

## COLLABORATION WITHIN THE 'ECOLOGY OF MISSION': AN AFRICAN CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*Collaborative ministry concerns the dynamics of relationships between the clergy, consecrated persons and lay faithful, that is, how they are able to work together as Christian ministers, each in his or her own right, being mutually supportive and acting in fellowship with the wider church<sup>1</sup>. However, in recent times, the issue of collaboration in ministry has become one of great importance with the passage of time, especially, as continuing cultural, economic and political changes have brought present conditions to such a point of development that completely new delicate and complex problems have arisen. This paper discusses not just the issue of collaborative ministry, but introduces an innovation as it colors the discourse with an African cultural perspective. The major question looming at the horizon of this work is: what has the African worldview to offer in the evolving discourses on collaborative ministry? In response to this question, this piece has explored the African background for African categories that would make discourses on collaborative ministry more meaningful to and at home in Africa. Having discussed the African worldview and developed models for collaborative ministry in Africa, this piece strongly submits that collaborative ministry studied from the African cultural perspective enriches the concept and makes more meaning to the African. For the purpose of this research, the contextual method of inquiry would be employed as it emphasizes circumstances and experiences of each people for the appropriation of the Christian faith. The complementary approach would also be patronized, especially as it expresses the nature and rhythm of the African universe.*

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Ecology, Mission, African, Cultural, Perspective.

### **Introduction**

A cursory glance at the historical development of the theology, spirituality and ecclesiology developed by the Church, especially during the Second Vatican Council, teach us that the different forms of life in the Church cannot and should not be compartmentalized, but are always in correlation with one another. And

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<sup>1</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Collaborative ministry': Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission (pp. 56-75), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p. 56.

this perspective is based on the concept of the nature of the Church. St Paul, around 90 AD, described the Church as “the fullness of Christ and of fellowship” (Ephesians 3:19)<sup>2</sup>. The early Fathers of the Church referred to the church as the *Ecclesia*- ‘the called out ones’, ‘the elect’, ‘the saints’ and ‘the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts’<sup>3</sup>. These perspectives define what quality of collaboration should be found in the Church.

The Second Vatican Council describes the singular constitutive nature of the Church, presenting her as *Mystery*<sup>4</sup>. From Pentecost, there exists in the world a *new People*<sup>5</sup>, which, vivified by the Holy Spirit, assembles in Christ in order to have access to the Father<sup>6</sup>. She is gathered from all nations and merged into such an intimate unity by the power of the Holy Spirit that its reality cannot be explained by recourse to mere sociological formula<sup>7</sup>. Only in this transcendent perspective can we rightly interpret the relationships among various members of the Church<sup>8</sup>. Intimately related to the idea of the Church as a mystery is the image of the Church as the body of Christ; unity in Christ involves a mutual communion of life among her members<sup>9</sup>. The very life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit builds up organic cohesion in Christ and unifies the Church “in communion and in the works of ministry”<sup>10</sup>. As the body of Christ, the Church is also the Sacrament of salvation, with a visible social organism and an invisible divine presence intimately united<sup>11</sup>. In this relationship, the social structure of the Church serves the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it<sup>12</sup>. The intimate reciprocal connection of the two elements, therefore, confers upon the Church her special *sacramental nature*<sup>13</sup> and thus, challenges her towards collaboration.

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<sup>2</sup> Kanu I. A. Introduction. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 4-5), Decent Global, Lagos, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Kung H. *The Church*. New York: Image Books.1981, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council* (pp.350-428). Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1964, No. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lumen Gentium. In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Kanu I. A. The theological foundations of mutual relations. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 4-5), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p.7.

<sup>7</sup> Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 9

<sup>8</sup> Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 4; 7; 8; 9; 12; 18; 21.

<sup>9</sup> Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 9

<sup>10</sup> Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Kanu I. A. The theological foundations of mutual relations. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 4-5), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 8

<sup>13</sup> Gaudium et Spes (1965). In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council* (pp.903-1001). Dublin: Dominican Publications. No. 42

This notwithstanding, with the passage of time, the issue of collaboration in ministry has become one of great importance in the Church, especially, as continuing cultural, economic and political changes have brought present conditions to such a point of development that completely new delicate and complex problems have arisen. This paper provides a context for discussing the issue of collaborative ministry in the Church from an African cultural perspective. The uniqueness of this discourse springs from the contribution that the African cultural worldview makes to the discourse on collaborative ministry. The phrase: 'Ecology of Mission' is very significant in this paper because it serves the understanding of the Church as an ecosystem in which we find mission in different layers and levels, but all of them in mutual interconnection<sup>14</sup>.

