

The Traditional Use of “*Incensi*” among the Annang People: Liturgical Opportunities and Challenges in Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocese, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: Almost every major world religion and tribal spiritualities light plant parts in worship to seek greater connection to the divine. Incense is defined as a material that is burned to produce an odour which is also referred to as the perfume itself that is produced from the burning of plant. Many people light incense sticks in their homes just for the sweet smell and the ability it has to transform space. Others too in our world today may have a stigma connecting incense sticks and illegal drug use. Many of us who have been Catholics may have witnessed the swinging of censers, filling the Church with sweet-smelling resins. The tradition of using incense in the liturgy goes back to ancient Hebrew worship, as recorded in the Psalms: “Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense” (Ps 141:2). Incense as often used as part of a purification ritual seems to have lost its symbolisms and proper use of it in the Church as well as the decline of its use. The real problem here is that many faithful hardly know the real reason and purpose why incense is an important part of the Catholic Mass. Do people fully understand the use and symbolism of incense during the liturgical celebrations? Do the traditional use of incense offers some opportunities or challenges in the Church liturgical rites? The purpose of this study is to investigate, stimulate and sensitize the Church and all the Christian faithful of the symbolism of incense which have become optional or none use and to take effective action in reclaiming the lost symbolism and proper use of incense. Perhaps a better understanding of the traditional use of incense may help or enhance the use and importance of the symbolism of incense in our liturgical celebrations. Maybe some elements found in the traditional use of incense, the Sacred Scripture and the Church’s practice may enrich and recover the lost symbolism of incense. And may be by organizing Liturgical Seminars/workshops to seminarians and young religious in formation houses it may address the essential elements in the way incense is use.

INTRODUCTION

The word “incense” is derived from the Latin word, “*incendere*,” which means “to burn”. It is commonly used as a noun to describe aromatic matter that releases fragrant smoke when ignited, to describe the smoke itself, and as a verb to describe the process of distributing the smoke (Mbaeri, 2016). Incense is defined as a material that is burned to produce an odour, usually fragrant, and is also referred to as the perfume or fumigation itself that is produced from the burning of plant or other materials. Incense comes in different forms. I believe that incense may be the most spiritual way we use plants across cultures. Almost every major world religion and many smaller and tribal spiritualities light plant parts in worship to seek greater connection to the divine. Even outside of “religious” use, many people light incense sticks in their homes just for the sweet smell and the ability it has to transform space. We may not remember why we started doing it, but unconsciously we know the strength of this ritual (Hughes, 2007).

We have all seen incense sticks, and many of us have ideas of what incense use is. Many of us who have been Catholics may have witnessed the swinging of censers down the aisle, filling the Church with sweet-smelling resins. Others too in our world today may have a stigma connecting incense sticks and illegal drug use (Hughes, 2007). The real problem here is that many faithful hardly know the real reason why incense is an important part of the Catholic liturgy. Much of Christianity is confused by the use of incense and its real purpose. Many people today are not aware of the historical or symbolical significance of incense or the pivotal part incense should play in the Mass of the Church (Cunningham, 2015). The tradition of using incense in the liturgy goes back to ancient Hebrew worship, as recorded in the Psalms: “Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense” (Psalm 141:2). As this verse suggests, incense symbolizes the prayers of the faithful rising up to heaven as the smoke rises to the rafters. The smoke itself is associated with purification and sanctification.

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In many parts of the world today, during the liturgical celebrations, they have taken the optional position in the use of incense. Some have taken it to be none. On the other hand, though the incense is not use regularly in the liturgy but the people are buying incense and are asking us for blessings. However we can justify this research work from the fact that in our Church today we have seen so much of the loss of symbolism has resulted in superstitious beliefs and dispelling of evil spirit, lack of knowledge of the use of incense, lack of attention and preparation of the incense, abuses of the use of incense and the manner of incensing. Why do we have to study the use of incense in the Church among the Annang People? Do they fully understand the symbolism of incense during the liturgical celebrations? How can we address the importance of the symbolism of incense in our liturgical celebrations? How do we highlight some essential elements in the way incense is use? This caused the researcher to find out what is the cause. Unless we recover this lost symbolism of incense and the Church through her ministers go extra miles in re-catechising the people then we will still sit and see the wrong use of incense by our members. The reason is to find out the point of convergence of the use of incense among the people of Annang and the Catholic Christian Rites which will enable us in a very big way in the recovery of the liturgical symbolism of incense. Hence, this work shall focus on the traditional use of incense among the Annang People, the liturgical opportunities and challenges it offers in the use of incense. It shall also focus on the ways (recovery) to make the people in Ikot Ekpene Diocese and elsewhere become more aware of the use of incense in offering our prayers to God. It shall also be helpful in the liturgical formation of seminarians and young religious to liturgical life and liturgical catechesis to the lay faithful. Thus the Church must be concerned with providing a realistic understanding and the right catechesis for the use incense in the Church and at homes. Hence, this work will help reduce the exaggerations and superficiality in the use of incense.

1. The Traditional Use of “*Incensi*” among the Annang People

Nigeria has 9 Archdioceses and 46 Dioceses which forms the Nine Ecclesiastical Provinces of Abuja (8 Dioceses), Kaduna (7 Dioceses), Benin (6 Dioceses), Lagos (3 Dioceses), Onitsha (7 Dioceses), Owerri (6 Dioceses), Ibadan (6 Dioceses), Jos (7 Dioceses), and Calabar (5 Dioceses) of which Ikot Ekpene is one. Ikot Ekpene Diocese is located in the southern part of Nigeria. It is one of the Dioceses under the suffragan of the Metropolitan of the Calabar Ecclesiastical Province of Calabar since 1st March 1963. It covers an area of 2,263km² (874 sq mi) and has a population of about 908,026 inhabitants of which about 80% are Christians and about 11% of the population are Catholic (2004 Census). The earliest date for the foundation of any mission Church in Ikot Ekpene was in 1914 by the missionary fathers at Anua, St Anne Station, Ifuho, which is now the Cathedral parish. It was established in 1918 with Rev. Fathers Paul Biéchy, CSSP, and James Moynagh, SPS, as the first resident priests in 1920 and 1930, respectively, under Bishop Joseph Shanahan – the pioneer Holy Ghost Bishop of Southern Nigeria with his headquarters at Onitsha. The Diocese is situated in Annang land (Udondata, 2013). It has 268 priests (2018), many religious, 30 Parishes, 8 Quasi Parishes, 7 ACC and 3 Chaplaincies (Ikot Ekpene Catholic Diocesan Directory, 2019).

2. Anthropological Context of Annang People

The Annang people are a peculiar cultural group within the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The Annang territory lies between Latitude 4.25 and 7 North and Longitude 7.15 and 9.30 East (Enang, 1979). The landscape is generally flat and low-lying with no point rising to 300 feet above sea level. There are two main seasons: the wet and rainy season which starts from April to October and the dry season from November to March (Ekong, 1983). Annang means “those who speak well.” They are known in the use of proverbs when they speak. For this reason they are often called “Awo Annang.” The Annangs have a rich oral tradition. According to oral tradition, some believed that the Annang people have their origins in Jewish tribes from Egypt and settled in Ghana before arriving in the coastal Southeastern Nigeria and Southwestern Cameroon. For example, the name Annang in Twi in Ghana means fourth son. Others believe that the Annang came through migration of Bantu speaking and Zulu hunters from central African region via Congo Basin into the hinterland of Equatorial West Africa (Udoh, 1983). It is believed that Annangs started their migration from Egypt around 7500 BC. The Abiakpo came to the northern range of Annang from Eka Abiakpo. They were quickly followed by the Ukana clan, the Utu, Ekpu, Ebom and Nyama (The British would lumped these together and gave the name Otoro), and other Annang clans. The Annang people have occupied their land in the coastal Southeastern Nigeria for thousands of years (Kwekudee, 2013).

The entire Diocese of Ikot Ekpene is dominantly the Annang People whose traditional religion like most African tribes and their traditional religion is based on the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being called “Abasi Ibom” (“Abasi Enyong”) whom they believe lives beyond the clouds. But there are also myriads of divinities and spiritual beings (“Abasi Isong”) that assist Abasi Ibom to deal with human problems of moral, social, economic, political and psychological nature (Udo, 1983). “Ibom” means the whole “limitless universe.” He is the Lord of the whole boundless universe and everything within it. Due to his boundlessness, there is neither a temple nor shrine that can accommodate him. He cannot be localized nor confined. He transcends space and time. Owing to this, a temple is, therefore, non-existent in the Annang religion but rather shrines attributed to the

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divinities and deities. And as the “Abasi Ibom” is perceived to be unlimited, so also are his powers but the assistance from other divinities and ancestral beings (Pulse, 2019).

3. The Uses of “*Incensi*”

Incense is a substance that is burned to produce a fragrant scent. In fact, the word “incense” is derived from the Latin word for “to burn.” Incense has been around since ancient times. It was used in religious rituals in ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Greece. Over the centuries and into the present day, people throughout the world have used incense for a variety of reasons and as such the Annang people included have used it in various ways, for example in component of various religious practices, as a means to counteract bad or disagreeable odours, as a way to repel demons or evil spirits (Seladi-Schulman, 2018), for purification of places of sacrifice and people. Incense is any botanical aromatic substance or mixture of such substances, assembled and burned for the purpose of producing a fragrant or pleasant odour. Typically, the Annang people burn incense either to scent a room or to offer an oblation to God or a pagan deity.

