presentations can increase worshippers’ engagement with the liturgy, as they can be more engaging. Nevertheless, they should not be the reason for discarding sacred liturgical books and materials (Musa, 2019). There are records of priests and religious men and women celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical activities using their cellphones or iPads. Sometimes, some priests even prefer to celebrate Mass with their gadgets. On one occasion, a priest even kissed his phone after reading the gospel from it. We make exceptions for those who may have genuine reasons, such as eye problems or the unavailability of liturgical books, allowing them to read through their phones, iPads, or other gadgets during liturgy. But when the foregoing is not the case, it is inappropriate to supplant the traditional mode of liturgical celebrations with digital media. The people of God are expected to look to the clergy and religious leaders for guidance. Still, sometimes they are misled, as they observe that some

religious and clerical figures in Nigeria are losing touch with how to navigate between the easy availability of new media and the traditional and holy sources.

Pope Francis (2017), during one of his Wednesday audiences, outrightly denounced the use of cellphones during mass and delineated the act as “an ugly thing.” If using cellphones during Mass is bad, it will be even worse to substitute the sacred liturgical books with gadgets. We should also not forget that those devices do not possess the sacramental status as the liturgical books and materials. As such, they should only complement, not replace, the ideal.

Digital liturgy also undermines active participation and physical communion, which are essential to liturgical celebrations. Liturgy etymologically connotes ‘assembly.’ It presupposes that to celebrate a liturgy that is really worth its name, there must be a ‘gathering’ in one place, in this case, a gathering of the people of God in worship. Unless the priest is celebrating alone, physical presence is an essential element of Catholic liturgy. But from observation, the advent of new media in liturgy in Nigeria seems to be leading to communal disengagement in the long run. Pope Paul VI (1975) already foresaw this possible loss of personal touch in the liturgy when he admonished that the urgent necessity of announcing the gospel to a large number of people should not lead to neglect of an essential dimension of proclaiming the gospel, which is one-on-one contact. Granted, some circumstances could warrant livestreaming either the Mass or any other liturgical celebrations; however, its arbitrary use encourages absenteeism from the liturgical assembly among those who can afford the digital gadgets. It equally constitutes a danger to interpersonal relationships that should grow in the gathering of the people of God. As most people continue to follow online Masses and liturgical celebrations, the communal dimension of the liturgy is drastically affected.

The rate at which online transmission of liturgical activities is progressing in Nigeria, if unchecked, might result in a fragmented network of disconnected individuals, each in their little world, engaging with data rather than with fellow human beings. Moreover, although social media brings people together, judging by the current trends, it is actually creating a wider gap among people, as virtual relationships are growing more prevalent among Catholics at the expense of genuine, fraternal relationships (Pope Francis, 2015). The loss of physical connectedness also has some pastoral implications for priests, who may be inclined to replace in-person visitation with social media conversations and meetings. This also creates further pastoral problems of insensitivity and alienation of the poor from their pastors and liturgical activities, since not everyone can afford smartphones, let alone the internet, due to the Nigerian economic condition.

There is also an apparent impropriety often displayed by some members during liturgical celebrations, which makes the house of God appear like a showcase for the latest gadgets, fostering some unhealthy competition. Some priests have also joined this competition, as more and more of them go live on social media for every liturgical celebration where they are concelebrants. Exceptions can be made for live broadcasts on social media or satellite television during special liturgical ceremonies. However, being on air every day, aside from alienating people with low incomes, also deprives those assigned to operate the gadgets daily from actively participating in the liturgy.

Additionally, acquiring those gadgets is capital-intensive, especially given Nigeria's economic hardship; therefore, when priests, even in rural areas, insist on celebrating liturgies with these gadgets, it places a significant financial burden on the people of God. There is also the apparent danger of monetizing liturgy on social media platforms. What one sees today is that some are using the online liturgical celebrations to project themselves as some content creators do. That is why some priests sometimes request that people follow, like, and share their liturgical programmes. As much as people follow their social media handles, like and share those liturgical programmes, so their online income increases. That is to say that some priests in Nigeria may be active on social media today, not just to spread the gospel, but also to amass followers for financial gain.