The contextual method of inquiry would be employed for the purpose of this study. This is important because it emphasizes circumstances and experiences of each people for the appropriation of the Christian faith. Contextualization removes theology from the ivory tower of merely academic engagement and situates it on the ordinary experience of people. Contextualization is cognizant and also respectful of the distinctiveness of the various human conditions and pays attention to them in their particularity<sup>15</sup>. The complementary approach would also be patronized, especially as it expresses the nature and rhythm of reality in the African world.

Consequently, my reflection would be divided into four parts:

1. What the African perspective has to offer
2. The imperatives for a cultural perspective
3. Understanding African cosmology
4. African cultural models for collaboration
5. Articulating an African cultural perspective of collaboration

### **What has an African Perspective to offer?**

The Western educational system has extolled the achievements of the West and denied African contributions so that what is known of Africa in many instances is limited to the usual stereotypes of the primitive, the savage, the inferior, etc<sup>16</sup>. This is evident in the writings of many Western scholars.

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<sup>14</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Collaborative ministry': Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.), p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Ogbonnaya, *African liberative theologies*. In *Introducing African liberative theologies* (pp. 26-46), New York: Orbis Books, 2015, pp. 31-32.

<sup>16</sup> Innocent Onyewuenyi, *The African origin of Greek philosophy*. University of Nigeria Press, Enugu, 1994, p. 33.

Linnaeus, writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, argues that all creatures were arranged by God in a great chain of hierarchy. In this hierarchy, the *Americanus* were considered tenacious, contented, free and ruled by custom. The *Europeanus*, he says are light, lively, inventive and ruled by rites. The *Asiaticus* are stern, haughty, stingy and ruled by opinion. *Africans* are cunning, slow, negligent and ruled by caprice<sup>17</sup>. Gobineau, writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed a racial anthropology, which argues that Europe had attained civilization while others are yet to<sup>18</sup>.

As a child of the same racial climate, Hume writes: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even an individual eminent in action or speculation"<sup>19</sup>. While Hegel avers that: "In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realization of any substantial existence<sup>20</sup>", Levy-Bruhl questions the veracity of an untutored African knowing God<sup>21</sup>. Baker did not spare the Negro: "The Negro is still at the rude dawn of faith-fetishism and has barely advanced in idolatry.... he has never grasped the idea of a personal deity, a duty in life, a moral code, or a shame of lying."<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, while this was part of the curriculum of the western educational system, here in Africa, African students were starved of information about their rich heritage and the achievements of their ancestral home, while being stuffed with an overdose of the history and achievements of the West. There is, therefore, the need for an honest re-evaluation of what is African. Saint Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Africa*, observes that the African continent: "is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole<sup>23</sup>."

These values became more visible through the writings of Leopald Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire and Leon Gontran Damas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This did not

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<sup>17</sup> Linnaeus, C. *System of nature*. Stockholm: Laurentius Salvius, 1758, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Gobineau, A. *The inequality of human race*. London: William Heinemann, 1915, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Kanu, I. A. *An Ontologico-Existential Hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian publications, Nigeria, 2015, p. 10

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, G. W. F. *The philosophy of history*. New York: Dover. 1956, p. 93

<sup>21</sup> F. O. C. Njoku. *Essays in African philosophy, thought and theology*. SNAAP Press, Enugu, 2002, p. 199.

<sup>22</sup> F. O. C. Njoku. *Essays in African philosophy, thought and theology*, p. 199.

<sup>23</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 2000, No. 42. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html).

only change the course of the intellectual history of Africa, but has also affected the way the gospel message is proclaimed to the Black Continent<sup>24</sup>. Since then, African theologians began to debate on the value of the gospel message announced to Africans by Western missionaries<sup>25</sup>. The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were years of passionate and fruitful discussions. It is in this same spirit that this paper echoes the relevance of an African cultural perspective in the discourse on the theology of collaboration.

The clause “African cultural perspective” is employed to reflect that every culture makes a contribution from its house of experience to the universal themes of theology, thus, making theology relevant to the reality of life.

To speak of an African cultural perspective does not in any way undermine the differences obtainable in Africa. It rather points to the many similarities and points of convergences in Africa because of which a scholar can make limited generalizations<sup>26</sup>.

### **Theological Imperatives for an African Cultural Perspective**

Before we undertake the study of collaborative ministry within the context of an African cultural perspective, it would be necessary to investigate the imperatives for such a study. The imperatives are taken from the Scripture and the history of the Church.