Medicinal Use of “Incensi”

Incense is aromatic biotic material that releases fragrant smoke when burned. The term refers to the material itself, rather than to the aroma that it produces. Incense is used for aesthetic reasons, and in therapy, meditation, and ceremony. It may also be used as a simple deodorant or insectifuge. “*Since the most ancient of times, African priests and priestesses and the common people believed in and used magic, medicine and religions to protect themselves from evil forces and to attract good ones*” (Yarbrough, 2002). The Obong Obio and Obong Idung,” observed that in Annang land there are and there were traditional trees and leaves such as “nyanyaha” and “ntung or ntungoku.” As seen in this figure 5 (personal photograph), the leaves and twigs are boiled and prepared as a sort of tea to soothe coughs and fever. The aromas are so powerful that once it is applied or cook with food they brought about healing for those who were sick. When it is burnt with charcoal, they can also act as mosquito repellent (Chief Andrew Casimir Okon, et al., 2019). There are others who are planted in one’s compound and the aroma from it was always considered as having the power to dispel the evil spirit or even snakes. Beyond our sense of connection that we need to be healthy, incense can also help us to garner awareness and align ourselves in mind, body, and spirit. As incense signifies elements of the spirit realm, it is often used as a medicine and for healing in traditional healing systems throughout the world. If you have ever been to an acupuncturist that has used moxa on you, then you have experienced the use of incense in medicine (Hughes, 2007).

Use of “Incensi” for Recreational Purposes

This is a cultural dance display at the ceremony by the cultural youth group. They always carry with them the incense pot. At some moments the incense is added to the burning charcoal in the pot. The understanding is that the incense will purify or sanctify the place and all those who take part in the celebration and that no member of the group could be attack by the evil powers.

Magic-Religious and Ceremonial Usage

In Annang there are many kinds of traditional religious and ceremonial activities like “*Ekpo*” masquerade, “*Ekong*,” and etc. “*Ekpo*” Masquerade is a cultural heritage practiced in the Annang community in Nigeria. “*Ekpo*” is mostly seen during the festive periods as a way of traditional celebration. The practice is limited to only males, specifically, those initiated into the mystery of the cult. In Annang, “*Ekpo*” denotes spirits of the people who have died the ancestors (Ekanem, 2016). Going by performance, it is a human representation of these spirits through the employment of masks and other paraphernalia mystified using ritual and displayed to commemorate cardinal seasons of the year to elicit in the mind of the native an interface of the living and the dead and a regeneration of cosmic elements in nature (Etim et al, 2019). The “*Ekpo*” masquerade in particular has some rituals they perform before they come out in public. One of those rituals is the pasting of incense on the mask that they put on. Others would apply the smoke incense. The use of this incense is to connect with the spirit world of the ancestors (“Obong Ekpo” of Afaha Obong, and et., al., “Obong Ekpo,” literally means “King of the Ekpo” Masquerade or the leader of the “Ekpo” Masquerade).

Use of “Incensi” in the Rites of Passage

The rite of passage is slightly different from the general understanding related to age group. Here we are talking about those rites performed when a member of the village passed away or has gone to be with his/her creator and the ancestors. Annang burial ceremonies may be understood as rites of passage based on the global, intercultural belief that the body and the mind are related but not the same, and that the mind continues after the body dies. For the Annang people, purification procedures involving plants during rites of passage have been a widespread phenomenon through the ages. In Annang there was a great awareness of the mystical forces of pollution and danger that need to be overcome to ensure safe passage during such times of transition (Hutchings, 2007). Thus, incense was used to remove certain odour that could emanate for the dead body or expulsion of evil powers around the dead body.

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“*Ufok Idiong*,” *Idiong Ufok Ugua*” and “*Idiong Mkpo Ugua*”

The Annang believe that the gods would not accept the sacrifices offered without complete purification of “*Ufok Idiong*” (shrine or place of worship), “*Idiong Ufok Ugua*” (blessing of place of worship), and “*Idiong Mkpo Ugua*” (blessing of objects of sacrifice). These were usually done either with the pouring of libation, use of a cock or burning of aromatic incense. This indicates that God cannot accept any sacrifice without first purifying the place, the people and the items for sacrifice.

Incensation on the “abia idiong” or “abia ibok” and Purification of the People

“*Abia idiong*” or “*abia ibok*” is a traditional priest who on behalf of people or community offers sacrifices to God or deities at different functions or ceremonies of the clan or villages. During one of these ceremonies, for example, “*ugua idiong*,” that is, the traditional religion, the “*abia idiong*” in pronouncing the words for sacrifices will add grain of resin to the burning charcoal in calabash pot and most times will carry the incense pot and run it over his head before running it over the objects of sacrifice and thereafter the people. This was to make himself clean to be able to offer a clean sacrifice to God or the deities. The “*abia idiong*” will also use the incense pot on the people who have brought the objects for sacrifice and all the participants. These could take place at the beginning of the sacrifices or within the ceremony. This was a symbolic expression of purification of the people, making the people clean and ready to offer sacrifice to God or deities

Preservation of the Dead and for Healing Purpose of the Sick

Though death is inevitable, the Annang believe that it cannot occur without a specific cause. Ancestors or witchcraft were in many instances seen as the cause of the death of someone. For that reason, the *abia idiong* (traditional doctor) plays an important role during the death of a family member. The traditional doctor would be called to come and investigate the cause of the death (Owuor, 2006). In some instances in the past the dead were not kept but buried immediately. For certain occasion the dead body were kept to allow the investigation to be completed. For this reason they may employ strong incense in the room where the dead body is kept.

4. The Use of Incense in the Biblical and Church’s Tradition

Is incense found in the Scriptures? We will investigate in a preliminary way the incense offering as that was required by God in the tabernacle and the temple. We will therefore not deal with just the frankincense that accompanied the cereal offering (Lev. 2:1-2, 15-16), but shall deal with the relevant terminology; secondly, look at the appropriate meaning of this incense, considering the wider Old Testament context as well as the New Testament perspectives (Dam, 1991). This definitely shall lead us to teachings of the Church Fathers, the documents of the Church Councils. The researcher shall make use of the GIRM, Books of the Catholic Rites and as well shall investigate what the local magisterium says about the use of incense. The use of incense is an expression of prayer, and it is in fact scriptural, Roman Catholic (traditional), and Judeo-Christian. In the scriptures, ritual incensing of objects, people and places was for their purification or for making the object or person holy and worthy of God. So the purpose of incensing and the symbolic value of the smoke is that of prayer, blessing, purification, and sanctification (Mbaeri, 2016). In this chapter it is of great importance to explore the use of incense in the Bible and the Church tradition whereby it shall look at the Old and Testaments use of incense. It shall also look at the use of it in the Church during the early Church, Patristic, middle ages, scholastic era, Trent, Second Vatican Council as well as the GIRM.

The Use of Incense in the Old and New Testament

There is mention of incense in (Ex 30: 34-36), and it is associated with divinity and reserved for God (Ex: 30: 37-38). There are also other passages that speak of incense in the Bible: “Aaron shall offer fragrant incense every morning and evening...” (Ex 30: 7-8); “making incense according to the composition of sweet spices: stacte, onycha, galbanum, and sweet spices with pure frankincense shall not be made for oneself (Ex 30: 34-37); “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice” (Ps 141: 2); “Perfume and incense make the heart glad” (Prov 27: 9); “...in every place incense is offered to my name...” (Mal 1: 11); “Send out fragrance like incense, ... Scatter the fragrance, and sing a hymn of praise; bless the Lord for all his works...” (Sir 39: 14-16); “...he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel” (Rev 8: 3-4). The sacred incense prescribed for use in the wilderness Tabernacle was made of costly materials that the congregation contributed (Ex 25: 1, 2, 6; 35:4, 5, 8, 27-29). In the book of Exodus 25: 6 (cf. 35: 8, 28) where God asked for a freewill offering of incense from the people for the tabernacle construction and everything that belonged to it. The book of Exodus lists four components of the incense while the Talmud lists seven additional components from the oral Torah. The four components from the book of Exodus are: Nataf (Stacte), Shekheleth (Onycha), Khelbanah (Galbanum), and Levonah Zach (Pure Frankincense). All these were in preparation for the incense that was to be made according to the instructions found in Exodus 30: 34-38. The fact that such a freewill offering could be asked shows that such spices were readily available. Israel may have taken these spices with them out of Egypt, or they could also have purchased them in the wilderness

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from caravans that they may have met (Dam, 1991). The altar of incense was made of acacia wood with a veneer of gold (Jackson, 2019). The altar was thirty-six inches high and eighteen inches in both length and breadth (Ex 37: 25ff). It served as a place for the daily burning of incense, both morning and evening. The incense consisted of an equal mixture of five spices, and any deviation from this formula was subject to severe consequences (Ex 30: 9). Moreover, this incense mixture could never be employed for private use (Ex 30: 37). Interestingly, small stone incense altars have been found in Palestine (e.g., at Gezer) for the worship of false gods (Gispén, 1982). Perhaps this explains why the Israelites were forbidden to make and burn incense in their homes. Incense was also utilized on the Day of Atonement (Jackson, 2019).