The Way Forward for Proper Integration of New Media in Catholic Liturgy in Nigeria

As previously indicated at the beginning of this paper, we also conducted spontaneous interviews and discussions with both young and old Catholic members at various liturgical gatherings. Our interactions

with various individuals focused on creating a balanced harmony between Catholic liturgy and a new culture of new media in Nigeria, without jeopardizing the fundamental principles and sacredness of the liturgy. Most of our respondents strongly avowed that the innovations brought about by new media culture serve as a veritable means of propagating the gospel of salvation and have equally greatly enhanced the liturgical activities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. Although they also observed that some abuses portend threats to the future of the Catholic Church's liturgical life in Nigeria, they insist that these abuses should not inspire a disapproving attitude towards the use of new media in the country's Catholic liturgy.

The wheel of the Catholic Church in Nigeria should not be steering backwards in a society that is increasingly becoming digitalized. It only behoves the leaders of the Church to find ways of sensitizing the faithful to always put into perspective the unique place of liturgy in the life of the Church, while utilizing new media. This is so that digital gadgets can be used in ways that preserve the sacred nature and solemnity of the liturgy. We shall, in what follows, propose additional recommendations on how to chart a way forward for the use of media in Nigeria, ensuring that its use does not compromise the fundamental tenets and elements of the Catholic liturgy.

There are overarching observations from those we interacted with, which point out that most of the liturgical abuses arising from the use of new media in Nigeria owe greatly to catechetical lacuna. Indeed, John Paul II (1998) demonstrates that numerous misconceptions, mishandlings, and scandals surround the essence of the liturgy because people are not adequately catechized on how to navigate the changes in society in relation to Catholic liturgy. Catechesis involves instructing people on matters of faith, which helps form their consciences, enabling them to make sound moral judgments. Media literacy must go hand in hand with proper catechesis on the Church's doctrines.

There are many Catholics who do not understand the basic principles of Catholic liturgy, either because they have not been taught or they have been taught but have been carried away by the societal trend. Against this backdrop, it is therefore imperative for the church in Nigeria to emphasize the need for more catechetical instruction on the nature of Catholic liturgy. The church remains in a state of continuous renewal; there is also a need for ongoing reactivation and instruction on the church's liturgical practices to help people remain conscious of the current trends in the church's liturgy.

Ongoing catechesis is necessary because it instils in the minds of Catholics and others that, even though the Church and its liturgical practices evolve, the fundamental principles of the Church's liturgy must always be preserved during any evolution. New media is a culture that is essential to the life of the Church, but our attitude towards its use should be shaped by the traditional principles of the Catholic Church (Gan, 2010). When people are properly catechized, they will understand that, even when adaptations are necessary, certain truths of faith remain constant (Vatican Council II, 1965).

Sometimes, exuberance arises when one begins to learn something new, and this may account for the excesses occurring in the use of new media in Catholic liturgy in Nigeria. Hence, continuous catechesis will instill moderation and make the faithful aware that liturgy should be celebrated in a dignified manner for a fruitful result. Ongoing media education through seminars and workshops will also raise people's awareness of the reverence and awe required when they are in the presence of the Divine Majesty of God.

It is also noticeable that those in the clerical order are among the perpetrators of some of the liturgical abuses in Nigeria; hence, the document issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (2024) decrying them. Although the document proposed some corrective measures to redirect the steps of the erring clerics, more will be achieved if media literacy is promoted from the formation of seminarians. The appropriate organs of the Catholic Church have consistently advocated for this. It will go a long way to forestall media abuses, as it will instil in candidates prudence, self-discipline, and restraint in the use of digital media (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1986; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2000, 1971).

At the moment, the Catholic Church in Nigeria cannot bring those who are defaulting in the use of new media in liturgy to book because there is no law binding their excesses. It is therefore pertinent that the Nigerian Catholic Church develops guidelines and policies to guide the use of new media in

Catholic liturgy in Nigeria. The guidelines and policies will stipulate the limits to which new media should be incorporated into the liturgy and the disposition to be adopted by both clergy and lay faithful when using these gadgets. The guidelines and policies must be very clear about the sacredness of what is celebrated in Catholic liturgy and strictly emphasize that not every new thing must be aligned with the sacred liturgy. The liturgy is not a social event, and so people should understand that \in matters of faith and our relationship with God, not all sensational things are necessary, nor every novelty essential simply because it is new. The bishops should take the bull by the horns. It is one thing to know what to do, and another to make a correct decision on the proper action to take; yet another is the commitment to following through (Muonwe, 2025).