#### **a. Imperatives from the Scripture**

Jesus came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, His attitude towards the Jewish cult was one of Fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of His time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of Word in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, His fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a “critical yes”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of his time. His autonomy found

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<sup>24</sup> Bujo, B. and Muya J. I. *General Introduction: African theology today*. In Bujo, B. and Muya J. I. (eds.). *African theology: The contribution of the pioneers*. Paulines, Nairobi, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Bujo, B. and Muya J. I. *General Introduction: African theology today.*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Kanu, I. A., *Towards an Igbo Christology: A Cultural Christological Construct in Post-Missionary Africa*. Germany: Lambert Publications. 2016, p. 22.

expression in His challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion<sup>27</sup>.

When Jesus preached the Gospel, He used categories familiar to His audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during His time. St Paul writes, "To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (9:20 & 22). In this context, St Paul was talking about mission, in a way that brings the Christian experience into the cultural experience of the people<sup>28</sup>.

### **b. Imperatives from Church History**

Justin the Martyr holds that different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for His service. He saw culture as a prefiguration of Christ: a *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with Him and for Him<sup>29</sup>.

Clement of Alexander established a fundamental theory- a harmony of faith and Greek culture, which places Greek philosophy at the service of faith.

Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. ... philosophy was given to the Greeks directly; for it was a "schoolmaster", to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew<sup>30</sup>.

As the Church expanded from Palestine to Rome, it became clear that it was going into a new culture and would have to have new ways of expressing

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<sup>27</sup> Kanu, A. I. *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*, p. 58

<sup>28</sup> Kanu, I. A. & B. A. C. Obiefuna, *Inculturation as the Reconciliation of Cultures: Implications from Africae Munus*. A paper presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference/Meeting of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN). April 20<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>. At the Redemptorist Conference Centre, Ibadan, Oyo State, 2012, p 12.

<sup>29</sup> Kanu, I. A. *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Kanu, I. A. *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*, p.58

herself. In 312 Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan decriminalizing Christian worship. This paved the way for the initiation of large numbers of people to Christianity and the shaping of their belief systems on the Greek and Roman cultures. St Augustine taught that “as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages; and faith is not to be pre-occupied with customs, laws and institutions, neither is it to reject or destroy any of these, but rather it should observe and conserve them so that they do not constitute an obstacle to the religion that teaches the true worship of God”<sup>31</sup>.

### **The African Cosmology and Inter-Subjective Relations**

The structure of the African cosmos is the basis for an African theology of collaboration. It is a universe of particularities that, however, exist in a thermodynamic system- where every creature as an independent but interacting entity, negotiates another’s existential highway for mutual survival<sup>32</sup>. Negotiation is very important in the African universe because it is a world that one shares with the other in an atmosphere of inter-subjective relations. This inter-subjective relations only plays out without chaos when the individual is able to skillfully bridge his or her interiority with the individuality of the other.

African universe has physical and spiritual dimensions. In the spirit realm, God represents the Chief Being, and sits at the apex of power. In the physical world, human beings dominate, occupying the central position in the scheme of God’s creation. The structure of the African universe can be illustrated in three levels: the sky, the earth and the underworld: “the sky is where God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* and angels reside; the earth where human beings, animals, natural resources, some devils and some physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where ancestors and some bad spirits live”<sup>33</sup>.

The African universe persists because of a healthy inter-subjective relation. The spiritual and physical realms, although they have separate existence, interact. This is reflected in the above diagram as the three circles representing the spiritual worlds of (God), the spirits and the physical world of human beings

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<sup>31</sup> Kanu, I. A. & Elizabeth Ezenweke, Revisiting the Lessons of the Interaction between Faith and Culture in North Africa. A paper presented at the International Conference on Sustainable Development. Vol. 8. No. 2. pp. 67-71. Uyo: International Research and Development Institute, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> F. O. C. Njoku, *Ana Atutu Igbo philosophy: An African perspective on the problem of identity and conflict resolution*. Goldline and Jacobs publishers. USA, pp. 119.

<sup>33</sup> Ijomah, C. African philosophy’s contribution to the dialogue on reality issues. *Sankofa: Journal of the Humanities*. 3. 1. 81 – 90., 2005, p. 84.

overlap and, therefore, interact. There is really no demarcation between the physical and spiritual worlds, between the visible and invisible, the sacred and profane; as there is a cooperate existence of reality in the African universe. This is seen in the fact of the possibility of certain elements to move from one structure to another to commune with other elements. In this interaction, human beings commune with God, the divinities, the ancestors and vice versa<sup>34</sup>.