It is within this context of a very close association of the incense altar to the ark that we have to appreciate New Testament Book, Hebrews 9:3, 4 which states that “behind the second curtain stood a Tent called the Holy of Holies having the golden altar of incense and the Ark of the Covenant.” This does not mean that the book of Hebrews did not know the place of this altar. But considering the theological concern with atonement and forgiveness and the entrance into God’s presence, it is not surprising that the ark and the incense altar are brought here into a very close association, as was already done in the Old Testament (Jackson, 2019). It is worth mentioning that the Scriptures are clear that the fragrant fumes or smokes that ascended from the incense represented the prayers of godly people, those in covenant relationship with God. It is also worth observing that when Zacharia was performing his duty as a priest, he entered into the temple to burn incense. This is worth pointing that “the whole multitudes of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense” (Lk 1: 9-10). The book of Revelation unquestionably indicates that “incense” is symbolic of “the prayers of the saints” (Rev 5: 8; 8: 3-4) (Jackson, 2019). As observed earlier, the incense was typical of the prayers of the saints; it was an act of faith on the part of the people of God. The combining of the two elements, therefore, sets forth the image of the cooperative affinity between Christ’s blood on our behalf, and our prayers to God. Hence, the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were a pointer to a sweet scent aroma that brought about salvation. The efficacy of our prayers is dependent upon the shedding of the Lord’s blood. And the power of that blood for the Christian must be accessed by prayer (Jackson, 2019).

The Use of Incense in the Church’s Tradition: The Challenge of the Romans on the Early Christians

The New Testament makes several typological references to incense, including a Christological reference to the coals from the altar of incense taken behind the veil on the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:3-4), and a reference to the prayers of believers as incense (Rev 8:4). In later Christian typology the smoke of incense in the tabernacle typically signifies offered prayer. This was developed in medieval Christian art. The use of incense has a long history. From the late 4th century onwards, Arabian incense burners began to appear and Egyptians travelled great distances to import frankincense and myrrh (Majno, 1975 and Singer, 2007). Frankincense was also highly esteemed throughout Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece and the demand reached its peak when Romans burnt it in temples, at funerals or in domestic contexts for propitiating the gods (Singer, 2007). The Romans mainly traded for incense by sea, rather than the land route the Greeks used. The gum resin extracted from frankincense and myrrh had great significance in the Roman religion and culture. The Romans were consumers of frankincense (*boswellia*) and myrrh (*Commiphora*) used as burnt offerings for their gods. It was common in almost all their sacrifices, in cults of the dead, and in imperial worship, as well as in mystery cults borrowed or adapted from the Greeks or elsewhere. Therefore incense tends to be made out of more or less the same stuff wherever you go, even though the particular plant we are burning might not be the same from place to place (Capello, 2019). Were the early Christians influenced by the romans use of incense?

Understanding of the Use Incense among the Early Christians

David Brattson like many other people made two arguments that there is no evidence that the early Christians used incense when he said that St. Justin (Martyr) wrote that because Christians are reasonable and intelligent people who knows that God has no need of incense...and that Athenagoras explained that Christians do not offer sacrifices because the Creator does not require blood nor the smell of burnt offerings or incense, God himself being the perfect fragrance (Brattson, 2003). Perhaps, the burnt offerings of incense to the gods greatly influence the early Christians. With the spread of Christianity, the incense trade partially collapsed. Early Christians initially repudiated incense burning for its idolatrous connotation but later adopted the use of incense in their rituals (Crone, 2004). Trade connections and frankincense consumption, however, never reached the level of Roman times again and this coincided with severe droughts, over-grazing and an increasing need for firewood causing the habitat of *Boswellia* trees to shrink (Groom, 1981; Sedov, 2007 and Baeten et al, 2014).

The Patristic Fathers of the Church and the Middle Age

But there seem some positive evidences that disprove this. Eusebius in *Demonstratio Evangelica* Book 1 Chapter 10 wrote: “So, then, we sacrifice and offer incense.” Furthermore, the liturgical rubrics as it is found in the Apostolic Canons 3 allowed for incense to be brought to the altar. Though the earliest documented history of using incense during a Catholic liturgy comes from the Eastern tradition of the Church, more significant is the fact that abundant references to the rituals of the Divine Liturgies of Saint James and Saint Mark and Ss. Addai and Mari dating from the 5th century include the use of incense (Ide,

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2018). It was before the 5th century, when the Church leaders make rare mention of incense and they did so to draw a distinction between what was acceptable practice for Christians and the idolatry of pagans (Lents, 2016). Christian attitude towards incense in ritual practice changed during the middle ages. Certainly Christians began burning incense at the latest by the mid-5th century. By the sixth century, incense became an accepted, even expected, element of Christian practice (Weitzman, 2019). How could a people who were avidly outspoken against incense transition to embracing the practice? Given Church Fathers’ fiery polemic against incense burning, the later acceptance of the practice is rather unexpected (Lents, 2016).

The Scholastic Ages and the Council of Trent

During the scholastic age there was a great effort in the explanation of Christian symbolism in relation to language and ceremonies – the use of incense. According to it was considered to the celestial light to enter the house of our minds and from a golden thurible filled with aromatics, to incense all our interiors, and consecrate our hearts as a temple of the Holy Spirit. During this age there was great procession of faith with burning incense (Digby, 1845). The Council of Trent, 19th Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church, held in three parts from 1545 to 1563, under the Pontificate of Pope Pius IV, in Session 22, chapter V, of its documents on the solemn ceremonies of the Sacrifice of the Mass says that,

“And whereas such is the nature of man, that, without external helps, he cannot easily be raised to the meditation of divine things; therefore has holy Mother Church instituted certain rites, to wit that certain things be pronounced in the mass in a low, and others in a louder, tone. She has likewise employed ceremonies, such as mystic benedictions, lights, incense, vestments, and many other things of this kind, derived from an apostolical discipline and tradition, whereby both the majesty of so great a sacrifice might be recommended, and the minds of the faithful be excited, by those visible signs of religion and piety, to the contemplation of those most sublime things which are hidden in this sacrifice” (Council of Trent, 2019).

With this it was a Council confirmation of the use of incense.

The Ordo of Incense according to Pope Pius V

According to Matthew Herrera, the “*Ordo Incensandi Oblata*” – *Iuxta Rubricas Missalis Romani* for incensing the gifts has two modus “*In modum Crucis*” counting the number of swings from 1 – 9 in the following order.

1. Incensum 4. Benedictum 7. Et Descendat Super Nos
2. Istud 5. Ascendat 8. Misericordia
3. A Te 6. Ad Te, Domine 9. Tua

and “*In Modum Circuli*.” For the “*Ordo Incensationis Altaris*” - “*Iuxta Rubricas Missalis Romani*” (Herrera, 2012).

Si in altari non adsunt reliquiae seu imagines Sanctorum, omittitur earum incensatio, Quae indicator sun nn. 4,5,6,7 (Ritus servandus, IV, 5) et statim, incensa cruce (nn. 1,2,3), proceditur ad incensandum altare per ordinem 8,9, etc. ad 29.

If there are no relics or images (e.g. small statues) of saints upon the altar, omit their incensation as indicated under numbers 4, 5, 6, 7 [Rite of offering (rubric section of missal that describes celebrant's actions...)] and immediately proceed to incense the cross and altar per the rules 8, 9, etc. to 29 (Herrera, 2012).

“*Ordo Incensationis Altaris*” - “*Quod Commode Circuiri Potest*”

Praemissa cruces (et reliquiarum seu imaginum) incensatione, fiunt 22 ductus, quorum nn. 1-2 et 14-16 *supra mensam* altaris, nn. Autem 4-13 et 17-22 *infra et ex latere*.

As previously mentioned, having incensed the cross (and relics or images), make 22 swings, of which nn. 1-2 and 14-16 are over the mensa of the altar, however Those that follow, nn. 4-13 and 17-22, are at the side.

General Instruction of The Roman Missal #299: “The altar should be built apart from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily...” In other words if a freestanding altar is employed (it is not a requirement) it must be placed in the sanctuary in such a way as to allow easy circumambulation which is required for proper incensing. If 4 reliquaries or small statues were placed on the freestanding altar (as shown in the previous illustration) a total of 29 swings of the thurible (including 3 for the crucifix) would be required (Herrera, 2012).

In the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite – the Order of Mass of Pope Pius V, it says if incense is used, the celebrant blesses the incense: *May you be blessed by him in whose honor you will be burned. Amen.* After that the celebrant incenses the altar, relics that are present, and the cross. Then the deacon or the server incenses the celebrant. Note is taken that this happens not at the beginning of the Mass before sign of the cross but just before Lord Have Mercy. At the liturgy of the Word the book of the gospel is incensed. And at the end of the Gospel after kissing of the Gospel, the deacon incenses the celebrant if it is solemn Mass

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(Order of Mass of Pope Pius V, 2019). During the (offertory prayers) preparation of the Gifts (if incense is used), the celebrant imposes and blesses the incense, saying:

May the Lord, by the intercession of blessed Michael the Archangel, who stands at the right of the altar of incense, and all his elect, may the Lord deign to bless + this incense and, receive it as an odor of sweetness: through Christ our Lord. Amen.