In the same vein, parents should serve as role models for their children, reinforcing the responsible use of new media during worship. The family, being the domestic church, has a significant influence on what occurs in the larger family of God, as most of the time, what children exhibit is what they have copied from their parents. If parents manifest responsible use of new media, their children will almost certainly imbibe it (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2000). This will help curb some of the abuses that occur during liturgical celebrations in Nigeria.

Another way to curtail the abuses associated with the use of new media during liturgical celebrations in Nigeria is to impose some restrictions on the use of digital devices during these celebrations. Restrictions would also inspire prudence and decorum in the use of the devices. First, regulating the use of digital devices will reduce the rate at which some lay people and priests distract the congregation with their phones. Secondly, it will also instil the right demeanour, even when it is necessary to use electronic devices during liturgical activities. Furthermore, when the priests demonstrate the appropriate attitude towards the use of new media during liturgy, it will also go a long way to arouse commitment among the faithful on how to use their devices during liturgical celebrations. It is also essential to reduce over-dependency on online liturgical activities so that worship is not reduced to a spectacle and the worshipers become mere spectators who have come to entertain their eyes. Those who lead liturgical celebrations, primarily clergy, should also ensure that, within the limits of permissible usage, they utilize new media very efficiently.

Additionally, there should be more emphasis on worship that deals with the physical presence of the people of God with one another. Even though new media creates a wider outreach, care should be taken not to reduce liturgical activities to cyberspace. Otherwise, we might end up promoting an e-church. There are numerous online liturgical activities in Nigeria, making it essential for the Catholic Church in Nigeria to find a way to properly integrate the liturgy with new media, thereby avoiding what Gan (2010, p. 4) described as a “virtual rabbit hole.” Assuredly, physically liturgy imparts a sense of community and conviviality, which is not entirely possible to replicate in online liturgy.

When restrictions are properly enforced, people will ultimately begin to realize that they do not need their phones and other devices during liturgical celebrations. Currently, some people believe they need their gadgets, such as smartphones, to follow the readings during Mass. That is not entirely wrong. However, experience and observation suggest that some people who follow readings on their devices during Mass can cause distractions, as they sometimes leave their internet connections on, leading to an influx of messages from various online sources. Sometimes, the phones ring in during Masses.

Come to think of it, is it really necessary that everyone reads from their devices while the Word is being proclaimed from the altar? Is the proper disposition not to listen while the Word of God is being proclaimed? Someone may ask, “Why then are bulletins sold at Masses?” Even when people have the bulletins, they are not meant to be read during Mass. The essence of those bulletins is for one to consult them later. Having the bulletins is like when a teacher gives out their course note to students at the onset of the course. The note is intended to be referred to after the class, not for students to read while the teacher is teaching. Even the Scriptures affirm that the most appropriate thing to do when the Word of God is proclaimed is to listen (cf. Neh 8:3; Lk 4:20). Notably, reading instead of listening also has implications for growth in faith, since the scripture says, “faith comes from hearing” (Rm 10:17). Cultivating the attitude of listening when we are celebrating the liturgy is the ideal thing. Listening while the Word of God is being read is a manifestation of reverence for God and also enhances the ability to

absorb the message being conveyed. Sometimes, people leave the liturgy still feeling empty because they spend their time reading instead of listening; as a result, they are not deeply involved in the liturgy. It is only when one is fully involved in a process that transformation happens. This involvement will only occur when people disengage from their gadgets and become engaged with the liturgy.

Conclusion

Our study has shown that Catholic liturgical activities in Nigeria have much to gain from new media, as it is an effective tool and a fundamental vehicle of evangelization. We also observed that there are possible limitations associated with the use of new media in liturgy arising from misuse. However, it is said, “*abusus non tollit usum*; misuse does not cancel use. Something good should not be discarded because of the improper actions of some people. Society is becoming increasingly digitalized daily, and the church cannot be left out of this societal reality. So, all hands must be on deck to ensure a proper integration of new media into the Catholic liturgy in Nigeria. Changes brought about by new media should be appropriately utilized in a way that does not undermine the rich treasures of the Catholic liturgy. There is no doubt that numerous benefits abound in enriching the liturgical celebrations in Nigeria with some practical applications provided by new media. However, its use should not be allowed to exert an unwarranted influence on the liturgy.

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