### **African Anthropology**

The human person in African ontology was created by God, and this makes life sacred and thus deserving of respect and dignity. This is why the Igbo-African bear the names: *Chi-nyere ndu*: God gave life; *Nke-chi-yere*: the one God has given; *Chi-n'eye ndu*: God gives life; *Chi-nwe- ndu*: God owns life; *Chi-ji-ndu*: God owns life. Among the Yoruba such names also abound: *Araoluwa* – Wonder of God; *Araoluwanimi* – I am God's wonder; *Ayanfeoluwanimi* – I am God's beloved; *Ereadura* – Reward of prayers; *Eriadurami* – Testimony of my prayer; *Ewaoluwa* – Beauty of God.

It is because the human person is understood as *Ewaoluwa* – Beauty of God that the Igbo cannot but call the human person *Mmadu*, which means that 'there is beauty'. The human person is not *mmadu* because he or she has a physical beauty. If it were based on this then many human beings would be referred to as 'Njodu' (there is ugliness). We are *mmadu* because of our ontological connection with God who is Beauty itself.

The divine presence in us, which one could refer to as the *Chi*- the spark of the divine in all human beings, provides a unity even in the midst of the plurality of humanity. This unity helps us to develop a philosophy of relationship with the other, *Ibem*. The Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. In a paradoxical way Ekwulu writes that:

The term *ibe* brings out the reciprocity tension between the self and the other. The self is always implicated in the other. The self's reference to the other always points back to the self. I am, as it were, in the other and the other is in me. He is my piece as i am his piece. That which is different

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<sup>34</sup> Ekwealor, C. C. The Igbo world-view: A general survey. E. Oguegbu (Ed.). *The humanities and all of us* (pp.29-33). Onitsha: Waterside, 1990, p.30.

from me is 'my piece' or 'my other'. That which is different from us is part of us<sup>35</sup>.

One can, therefore, argue that the differences among human beings is absolved in identity, for that which is different from me is part of me, *ibe m*, and, in turn, identity is absolved in the otherness, because I am part of the other who is different from me. Identity and otherness are in a sense two related concepts, for the one implies the other<sup>36</sup>. This anthropology can be a solid ground for constructing an African theology of collaboration.

### **African Cultural Models of Collaboration**

The idea of models employed here is within the context of a proposal that would serve as a basis for further study in the area of collaboration from an African perspective. While they might look strange, this proposal is in harmony with the economy of the incarnation and the teaching of *Ad Gentes* that calls for borrowing from the customs, traditions, wisdom and learning of local people.

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be<sup>37</sup>.

*Ad Gentes* teaches further:

From here... the Christian life will be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the young particular churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, saving always the primacy of Peter's See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Ekwulu, B. I. *Igbo concept of Ibe (the other) as a philosophical solution to the ethnic conflicts in African countries*. In B. I. Ekwulu (Ed.). *philosophical reflections on African issues*, 2010, p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> Kanu, I. A. *African philosophy, Identity and the Otherness*. A paper presented at the philosophy week of Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, School Auditorium, Makurdi, Benue State 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, No. 22

<sup>38</sup> *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, No. 22

In this regard, five African cultural models of collaboration would be entertained. And although they are treated as different models of collaboration, the nature of the African worldview, allows for an interaction in meaning.

**a. The 'Nri' Negotiative Model of Collaboration**

The story of the Igbo, no matter how briefly considered, would be incomplete if one omits the Eri-Nri contribution<sup>39</sup>. Tracing this history, Afigbo avers that Eri clan originated from the regions of Omumbala River, in Aguleri; from there they fanned eastward and established various communities<sup>40</sup>. Uzuoku describes Eri as the father of all Nri; and tradition says that he came from *Chukwu*<sup>41</sup>. It is reported that the earth was not firm when he came into it. To solve the problem of flood, he employed blacksmiths from Awka to use their bellows to dry the flooded land. There was also no food for people on earth to eat. To provide food, he prayed to God and God demanded that he should sacrifice his first son and daughter to him. After the sacrifice and burial of his son and daughter, yam and palm tree began to grow out of the place where he buried his first son, while vegetables and cocoyam grew out of the place where he buried his daughter. If yam germinated from where Eri's first son was buried, it means that yam is the resurrected son of Eri, given to man to sustain life. Yam is also regarded as life<sup>42</sup>.