At the Incensation of offerings, the celebrant incenses the gifts with three signs of the cross and with three circles, saying: *May this incense, which thou hast blessed, O Lord, ascend to thee, and may thy mercy descend upon us.* The celebrant having incensed the gifts, proceeds to incense the altar and the cross while praying:

May my prayer be brought up, O Lord, like incense in your sight, the raising of my hands like an evening sacrifice. Lord, place a guard on my mouth, and a door of watchfulness at my lips, that my heart may not sink down into words of malice, making excuses for sins.

And as the celebrant is incensed, he says:

May the Lord enkindle within us the fire of his love, and the flame of everlasting charity (The Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, and Society of St. Pius X, 2019).

The Second Vatican Council and the Use of Incense according to GIRM

“The Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* defines sacred liturgy as “the exercise of the priestly function (*munus*) of Jesus Christ”, in which “the sanctification of man is signified through sensible signs and realized in the manner proper to each one of them” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 7). The theological vision of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Roman Missal is that burning of incense is a beautiful and symbolic act of worship. During Second Vatican, within the spirit of restoration many rubrics and prayers concerning incense were removed. The Catechism of the Catholic Church noted that liturgical celebration involves signs and symbols relating to creation (candles, water, fire), human life (washing, anointing, breaking bread) and the history of salvation (the rites of the Passover). By integrating them into the world of faith and taken up by the power of the Holy Spirit, these cosmic elements, human rituals, and gestures of remembrance of God become bearers of the saving and sanctifying action of Christ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1145-1155; 1189). Hence, in the monograph on *Sacred Signs*, of Monsignor Romano Guardini (1885-1968), who greatly influenced the writings of Pope Benedict XVI says that, the gesture of the offering of incense is a generous and beautiful rite where the fragrant smoke rises in clouds and within the rhythm and the sweetness there is a musical quality; and like music also is the entire lack of practical utility: it is a prodigal waste of precious material. It is a pouring out of unwithholding love (Herrera, 2012).

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) speaks of the use of incense as:

“The priest may incense the gifts placed upon the altar and then incense the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church’s offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God. Next, the priest, because of his sacred ministry, and the people, by reason of their baptismal dignity, may be incensed by the deacon or another minister” (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, No. 75).

The GIRM further provides instruction on how incense should be used during the celebration of the Mass. The GIRM underlines that the priest, put incense into the thurible, blesses it with the sign of the Cross, without saying anything. a profound bow is made to the person or object that is incensed before and after an incensation, except for the incensation of the altar and the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass. The GIRM 276 says that thurification or incensation is an expression of reverence and of prayer, as is signified in Sacred Scripture (cf. Ps 141 [140]:2; Rev 8:3). Though it says that incense may be used optionally in any form of Mass but instructed various ways, number of swings and the manner of incensing: during the entrance procession, at the beginning of Mass, to incense the Cross and the Altar (3 swings), at the procession and proclamation of the Gospel (3 swings), at the offerings of bread and wine placed on the Altar (3 swings), the Cross (3 swings), the priest (3 swings), the people (3 swings) and at the elevation of the host and the chalice after the Consecration (3 swings) (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, No. 276). Three swings is also given to the Most Blessed Sacrament, a relic of the Holy Cross and images of the Lord exposed for public veneration, Paschal Candle and two swings for relics and images of the Saints exposed for public veneration and single swings for the Altar (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, No. 277).

Incense is also used on Holy Thursday, during the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the altar of repose. At the Easter Vigil, five grains of encapsulated incense (most often made to look like red nails) are embedded in the paschal candle. These five grains of incense represent the five wounds of Jesus Christ. At funeral Masses the earthly remains of the death may be incensed, and also the gravesite at the burial service (Herrera, 2012).

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The Liturgical Symbolism of Incense

The smoke of the incense is symbolic of sanctification (God cleanses us of sin grant us his sanctifying grace) and purification (setting our hearts clean), as well as symbolic of the prayers of the faithful. It is one of the outward signs of spiritual realities, and that is why it has its place in Christian liturgy. These two purposes reveal a deeper truth that prayer itself purifies and sanctifies us, making us worthy of worshiping God in heaven for eternity with all the angels and saints (Filz, 2017). In the Old Testament, God commanded his people to burn incense (e.g., Ex 30:7, 40:27). Incense is a sacramental used to venerate, bless, and sanctify. Its smoke conveys a sense of mystery and awe. It is a reminder of the sweet-smelling presence of our Lord. Its use adds a feeling of solemnity to the Mass. The visual imagery of the smoke and the smell reinforce the transcendence of the Mass linking heaven with earth, allowing us to enter into the presence of God. The smoke symbolizes the burning zeal of faith that should consume all Christians, while the fragrance symbolizes Christian virtue (Herrera, 2012).

5. Liturgical Challenges and Opportunities of the Use of Incense in Places of Worship in Ikot Ekpene Diocese

Liturgical Opportunities

Incensation: An Act of Worship and Sacred Offerings to God

What are the liturgical opportunities with incensation? The book of Revelation says, and I quote; “*And I saw an Angel come and stand before the Altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, and the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the Angel*” (Rev 8: 3-4). The offering of incense is a generous and beautiful rite or act of worship and sacred offerings to God. When the grains of incense are laid on the red-hot charcoal, the censer is swung, or in the incense pot, the fragrant smoke rises in clouds. The offering of incense is like Mary’s anointing at Bethany. “*When the Lord was at supper Mary brought the spikenard of great price and poured it over his feet and wiped them with her hair, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.*” Mary’s anointing was a mystery of death and love and the sweet savour of sacrifice. For the narrow minded persons, they will always object the use of incense with their excuses of being a prodigal waste of time and material to use it in the liturgy. The offering of incense is a pouring out of unwith holding love. It is the offering of a sweet savour which Scripture itself tells us is the prayers of the Saints. Incense is the symbol of prayer. Like pure prayer it has in view no object of its own; it asks nothing for itself. It rises like the Gloria at the end of a psalm in adoration and thanksgiving to God for his great glory (Guardini, 1956).

The Odor of Sanctity and Power of Fragrance

Scents and smells form an invisible molecular cloud that surrounds our whole body. The sensory apparatus of our nose reacts to the scent molecules by triggering thousands of microscopic chemical reactions that carry messages to the brain. Every odour we perceive whether pleasant or noxious, causes minute chemical reactions in our brain causing a reaction whether we are conscious of it or not. Our physical bodies are surrounded by subtle fields of energy that are the manifestation in this universe of our connection to higher states of awareness. These are the physical manifestation of our mental, emotional, spiritual and physical energy levels. These energy fields are also affected by this molecular cloud. By using scented oils, bath crystals, incense and scented smoke to create whatever cloud of fragrance we desire, we can create the type of energy and reaction we want to tune our energies to a specific purpose (Heath, 1996). In the use of incense we become aware of the power of fragrance and the odour of sanctity. God sanctify us and make clean to be in his presence to worship him.

Purification of Persons, Sacred Images and Places of Worship

During the celebration of the Mass, the use of incense adds great solemnity and beauty to the experience of being present at Calvary. Persons, Sacred images and Places of worship are incensed. This is in order to purify them. At Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament incense is used. Many people today use the burning of incense as part of their praying of the Liturgy of the Hours or during private prayers. The *Roman Ordos* (ritual books) from the 7th to the 14th centuries document the use of incense at the blessing of the dedication of new Churches and items such as new Altars, new Church bells, new Sacred Vessels, and newly acquired copies of the Book of Gospels. Incense is also used in the rite of consecrating of the Oil of Chrism and the blessing of other Holy Oils, and during the singing of the Gospel canticle at solemn Morning and Evening Prayers of the Divine Office. Equally grains of incense are placed into the sepulcher of newly Consecrated Altars along with the relics of saints to represent the burial rite of the ancient martyrs and to symbolize the prayers of the saint to whom the relic belongs (Herrera, 2012).

Burning of Incense and Prayer Intentions: A Ritual Contact with God

Today incense is available in a great many forms and uses. Traditionally, people burnt incense for different purposes. Some are sticks, cones, logs, blocks, and powders. The most popular scents are Frankincense, Jasmine, Musk, Rose, and Sandalwood. However, form and fragrance are not really of primary importance in the choice of incense to be used. What is important is the belief that their prayers are answered and that the evil power have been averted. The burning of prayer intentions were not common to the Annang people as their prayers were vocal, mentioned instantly as the incense are burnt (Riva, 1984).

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Burning of incense and prayer intentions in the Church today brings about the Christian ritual contact with God as those prayer intentions are burnt together with incense and the smoke and aroma produce from it our prayers are rising to God in heaven. During pilgrimages, or special prayer moments, Novena Prayers, intentions should be burnt because of their powerful liturgical symbolism.

Raising of Sense of Solemnity and Mystery to the Mass

Pat McCloskey underlines that the concept of progressive solemnity seems a helpful guide to decide in which Masses to use incense and where in the Mass incense should be used. In most cases we do not use incense. During the most solemn days of the year we should use incense throughout the liturgy. In doing this, incense becomes one of many ways in which a liturgy can be made more solemn. Hence, the use of incense adds and raises a sense of solemnity and mystery to the Mass (McCloskey, 2019). Both Williams Saunders and Chinaka Justin observed that the imagery of the smoke and the smell remind us of the transcendence of the Mass which links heaven with earth, and allows us to enter into the presence of God. It helps in understanding that at Mass the faithful enter into and are united with the worship offered to God in Heaven by his Angels and Saints (Mbaeri, 2016).