In this myth, there is a cosmic drama between God, human beings, land and crops. Eri, the civilization hero enjoys a special relationship with Chukwu, and through Eri's sacrifice, humanity now enjoys a special relationship with the land which offers food for its sustenance. The ritual act performed by Eri established a covenant between Eri, his descendants and Chukwu. This explains why yam is very prominent in Igbo sacrifice and life, one which warrants its annual elaborate festival throughout Igbo land<sup>43</sup>.

These notwithstanding, we draw from this myth that collaboration can guarantee the survival of a people. Where there is no collaboration, even

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<sup>39</sup> Madubuko, L. Igbo world-view. *Bigard Theological Studies*. 1994, 14, 2. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Afigbo, A. E. *Ropes of sand: Studies in Igbo history and culture*. Ibadan, 1981, p.48.

<sup>41</sup> Uzuoku, E. E. Nri myth of origin and its ritualization: An essay in interpretation. In E. E. Uzuoku (Ed.). *Religions and African culture, Inculturation: A Nigeria perspective* (pp. 56-80). Enugu: Spiritan Publications. 1994, p.73.

<sup>42</sup> Madu, E. J. *Honest to African cultural heritage*. Coskan Associates, Onitsha, 2004, p. 43

<sup>43</sup> Madu, E. J. *Honest to African cultural heritage*. p. 44.

the most self-sufficient in the ranks of creatures would find it difficult to survive.

**b. The 'Ife' Thermodynamic Model of Collaboration**

Very interesting is the Yoruba mythology of creation, which can serve as a basis for an African theology of collaboration. The myth holds that Olodumare, the Supreme God, originally lived in the lower part of heaven, overlooking endless stretches of water. One day, Olodumare decided to create Earth. He sent an emissary, the Orisha Obatalá to perform this task, giving him what he needed to create the world: a bag of loose earth, a gold chain, and a five-toed hen<sup>44</sup>.

These different elements had their purposes. Obatalá was instructed to use the chain to descend from heaven to the water below. When he got to the last link of the chain, he poured the loose earth on top of the water and placed the hen on the pile of earth, and ordered it to scatter the earth with her toes across the surface of the water. When the hen was done, Obatalá climbed the chain to heaven to report his success to Olodumare, who then sent his trusted assistant, the chameleon, to verify that the earth was dry, after which Olodumare gave the earth as name: *Ile Ife*, the sacred house<sup>45</sup>.

After the creation of the earth, Olodumare returned to the uppermost part of heaven. However, before his retirement, he distributed his sacred powers to Obatalá, the Orisha of creation, and Yemayá, the orisha of the ocean, who gave birth to a pantheon of orishas, each possessing a share of Olodumare's sacred power. Olodumare gave Obatalá the sacred power to create human life. Obatalá was the divinity that created our ancestors, endowing them with his own divine power<sup>46</sup>.

From this creation myth, we draw that in collaboration, you share power, and by sharing power, you do not lose power as a leader but balances power. This perspective is very important as collaboration may wrongly be understood as loss of power or control.

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<sup>44</sup> Marta Moreno Vega, "The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería," One World/Ballantine, 2001. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>

<sup>45</sup> Marta Moreno Vega, "The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería," One World/Ballantine, 2001. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Marta Moreno Vega, "The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería," One World/Ballantine, 2001. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>

### c. The 'Kola Nut' Symbiotic Model of Collaboration

Of the many cultural symbols in Igboland, none has received attention like the kola nut. It is very important and central to the life and ceremonies of the Igbo<sup>47</sup>. For the Igbo it goes beyond the red and yellow seed that you find in trays sold on the street and in kiosks. It is not just the biannual crop grown and stored in sacks and baskets soaked with water to preserve it. It is not just the seed crops grown in the central and western parts of Africa. It is more than all these. It is a food that must be eaten with relish; it commands adoration and many accolades and must be attended to with deserving feast<sup>48</sup>. It is a holy communion that unites the living and dead. It symbolizes a feast of togetherness, love and trust. The Kola nut is a symbol of Life *ndu*, this is why the Igbo say: "He that brings kola brings life", and to share in it is to be part of the project of the preservation of life. It is, therefore, not surprising that the poetry of the Kola breaks the day for the typical Igbo<sup>49</sup>.

Every Kola can be broken into lobes, and these lobes signify numbers. And number is very important for the African. Some have 2 lobes, some 3, some 4, some 5 and some 6. Kola nut with two lobes is a dumb kola and is not eaten because it is understood as the *Kola of the Spirits*. When it has three lobes, it is called the *Kola of the Valiant*. As a matter of principle it is eaten only by warriors, brave men, the consecrated or ordained. The Kola with four lobes is the *Kola of Peace and Blessings*<sup>50</sup>. It is a sign of completeness and signifies four market days in Igbo society. The Kola with five lobes is the *Kola of Procreation, Protection and Good luck*. The Kola with six lobes is indicative of communion with the ancestors. No wonder the smallest part of it is not eaten but given to the ancestors<sup>51</sup>.

This notwithstanding, among the lobes, there is always a female and male lobe. When these lobes stay together they remain alive, but when they separate they die and dry off. Their togetherness is a symbol of life, and their separation, death. It's a symbiotic relationship in the sense that they

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<sup>47</sup> Philips Nwachukwu. *What is this about Kola nut in Igbo land?* Vanguard Newspaper. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/04/what-is-this-about-kolanut-in-igboland>.

<sup>48</sup> Philips Nwachukwu. *What is this about Kola nut in Igbo land?*

<sup>49</sup> Philips Nwachukwu. *What is this about Kola nut in Igbo land?*

<sup>50</sup> Jon Ofoegbu Ukaegbu, *The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and social symbol*. IgboNet. <http://kolanutseries.igbonet.com/jukaegbu>.

<sup>51</sup> Jon Ofoegbu Ukaegbu, *The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and social symbol*

need each other to remain alive. Here in, the concepts of co-essentiality and co-responsibility begin to make a profound meaning.

#### **d. Proverbial Model of Collaboration**

One of the major traditional vessels where African philosophy, religion and culture have continued to be preserved is in African Proverb. Mbiti writes that: "It is in proverbs that we find the remains of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom"<sup>52</sup>. Their relevance in African life and philosophy is the basis for the Igbo referring to them *as vegetables for eating speech* and *as the palm oil with which words are eaten*. The Zulu of Southern Africa describe proverbs thus: *without proverbs, language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without a soul*. The Yoruba would say that *proverbs are horses for chasing missing words*<sup>53</sup>.

Proverbs are very important for our study of collaborative ministry within the context of the African cultural setting because they contain the wisdom and experience of the African people, usually of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression. Proverbs spring from the people and represent the voice of the people and express the interpretation of their beliefs, principles of life and conduct. It expresses the moral attitudes of a given culture, and reflects the hopes, achievements and failings of a people<sup>54</sup>.

1. **A person is a person because of other people**  
*It speaks of the importance of alterity in collaboration*
2. **Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken**  
*It speaks of the importance of collaboration*
3. **When spiders unite they can tie up a lion**  
*It speaks of the power of relating with the other*
4. **If one finger tries to pick up something from the ground, it cannot**  
*It speaks of the ontological need for collaboration*
5. **Behind an able man there are always other able men**  
*It speaks of our achievements as the result of collaboration*
6. **It takes a village to raise a child**  
*It speaks of the other as a complementary force*
7. **If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together**  
*It speaks of the fact that you need the strength of others to reach self-realization*

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<sup>52</sup> John Mbiti, African religions and philosophy. East African Education Publishers, Nairobi, 1969, p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> Kanu I. A., A Hermeneutic approach to African traditional religion, philosophy and theology. Augustinian Publications, Nigeria, 2015, p. 65

<sup>54</sup> Kanu I. A., African philosophy: An ontologico-existential Hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues. Augustinian Publications, Nigeria, 2015, pp. 55-56.

8. **I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am**  
*Your existence is ontologically linked with that of the other*
9. **If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught**  
*It speaks of the danger of avoiding collaboration*
10. **A tree does not make a forest**  
*It speaks of the incompleteness of being without the other*
11. **If two or more people urinate in the same place at the same time, it would produce more foam**  
*If more impact must be made, then collaboration is indispensable*
12. **When a bird builds its nest it uses the feathers of other birds**  
*We have to collaborate with other people to get the job done*
13. **One person is not the whole world**  
*Strength is in collaboration*
14. **It is by taking a goat around that you are able to sell it**  
*It speaks of the importance of meeting the other*

**e. The 'Choosy Princess' Complementary Model of Collaboration**

There was once a choosy princess who turned down the requests of those who asked for her hand in marriage. Her father was disturbed because of her choosy attitude and made public that any man who would win the love of his daughter would have half of his kingdom given to him. This was heard by a python that lived in the river and immediately it went about borrowing the parts of the human body and when it looked fully human, physically, it stormed the palace of the king in a grand style. Immediately the princess saw the human python, she was attracted to him, fell in love and decided to marry him. The human python departed with her and owned half of the wealth of the kingdom as the king had promised. When the python was returning with her to his home, just before the river, it turned into a python and went into the river with the princess. Those who witnessed this brought word back to the king that his son-in-law is not a human being but a python<sup>55</sup>.