Making our Liturgy and Prayers a Sweet Aroma Rising Up to God

Incense symbolizes communication between human beings and God through prayer whether it is public or private. It may also symbolize oblation, worship, veneration, and purification and refers to the burnt sacrifices in the Temple and to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in the crucifixion (Kenna, 2005). As a daily practice, priests burned incense morning and evening. This was called “perpetual incense before the Lord.” It typified the ministry of our Lord, the Great High Priest who ever lives to make intercessions for his people. The ministers are to offer up to God daily intercessions, pleading with him on behalf of people and obtain for them the blessings of God. By keeping the lamps burning bright with God’s oil, they bring pleasure to God our Father. Our prayers become like sweet aromas, and the fragrance which reaches him through his Son (Brownson, 1997). These clouds of incense in the liturgy symbolize the glory of God that is present as we worship him and God’s image is respected in each of the faithful incensed, thereby calling all to rise to where God is, becoming partakers of his divine nature.

Liturgical Challenges

Lack of Knowledge, Attention and Preparation of the Incense

What we see around regarding the use of incense seems to be a great lack of knowledge of the same. There is a gross disinterestedness in the use of incense by a good number of the minister of the Eucharist. This can be affirmed from the manner the thurible is used at Mass. A great number does not know how many swings to the consecrated host or Blessed Sacrament, let alone incensing the Bishop, priest and the faithful. Some do murmur some prayers while putting incense into the thurible while others have no knowledge of profound bow to the person or object that is incensed. The rite says that, the priest having put incense into the thurible, blesses it with the sign of the Cross, without saying anything and before and after an incensation, a profound bow is made to the person or object that is incensed, except for the incensation of the Altar and the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, No. 277). Attention is no longer given to the preparation of incense in regards to preparation for the Mass. Care is no more given to this area. In some Parishes you hardly see traces of incense and thurible. Preparing the incense for the liturgical celebration not just part of the things to do but being aware of the symbolism it brings. Attention and follow up must be given and possibly be used at every Mass.

Loss of Symbolism of Incense: Burning, Fragrance and the Rising Smoke

The Catholic Church has developed a very significant use of smoke over the centuries and the people of God have been fascinated by smoke which symbolises the constant striving to reach the heavens. For years the Church have always use smoke signals. During the election of a new pope the eligible cardinals conduct secret ballots until one person receives the critical vote of two-thirds plus one. Each time a vote is complete, the ballots are burned. To signify an unsuccessful ballot, straw is mixed with the papers to produce black smoke. When pure white smoke is seen, it indicates that a Pope has been elected. The more disinterestedness in the use of incense the more the symbolism of incense is lost. By not using it in the liturgy, the sign of reverence (for the word of God) and respect (for Christ whom the Altar represents and his sacrifice made present upon the Altar) and prayer is lost. The rising smoke of burning incense has always been the symbol of prayers of God’s people rising like incense to the altar of God in heaven (Smedley, 2019).

Abuses of the Use of Incense and Manner of Incensing

Issues have been on record whether it is acceptable for the priest to remain seated while he places incense in the thurible during the singing of the Alleluia? The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states: “Afterwards, all rise, and the Alleluia or other chant is sung as required by the liturgical season” (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, Nos. 62-64, 131). And “during

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the singing of the Alleluia or other chant, if incense is used, the priest puts some into the thurible and blesses it. When dealing with concelebration, the GIRM says:

“During the Liturgy of the Word, the concelebrants remain at their places, sitting or standing whenever the principal celebrant does. When the Alleluia is begun, all rise, except for a Bishop, who puts incense into the thurible without saying anything and blesses the deacon or, if there is no deacon, the concelebrant who is to proclaim the Gospel. In a concelebration where a priest presides, however, the concelebrant who in the absence of a deacon proclaims the Gospel neither requests nor receives the blessing of the principal celebrant” (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, No 212)

The key to interpreting this text lies in the lack of any exception indicated after the “all rise” in GIRM 131. If the intention for the priest was to remain seated, it would have been necessary to say so as indicated for the bishop during a concelebration. In other words, the text should have said, “All rise, except for the priest, who puts incense into the thurible.” This may be called an “understandable error” but not an abuse. It must be admitted that not all liturgists will agree with this position. Some would argue that since the Ceremonial of Bishops makes no such distinction, and this book was designed to be a guide for priestly celebrations in areas where the missal was not clear, then priests should follow the indications given in the Ceremonial. If that is the case such an inference would have been corrected before the publication of the third edition of the Roman Missal. This is why it is stated above that the practice of remaining seated was an “understandable mistake” (McNamara, 2013). Regarding the position of the thurifer at the entrance and final procession, it is the thurifer that leads the procession followed by processional Cross. Monsignor Peter Elliott (now Bishop) in his manual “Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite” states in No. 412 that: “...The procession leaves in the same order as it entered, except that the thurifer (and boat bearer) without the thurible (and boat) follows the cross bearer and candle bearers” (Elliott, 2005). Though many differ with this position, the point is whether a thurifer who is not carrying the thurible should lead the procession. On this point it is logical that, having ceased to function, the thurifer should join the other servers behind the cross.

Loss Symbolism of Incense in Parishes

Many Catholic Christians today are not familiar with many things in the Church again. For some it is just about attending Mass but things for the Mass they may not be familiar with. For instance, the uses of incense at liturgies in parishes are full of symbolic expressions of our prayers to God. The Catechism advises us that prayers of petition include substantially more than our spirit. “Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2562). Hence, the Church’s public forms of worship contain numerous elements that are visible and engage our bodily senses. The Catechism teaches us that, in human life, signs and images involve a vital place and as a physical being, we communicate and see profound substances through signs and images. As a social being, we need signs and images to speak with others, through dialect, motions, and activities (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1146 and Kosloski, 2017). In order to help connect with this greater part of our faculties amid the celebration of Mass, lifting up our bodies and souls to God, the Church for quite a long time has utilized incense as a vital outer sign. In the light of Ex 30:8; Ps 141:2 and Rev 8:4, the essential significance behind the utilization of incense is to symbolize our supplications ascending to God. When we see the incense, we are reminded that the priest is there to pray for us before our God. Incense brings to mind the wonderful reality of the Mass, reminding us that the Mass is a meeting place amongst paradise and earth (Kosloski, 2017 and St Theresa Church Alhambra, 2017).

6. The Paradigm: The Convergence of the Use of Incense among Annang People and the Catholic Christian Rites

Superstitious Beliefs and Dispelling of Evil Spirit

Today, the official Church teaching continues to wrestle with questions of sin and evil and superstitions. The belief that the devil exists but cannot prevent the establishment and spread of the kingdom of God is true and God always have the final victory in Christ Jesus. The Church in many part of the continent through her missionaries wisely encourages us to approach life’s mystery with trust and with a true sense of our own place in the created order. However, the ancient stories of superstition, evil spirits and works of satan though great in number were of mythology and are still very strong in many Annang people (Switzer, 2014). Superstitious beliefs are a belief based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic. It is a belief that certain events or thing will bring good or bad luck. For such position, the Annang people have an intense belief in the supernatural (ancestral and non-ancestral spirits and witches who cause disorders in the community and have to be appeased to maintain some order. Hence, the superstitious beliefs in witchcraft, wizards, divination, visiting ghosts, seeing some black cats crossing the road were considered as bad luck and many superstitions about rainbow or thunder lightings (Harish, 2016). Before the arrival of the Christian missionaries and even to some extent up to today, there still exist superstitious beliefs among the Annang people especially about the existence of evil spirits, bad spirits of the ancestors who comes to hunt the living or cause them sickness and misfortune in life. Hence, they resulted to burning of incense in their homes for protection against these bad spirits and dispelling of the same bad

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spirits. This exactly in line when we burn incense in the Christian rites to dispel the power of evil or chase them away and render the place of worship and the people free and clean to be in the presence of God.

The Places of Worship

A place of worship according to the Oxford dictionary defines it as a specially designed structure or consecrated space where individuals or a group of people come to perform acts of devotion, veneration or religious activities. As such, worship in these places becomes sacred by the virtue of what it is used for. Worship takes place at appointed seasons and places. The calendar of religious activities becomes also of great importance for the worshipping family or community, since communities associate worship with critical times in the life of the society – for example, the hunting, planting, and harvesting seasons were of special importance. Among the Annang people shrines were used as the place of worship. There were different types of shrines like personal huts, village shrine, family shrine, burial places of the ancestors. There were also sacred places associated with trees, water, cave and mountain (Harrelson, 2019). African shrines and Churches are a source of great pride not only for the worshipers of African Traditional Religion and the Church faithful but also for the wider local community (Roche, 2011). In African Traditional Religion, the place of worship and sacrifice is an important part of an African household, and such was for the Annang people. Almost every family had a shrine or what they call, “ufok idiong” (traditional shrines), for calling of the spirit of the ancestors or for offering of sacrifices it was always done in the shrine. Some families will even place this shrine in one of their rooms. Family members could spend some few moments in prayer, sacrifices or communication with the spirits. Sometimes they may light a simple oil lamp produced traditionally. At the “ufok idiong” they light incense to purify the place, objects for sacrifices and the people. At some certain day food may be offered to the gods (Oluwabukunmi, 2019). In all these we find some convergent point because of the place of worship involved. In both places (traditional shrine or the Church) burning of incense were offered – meaning that the prayers offered may rise to God.