This bordered the king who assembled the wise men in his kingdom for a way forward towards rescuing the Princess. They came to the decision that to rescue her, extraordinary talents would be required for the mission. This included professionals like: a boat rider, a thief, a carpenter, a diviner, a hunter and a swimmer. When they got to the river, and did not know where to begin to find her, the diviner did some incantations and found

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<sup>55</sup> Kanu I. A., *Sources of Igwebuiké Philosophy*. International Journal of Religion and Human Relations. 9. 1. 1-23. June 2017. p. 10.

out where the princess was hidden by the python. Having discovered her, the thief went into the river and stole the princess from where she was hidden. He handed her over to the skillful swimmer who immediately moved with her behind him. At this point, the python woke up from its slumber and angrily went after the swimmer. This was when the hunter came in and fired at the python. While the boat rider was heading to the shore with her, the anger of the python was stirred and it hit hard on the boat damaging a good part of it; and to save the boat from sinking the carpenter came in and mended the damaged part of the boat that they may continue on their journey. With a combined effort, the team was able to take the princess back to the king<sup>56</sup>.

We draw from this story that our differences are a basis for collaboration. Even what we consider as a negative potential in the other, like the case of the thief in the story, when properly harnessed can be very useful. Thus, weakness is not a reason for not collaborating.

### **Articulating an African Cultural Perspective of Collaboration**

A discourse on collaborative ministry that requires an African cultural perspective would be almost incomplete if reference to the document on the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome in April and May 1994, was neglected. Such exclusion would be even more serious considering that we are dealing with a topic which was at the heart of the key contributions of the African Synod. In this document, the Synod Fathers expressed the relevance of cultural perspectives in theological discourses.

The Synod observed that the structure of the African socio-political life, which is, the family and community is a key, not just for understanding the African life and philosophy, but also for important theological discussions that pertain to Africa:

In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. ...African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never

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<sup>56</sup> Kanu I. A., *Sources of Igwebuike Philosophy*. p. 11.

succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions<sup>57</sup>.

The African family functions by way of shared responsibilities. Everyone is consulted, before decisions concerning the family are taken. When a task is to be performed, everyone gets his or her own share, regardless of age, gender or status. The result is that success is everyone's success, and failure is everyone's failure<sup>58</sup>. To take advantage of this cultural structure already disposed towards the gospel, the Synod Fathers stressed the particular importance of inculturation. And by inculturation they meant:

...the process by which "catechesis 'takes flesh' in the various cultures".(86) Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity" and, on the other, "the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures".<sup>59</sup>

Inserting Christianity into the African culture in a way that the Gospel message would become culture and the African culture become a Christian message, the Synod Fathers developed the ecclesiology of the *Church as God's Family*, enriching ecclesiology from Africa's rich cultural heritage, and taking this as its guiding principle for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod, therefore, acknowledged the family as:

...an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. The new evangelization will thus aim at *building up the Church as Family*, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 2000, No. 43. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html)

<sup>58</sup> John Aniagwu. *Collabotaive Ministry in the Church*. Unpublished material. 2013, p.8

<sup>59</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 1995, No. 58.

<sup>60</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 1995, No. 63.

An important element which cannot be neglected in the idea of Church as family is the reality of openness to dialogue, without which there can't be collaboration. For the African, this begins from the family. It is in the family that the art of dialogue is learnt, and further extended to other persons or communities outside of the family. The Synod Fathers did not only observe that dialogue was crucial to evangelization, but saw collaboration as an important aspect of dialogue that should exist within each particular church:

*Dialogue is to be practised first of all within the family of the Church at all levels: between Bishops, Episcopal Conferences or Hierarchical Assemblies and the Apostolic See, between Conferences or Episcopal Assemblies of the different nations of the same continent and those of other continents, and within each particular Church between the Bishop, the presbyterate, consecrated persons, pastoral workers and the lay faithful; and also between different rites within the same Church*<sup>61</sup>.

Although the African world is one of relationships, it is also a chaotic universe where conflicts are very possible and sometimes unavoidable. What is required of the individual African is not to brood over a world that is chaotic or to create a world where chaos is absent, but to negotiate the other's existential highway for mutual survival in the midst of the struggles, ironies and weariness of the present world. This is important as chaos is a fundamental ground for coming into being in African ontology.