Offering of Sacrifice

The Old Testament consists of many Sacrifices and Offerings which were instituted by God himself. An offering is a gift that is brought before God in a manner of humility and honour. It need not necessarily consist of animal sacrifices, but could be anything from bread to jewels (Num 28: 2, 31:50). Burnt Offerings are first seen many years before Moses, being offered by Noah (Gen 8: 20), Abraham (Gen 22: 2) and Job (Job 1: 5). The processes could be of a meal offering according to Lev 2:2-3 is memorial which a reminder of our indebtedness to God, those offering made by fire and incense as a reminder that being consume by fire and incense our prayer rises up to God. In the offering of sacrifice in the shrine among the Annang people, there were at least two things involved: offering of incense from the calabash pot or incense sticks placed at strategic places within the shrine for prayers to rise up to the “Abasi Ibom – Abasi Enyong” (Supreme Being) and libation for “Abasi Isong” (god of the earth). In some instances, that incense could be used to run over the items for sacrifice. Similarly in our liturgy we incense the gifts of bread and wine to be offered as well the Altar of sacrifice.

In the Persons and the Ministers

It must be noted that in Annang land, the people make use of the sacred object which they extract from the nature and employ it in the worship or sacrifice; for example, water, oil, and incense becomes agent of personal protection. Hence, the “Abia Ibok” before presiding over a ceremony will always carry out ritual of self-purification and protection as well as those present in such ceremony. Within the ceremony itself, there may be moment he purifies himself again after that, the items of sacrifice before he purifies the people (Hackett, 1989) and secondly, apart from incensing or purifying the place, the people may be purified and made ready to partake in the sacrifice. In the GIRM we find some similarly to incensing the minister and the people when it says that the priest, because of their sacred ministry, and the people, by reason of their baptismal dignity, may be incensed by the deacon or another minister” (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, No. 75).

On the Sick Person and the Dead

In the traditional healing process of sick person incense were used since it produces a variety of plant based ingredients including barks, leaves, resins, roots and essential oils. This is not only among the Annang people but throughout the history, plants and their essential oils have been used to facilitate healing on all levels – mental, physical, emotional and spiritual (Beauchesne, 2014). I recall how my grandmother would give us a ritual bath whenever we were sick of “Utoonyen” (malaria) using barks of trees like mango, paw paw leaves, “owolowo” leaves, “dogonjaro” leaves” and etc. She will mixed them in the pot, add water and cooked it. When it is done the pot will be drop down from the fire and the sick grandchild sits around the pot and he/she will be covered with a thick cloth. She will be turning the herb which produces some kind of fragrance and odour. This is belief to be a healing remedy for the sick. On the other hand, the traditional methods of preserving dead human bodies had been of immense importance in Annang society. This practice had been sustained for thousands of years for cultural, religious and socio-environmental reasons before the incoming of the practice of embalment (Okonkwo and Eyisi, 2014). For the Annang people preservation of dead human body or embalment is the act of treating the dead human body in order to reduce the presence and

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growth of micro-organism, to retard decomposition and to restore an acceptable physical appearance (Frederick, 1989). Corpses are preserved traditionally for some days before burial using local materials sourced within the immediate environment. And as such, incense and other scent leaves were used.

The Church definitely would not recommend use of incense for curing purposes of sickness since her belief in the orthodox medicine is so strong and popular. However, the Church would recommend hospitals with mortuary services but at the funeral Mass the Church uses incense on the corpse. The priest continues a tradition that dates back to the time of Moses and the Aaronic priesthood: *...It has been given to you that you might bear the guilt of the community and make atonement for them before the Lord (Lev 10:17)*. The Church prays for the deceased and commends them to God. So the incense represents the prayers of the faithful at the Mass, praying to God to receive the soul of the departed one. The priest goes around the casket with the censer, showing that the soul is going up to God. Pope Benedict XVI says that the priest’s mission is to be a mediator, a bridge that connects, and thereby to bring human beings to God, to his redemption, to his true light, to his true life. Therefore, incense becomes a powerful sign of this intercessory role of the priest on behalf of the dead – a mediator between earth and heaven (DeFazio, 2019).

7. The Recovery of Liturgical Symbolisms of Incense

Much has been mentioned already about symbolisms in chapter three and four. In this chapter we will try explore how best the symbols can be recovered in the Eucharistic celebrations, Eucharistic Adoration, Eucharistic processions, solemn liturgy of the hours, burning of prayer intentions, dedication of the Church and Altar, Exorcism, and Christian funerals. The *General Instruction* which accompanies the *Roman Missal*, the manual for the celebration of Catholic liturgies, describes a biblical reason for the usage of incense. In the First and Second Temple periods, incense was used in Jewish worship. Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and sacrifices (1 Kgs 9:25). God chose people to offer sacrifice to him, incense and a pleasing odour as a memorial portion, to make atonement for his people (Sir 45:16). But there is also prophecy regarding the use of incense in the Messianic age: *...from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, (Mal 1:11)*, and in the book of Revelation, a vision of God’s temple in heaven depicts an altar of incense (Rev 8:3). So the concept of incense being offered to God as a means of accompanying prayers of intercession and atonement was carried over from Judaism to Christianity. What a beautiful sign that is given even greater significance when the ministerial priest is united with the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ in the liturgy (DeFazio, 2019).

The Sacred Incense in the Liturgy: The Fragrance of God

Most living things still use the sense of smell to communicate. The sacred liturgy uses incense as one way of communicating to God and as such it becomes the fragrance of God. God loves fragrances. This was a common saying among ancient Egyptians. To them, the burning of incense was very much a part of their worship. In the belief that the gods were near, the Egyptians burned incense daily at their temples and household altars and even while engaging in business. During our Church Services, the priest burns incense. A Church should have a fragrance that attracts people to it. – a fragrance that purifies the mind and strengthen the soul. It should have peace, which reinforces troubled minds. It should have strength to bring healing to the spiritually ill. It should have pungent activity, to lift children and youth. It should have the fragrance of flowers, to recall long-forgotten things of joy and beauty. Indeed, every Church should radiate the fragrance of Christ. “We are the aroma of Christ to God,” says St. Paul (2 Cor 2:15) (Ziton, 2019).

The Eucharistic Celebrations (Entrance, Gospel, Offertory, Priests and People)

The use of incense entered into the Jewish ritual very extensively, being used especially in connection with the Eucharistic offerings of oil, fruits, and wine, or the unbloody sacrifices (Leviticus, 6:15). According to the GIRM, incense is used at entrance, Gospel, offertory, the priest and the people. At the Eucharistic celebration incense is used in the following manner. Before the procession the main celebrant will add grains of incense into the thurible with charcoal. At the entrance procession the thurifer leads the procession before the Cross Bearer. At the Altar (after kissing the Altar) he adds another grain of incense and incenses the Altar and the Cross (it came around 12th century). Incensation of the Gospel at Mass appears very early. Before the Gospel the priest adds incense to the thurible and blesses it. Then before the proclamation of the Gospel the priest or the deacon incenses the Book of the Gospel (General Instruction for the Roman Missal, Nos. 133-134). In connection with the offertory and elevation it came around 11th century, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament (about the 14th century) (Balbirnie, 2019). A point of debate is raised in the case of concelebration, especially when a bishop presides. The Ceremonial of Bishops, No. 149, says that the deacon incenses the bishop, then the concelebrants, then the people. On the other hand, the more recent GIRM No. 214, in referring to concelebrated Masses, simply says that the preparation of the gifts is to be carried out according to Nos. 139-146 and there is no reference to a separate incensing of the concelebrants. Likewise, personal observation of some celebrations in the Vatican in which there was no separate incensing of concelebrants would seem to indicate that the incensing of the principal celebrant is considered as representing all clergy present. However, it might also be explained by the fact that the concelebrants in

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the basilica are generally not in a distinct presbytery but are placed in front of the assembly; this makes it impossible to distinguish a separate incensing of clergy and faithful. Since both these documents remain in force, I believe that both options are viable. Pending further official clarifications, either form may be chosen according to the concrete circumstances such as the number and location of the concelebrants, structure of the presbytery, or the time required (McNamara, 2013). For the Incensation of the bread and wine placed on the Altar, it is done “In Modum Crucis” or “In Modum Circuli” (Elliott, 2005).

In the Eucharistic Adoration

The Eucharistic Adoration is the act of adoring the Eucharistic presence of Christ. The Church believes that because “*Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity*” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1413 and Grigus, 2002). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “*The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the Sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only with Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession*” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1378). Who then is allowed to expose or repose the Eucharist in adoration? What are the sacred items needed for Eucharistic Adoration? The guidelines for Eucharistic Adoration regulates that arrangements should be made for a priest or deacon since they are the preferred or appropriate minister of the exposition and reposition of the Eucharist. However, in the absence of a priest or deacon, the following people may expose and repose the Eucharist: an acolyte or extraordinary minister of communion; a member of a religious community or of a lay association of men or women that is devoted to Eucharistic adoration, upon appointment by the Bishop (Regulation Regarding Eucharistic Adoration, 2001 and Adoremus, 2007).

Adoration of the Holy Eucharist may be celebrated in several ways. There are guidelines for solemn Exposition, Adoration, and Benediction, celebrated by a Bishop, priest, or deacon, with altar server(s) and congregation, in the main body of a Church. A priest or deacon should wear an Alb and a white stole. Other ministers should wear vestments suitable for this ministry that have been approved by the Bishop. On the altar are four or six lighted candles. As the celebrant and altar servers enter, the people stand. The hymn *O Salutaris Hostia* begins. In exposing the Eucharist the celebrant may place the monstrance on the altar (if it was not placed before), then goes to the tabernacle. (If the tabernacle is in a side chapel, the celebrant wears the humeral veil, and the torch-bearer may accompany him.) The people kneel as the celebrant brings the Holy Eucharist to the altar. He places the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance. Then the celebrant and servers kneel facing the altar, and the celebrant incenses the Blessed Sacrament with three swings. If the Exposition of the Holy Eucharist is to continue for an extensive period, the celebrant and servers may withdraw. The people may remain kneeling. During adoration, prayers, songs and readings should be used to direct attention of adorers to the worship of Jesus Christ. The Liturgy of the Hours is a recommended exhortation before the Eucharist at adoration. It is also desirable for adorers to spend periods of time in reflective silence (Regulation Regarding Eucharistic Adoration, 2001 and Adoremus, 2007).

Near the end of the period of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the celebrant goes to the altar, genuflects, and kneels. He may also incense the Blessed Sacrament (three swings) while the hymn *Tantum Ergo* is sang. All remain kneeling as the celebrant leads the people in prayer with the invitation – *Panem de caelo praestitisti eis* (You have given them Bread from heaven) and the people response, *Omne delectamentum in se habentem* (Having all sweetness within it) and then the prayer. After the prayer, the celebrant kneels and dons himself with the humeral veil, then goes to the altar, takes up the monstrance, and elevating the monstrance, the priest solemnly blesses the people by slowly making the sign of the cross with the Blessed Sacrament. This blessing may be given only by a bishop, priest, or deacon. During the Eucharistic blessing, the thurifer, kneel facing the altar, may incense the Blessed Sacrament with three swings. As they receive the solemn blessing with the Holy Eucharist, the people bow their heads and make the Sign of the Cross. After the celebrant blesses the people, he replaces the monstrance on the altar and returns to his place facing the Blessed Sacrament and kneels. He leads the people in praying or singing the Divine Praises. By custom the people repeat each phrase after him (Regulation Regarding Eucharistic Adoration, 2001 and Adoremus, 2007).

At the time of reposition, the minister, replaces the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and the hymn Holy God, we praise thy name may be sung. The celebrant rises, goes to the altar, genuflects, removes the Blessed Sacrament from the monstrance, and places it in the pyx. He places the empty monstrance to the side (he may also veil the monstrance). Then he goes to the tabernacle to repose the Blessed Sacrament within it. As soon as the Blessed Sacrament is reposed within the tabernacle, all stand. Facing the altar the celebrant and servers genuflect (or bow, if the Blessed Sacrament is not reserved in the sanctuary) and withdraw to the sacristy (Regulation Regarding Eucharistic Adoration, 2001 and Adoremus, 2007).

Solemn Prayers and Burning of Prayer Intentions

Why do we burn candles during prayers? The Catholic custom of lighting candles is rooted in the Church teaching that Christ is the Light of the World. It serves as an outward sign of the light of faith burning in our hearts. They help to draw us into communion with Jesus Christ. They are our silent sentinels lifting up our prayer intentions to the Lord in the spirit of an offering. People lit a candle as a way of entrusting their special intentions before the Lord (Congregation of Marian Fathers of the

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Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, 2019). In a similar note we may ask, why do we burn prayer intentions? According to Scripture, the prayers of God’s people are like an incense offering (cf., Ps 141: 2). Is it proper to pray while burning incense? Is it something that a lay person should performed? Can it be adopted and encourage during pilgrimages or solemn prayers in Parishes? There is nothing really wrong with that. Burning incense or candles in itself is not a usurpation of the priest’s function. Besides, many families are doing this as a private devotion. There is no really much difference between praying with lighted candles and burning of prayer intention except the addition of incense to the burning of the written intentions.

For the Annang people burning offering or ceremony was a transformative ritual performed seasonally. In the recent times we have seen during New Year Eve the youth are burning a symbolic old man or woman as a way to release the past, negativity, or pain. During this burning ceremony, fire is portrayed as a powerful symbol of wisdom, knowledge, passion, and purification. From our religious point, the intentions varied from one to another – a religious ritual of burning intentions of old resentments, hurt, grudges, regrets, or suffering, and focus on what is more significant to us (Baghadia, 2019). The Catholic does not really encourage it but only on few occasions like pilgrimage. In fact, during Novena Prayers, Mass for the sick (once a month) we can equally burn the prayer intentions. Incense as a thing that burns and produces smoke and fragrances is similar to a candle which is complete with the metaphorical smelling of the offering by God. It is an image of prayer. Hence, to burn prayer intention with incense is a symbol of an offering to God of everything of us as a pleasing odour and fragrance. Therefore, with regard to candles and incense, they are “sacramental” in the widest sense. This means that their physical use is for spiritual purposes and they have to be blessed by a priest (Armstrong, 2009).

Dedication or Consecration of the Church and the Altar

Consecration is an act by which a thing is separated from a common and profane to a sacred use or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies. The current terminology favours “Dedication” of the Church and the Altar over the “Consecration” of a Church or Altar (Lang, 1989). The second Book of Chronicles notes that, “*Now I am about to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God and to dedicate it to him for burning fragrant incense before him, for setting out the consecrated bread regularly, and for making burnt offerings every morning and evening and on the Sabbaths, at the New Moons and at the appointed festivals of the LORD our God. This is a lasting ordinance for Israel*” (2 Chron 2:4). In the Old Testament, Moses by a solemn act of consecration designated Israelites as the people of God. The Book of Exodus chapter 24 described the rite used on that occasion as the erection of an altar and twelve memorial stones (to represent the twelve tribes) and the selection of twelve youths to perform the burnt-offering of holocaust. In Exodus chapter 29 we read about the consecration of priests: Aaron and his sons who had been elected as mentioned in Exodus chapter 28. In this texts, the act of consecration consisted of purification, investiture and anointing (Lev 8) (Knight, 2019). The consecration of Churches dates probably from Apostolic times and is, in a sense, a continuation of the Jewish rite instituted by Solomon. At the consecration of a Church at least one fixed altar must be consecrated. Altars, permanent structures of stone, may be consecrated at other times, but only in Churches that have been consecrated or at least solemnly blessed. The ordinary minister of its consecration is the Diocesan Bishop but with the permission of the Ordinary, another Bishop from another diocese cannot licitly consecrate an altar, although without such permission the consecration would be valid (*Pontificale Romanum* and Knight, 2019).

The ceremony of the Dedication of the Church may begin with the Solemn Evening Prayer I from the office of the Dedication of a Church with the rite exposition and deposition of the relics on the evening before the day of consecration, it is highly recommended to keep a vigil at the relics of the martyr or saint that are to be placed beneath the Altar. This vigil should be properly adapted to encourage the people’s participation, but the requirements of the law are respected (The General Instruction for the Liturgy of the Hours, No. 70-73). In the dedication of the Church, the Rites of Anointing (the altar and the walls of the Church which signifies that it is given over entirely and perpetually to Christian worship), Incensing, Covering (indicates that the Christian altar is the altar of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the table of the Lord), and Lighting the Altar (reminds us that Christ is ‘a light to enlighten the nations’) is use which expresses in visible signs several aspects of the invisible work that the Lord accomplishes through the Church. Here in this case I am concern about the rite of incense when it says that incense is burned on the altar to signify that Christ’s sacrifice perpetuated in mystery, ascends to God as an odour of sweetness and it also signifies that the people’s prayers rise up pleasing and acceptable, reaching the throne of God (Rev. 8: 3 – 4) (The Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar, No. 16). In the outline of the Rite of Dedication of the Church and an Altar, the introductory rite has three forms: first, second and third forms; followed by the liturgy of Word; Prayer of Dedication and Anointing during which we have the anointing of the Altar and the Walls of the Church, Incensation of the Altar and the Church and Lighting of the Altar and the Church and the liturgy of the Eucharist and Concluding rite (The Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar, No. 12).

Exorcisms

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, it defines exorcism as the process of forcing an evil spirit to leave a person or place by using prayers or magic (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Exorcism is a religious or spiritual practice or an act of freeing by symbolic action or of evicting demons or other spiritual entities from a person or places. It is a practice of casting out demons. The

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exorcist may use prayers and religious material, such as the Rite of Exorcism, gestures, symbols or icons (Lang, 1989). The Book of Tobit has an episode in which the angel Raphael gets Tobias to burn incense in order to make the demon flee away (cf., Tobit 6: 1 – 7). Burnt incense is used in specific conditions. The smoke of blessed incense irritates evil spirits, which causes them to reveal themselves and move away. This helps the priest in the recognition of evil spirits. Exorcism incense contains powerful herbs and resins to get rid of the most stubborn of energies. For example, the “Basil” type of incense helps to exorcise and protect against evil entities such as demons and unfriendly ghosts. “Ginseng Root” is burnt to keep the wicked spirits at bay and for protection against all forms of evil and “Fumitory” is burnt to exorcise demons, poltergeists, and evil supernatural entities while “Galangal” is used to break the curses cast by sorcerers and “Frankincense” to dispel negativity, spirituality, purify magical spaces, protect against evil, exorcism, and induce psychic visions, courage and protection (Raven and Crone, 2009).

Christian Funerals

What significance would the use of incense in a Catholic funeral offer to us? Incense was originally used to mask the smell of the corpse – the smell of decomposition could be horrible. With the modern funerary practices, there are no more any lingering odours associated with a corpse and the use of incense has been relegated to being a ceremonial practice. Its significance as a symbol is used to “show” the soul of the deceased ascending to “heaven” (Currier, 2018). According to the Order of Christian Funerals, the Church uses incense during the funeral rites (final commendation) on the bodies of the departed as a sign of honour to the body of the deceased, which were sanctified and made holy through baptism. Incense is also used as a sign of the community’s prayers for the deceased rising to the throne of God and as a sign of farewell (The Order of Christian Funerals, No. 37). The use of incense at a funeral Mass becomes necessary. The purpose of incensing and the symbolic value of the smoke is that of purification and sanctification. Incense also creates the ambiance of heaven. The use of incense in the ordinary form of funeral rite is very clear – incensing the remains in the coffin and the grave. Do we also incense when it is cremated remains? In April 1997, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments granted an indult for the United States to allow the diocesan bishop to permit the presence of the cremated remains of a body at a Funeral Mass. Later that year, the Congregation confirmed the special texts and ritual directives (Prot. n. 1589/96/L for both indult and texts), which were then published as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. By means of clarification and suggestions for best practices regarding the presence of cremated remains and funerals and their appropriate final commendation (The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012), the Church clearly prefers that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites” (The Order of Christian Funerals, No. 413). The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains on the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (The Order of Christian Funerals, No. 417). This allows for the appropriate reverence for the sacredness of the body at the Funeral Mass: sprinkling with holy water, the placing of the pall, and honouring it with incense (The Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix, Nos. 418-421).

Incense as a Sacramental Devotion

Sacramentals are some of the least understood and most misrepresented elements of Catholic prayer life and devotion. What exactly is a sacramental, and how are they used by Catholics? The devotions are “external practices of piety” of an inward desires which may not part of the official liturgy of the Catholic Church but are part of the popular spiritual practices of Catholics. Catholic devotions do not become part of liturgical worship, even if they are performed within a Catholic church, in a group, in the presence of a priest (The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy). The centrality of a sacramental devotion is Jesus Christ. For instance, a devotion to a particular Saint does not take the place of or even equal our love of and devotion to Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity. A sacramental is anything set apart or blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion, and through these movements of the heart to remit venial sin. Some people may think that sacramentals are always physical objects. Many of them are but the most common of sacramentals are holy water, rosary, crucifixes, medals and statues of saints, holy cards, and scapulars. But perhaps the most common sacramental is an action, rather than a physical object for example the Sign of the Cross and the act of incensing (Richert, 2019 and Kwasniewski, 2016). As Catholics we light a candle to offering our prayers and burnt offering to the Lord which drives away the darkness and the emission of “holy smoke” that pervades a room and chases away the “prince of the power of the air” so it is about incense. For some it helps bring solemnity to the routine (not that prayer should be routine). It also acts as a burnt offering to the Lord and the smoke raises our prayer to God and drives away demons. The rising smoke shows our veneration of that which is incensed, the Holy Eucharist, the holy images, relics and the Scriptures (Oblate of St. Benedict, 2015).

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CONCLUSION

The Catholic faith is a liturgical faith. It makes use of all five of our senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. This is certainly by design as each sense aids us in availing ourselves of the salvific grace flowing from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This is precisely why every effort should be used to employ all of our senses whenever possible during the celebration of the sacred liturgy. In more concise terms, the “smells and bells” most certainly do matter (Herrera, 2012). Incense burning in religious and domestic contexts has existed since the beginnings of our civilization. Yet, few chemical analyses have been performed on remnants of this widespread ritual, which in part may be due to the misconception that incense is a fairly volatile substance leaving no traces after burning. Nevertheless, certain resins such as frankincense contain a substantial amount of non-volatile components which are well preserved in the archaeological record.

The Journal of American Cancer Society in August 26, 2008, says that the long term use of incense increases the risk of developing cancers of the respiratory tract. Researchers have shown that burning incense – which is made of plant materials mixed with oils – produces a mixture of possible carcinogens, including polyaromatic hydrocarbons, carbonyls and benzene. Because incense smoke is inhaled, a number of studies have looked at the possible link between incense burning and lung cancer, but results have been inconsistent. In addition, the possible association of incense use and other respiratory tract cancers has not been analyzed (American Cancer Society, 2008). Similarly, Jim McDaid, a minister of state in Ireland’s Ministry of Transport, in 2003 said that, the burning of incense could cause cancer. He highlighted the threat, particularly to altar boys and girls, in a comment on the Irish government’s plan to ban smoking in the workplace. Dr McDaid who was a medical practitioner before entering politics and had supported the ban on smoking, said that he was not anti-church, anti-smoking or against the use of incense, but he said there is a serious aspect to this and we all know that carbon is a carcinogenic agent, and wherever you have smoke, you are actually looking at carbon molecules. And wherever you have carbon molecules and happen to be inhaling them, then there is that chance that you will be doing damage (Parkin, 2003). In a response the spokeswoman for the Dublin archdiocese said although there was no official position on Dr McDaid’s remarks, any concerns about the use of incense would be taken seriously and subject to investigation by the Church. She further said incense had been widely used in the past during benediction and high mass, but was most often used now during funeral ceremonies, when the priest was performing a blessing over the coffin. Father John McCann, master of ceremonies to the Archbishop of Dublin, said he believed there was growing awareness about the potentially harmful effects of the smoke from burning incense. That in a large church building where there is plenty of space, I would be less worried. But in a small church building you have to be particularly aware, particularly if there are servers suffering from asthma (Parkin, 2003).

Scents, aromas, fragrances (however we may describe them) can be used to trigger specific responses. For instance; to encourage relaxation, aid sleep, promote concentration, stimulate creativity, increase motivation and heighten sexual desire, medicinal, meditation, air purification as well as spirituality. In addition, there’s also a whole raft of religious, aesthetic and practical reasons. A further dimension is that specific fragrances or ingredients can be used for specific purposes. Hence, there are types of incenses that may not be used at Churching (14 Reasons to burn Incense and the benefits, 2019). As such, the Annang people used incense for various reasons like medicine, recreation, magic, rites of passage, in the shrine for prayers and sacrifices, for purification, preservation of the dead and for healing purposes. For them, as long as it dispels the evil they never considered any harm in it. In fact, they have lived with it for thousands of years.

Though incense was burned not only for its pleasant aroma but as a sacred material to ward off evil spirit and offer prayers, purify and cleanse and to signify spiritual practices. It also encourages well-being and living in harmony with the nature. There are many types of incense that enhance this. For example, Jasmine has been associated with easing depression and calms the senses; Lemongrass is associated with uplifting energy and feeling alert and stress-relieving properties that inspire calm reflection and groundedness. Copal is a traditional Mexican scent, made from the sap of a Mexican tree and is used for cleansing negative energy and inspiring positive transformation. Lavender is known for its relaxing, sleep-promoting effects lavender is the ideal scent for those wishing to unwind and find some calm in a hectic world. It’s the most typical scent for creating a sense of tranquility (Kenshoway, 2019).

In the use of incense we become aware of the power of fragrance and the odour of sanctity. In the Scriptures not all incense offerings were acceptable to God. He punished non priests who presumptuously offered it as if they were priests (Num 16: 16 – 18, 35 – 40; 2 Chron 26: 16 – 20). The incense offered by the Jewish nation was offensive to God when they were at the same time engaging in acts of false worship and filling their hands with bloodshed. Their hypocrisy led God to declare: “Incense – it is something detestable to me” (Is 1: 13, 15). The Israelites became so negligent in the prescribed worship of God that they closed the temple and burned incense on other altars (2 Chron 28: 24 – 25). Years later the holy incense was even used in the depraved worship of false gods. Such practices were revolting to God (Ez 16: 2, 17 – 18). This means incense must be used properly for its purpose.

In religious rituals, specific smells may indicate liminality. Christianity in this case allowed the ritual use of incense only after Constantine’s Edict of Milan in the fourth century which legalized the religion. Until that time Christian theologians

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associated fragrance with polytheistic rituals, idol worships, particularly emperor worship, and condemned its use. As Christianity evolved into a state religion, it integrated incense into the liturgy perhaps as a way to compete with its various pagan counterparts. As recognized by most Romans, incense identified the Church as Sacred Space and the Mass as a Sacred Offering. The scented Mass also resembled Jewish temple sacrifice: just as the Jewish priest yielded the burnt offering upon the altar, by “fire of pleasing odour to the Lord” (Lev 1: 9), the Christian priest recreated Christ’s sacrifice as he transformed the Eucharistic bread into the mystical body. The liturgical use of incense re-enact the sacrificial victim’s “pleasing odour” rising to the heavens outlined in Jewish ritual (Thurkill, 2007).

I do believe that my work and the conclusions is not finality. It will definitely have some limitations and constraints since this work is on a specific group of people and for that matter a particular local Church. Therefore some findings may not be same as in other places. However, I would recommend that the issues surrounding the use of incense be not subjected only to pastoral circumstances but must be integrative of historical, anthropological and theological investigations.

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