This notwithstanding, conflicts in African ontology are regulated through Covenants. "A covenant is a solemn pact made binding by an oath by which people establish relations to henceforth treat themselves and their relatives"<sup>62</sup>. It is the covenant that guarantees impartiality among the covenant parties<sup>63</sup>, mutual treatment and rights of partners, and respects due to their persons and property. Covenants provide the principles of truth and justice, and thus the part towards mutual co-existence. This helps us to understand why there is always an emphasis on the signing of contracts and agreements. Wherever and whenever a covenant is made and respected, a new life of relationship is born in the world.

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<sup>61</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 1995, No. 65.

<sup>62</sup> F. O. C. Njoku, *Ana Atutu Igbo philosophy: An African perspective on the problem of identity and conflict resolution*. Goldline and Jacobs publishers. 2014, USA, p. 120.

<sup>63</sup> F. O. C. Njoku, *A perspective of an African philosophy on the problems of identity and conflict resolution*. *Mbari: The International Journal of Igbo Studies*. 1. 1. 2008. pp.40-41.

The complementary nature of the African cosmos is another cultural element that enriches our discourse on the theology of collaboration. It is in fact, a preparation for the Second Vatican Council's concept of shared mission: *Est in Ecclesia unitas missionis, pluralitas autem ministerii* (In the church there is unity of mission and plurality of ministries). In the African universe, power is generated, shared and exercised. It is a universe of powers, with a rhythm that is a response to the exercise of power. God is the most powerful force and the initiator of movements, including collaboration. What we actually do in collaborative ministry is that we share in the Ultimate Power's power and generatively bestow power. In most cases where collaborative ministry fails, it is because people understand power as an element to be grabbed rather than shared. The distribution of power is resisted by authorities in many occasions for fear of diminution. The result is that rather than creating a balance of power, we create an environment of conflict and competition rather than cooperation. Certainty, sureness and creativity is denied, while the gifts of the other are left unused and thus mismanaged.

As a result of the African's holistic awareness of belonging to a universe, in which everything is interconnected<sup>64</sup>, when he or she engages in collaboration, it is understood as fulfilling the mission of God, since it is a movement that begins from heaven to the earth, to humanity, in which we are involved and engaged. Our collaboration with one another is, therefore, in a way, a partnership with God for the fulfillment of His purpose. This is very different from the Western conceptualization scheme. From the Cartesian model, the Western pattern of thought is exclusivistic, depersonalized, objectivised and more concerned with analysis<sup>65</sup>; the African scheme of conceptualization is inclusivistic, integrative, non-reductionistic, concrete, personalized and subjectivised in all its manifestations, expressing the interconnectedness of reality- a world of relationship, harmony, continuity and complementarity. The dualistic and exclusivistic Western perception of reality understands a person in relation to the other in terms of "I and Not-I". This creates a dichotomy that brings in a strong divide between the "I and the other", which could set groups and individuals against themselves<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Collaborative ministry': *Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission*, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Kanu, I. A. *African Philosophy, Globalisation and the Priority of Otherness*. A paper presented at the 2017 Philosophy Week of Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi, Benue State Chapter of the Nigerian Major Seminaries Association of Philosophy Students. On 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu A. *Igwebuiké as a Hermeneutical Hermeneutic of Individuality and Communitarity in African Ontology*. A paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Annual Conference of the Association of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars, held on 28<sup>th</sup> June, at the PG School Auditorium, 2017, p. 7.

For the African, the 'other' is part of him or her. It is not an exclusive 'other', but an 'other' that is part of himself or herself. This has huge consequences in his or her understanding of the theology of collaboration; the approach towards mission is done from the angle of concrete ecclesial community, and not from the perspective of the individual person and function. When there is an emphasis on the individual person and function, the consequence is the empowering of the individual sense of call, the basis for the consciousness of spiritual superiority and hierarchical relations, and the neglect of the community sense of mission which continuously to impede the development of a richer theology of mission in the church. And this is a major contribution that an African cultural perspective makes to the theology of collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing has studied the African cultural perspective of collaborative ministry. It began by asking the question as regards what the African/cultural perspective has to offer in relation to a discourse on collaborative ministry. Having discovered the rich African cultural background, it developed imperatives for an African cultural perspective from the roots of Scripture and church history. Since we are dealing with the African/cultural worldview, this piece also ventured into a study of the African worldview from which was developed African cultural models for collaboration. These models were developed from Africa's rich religious and cultural heritage, from African proverbs, mythologies and parables. Rising beyond the literal understanding of these heritages, the meanings echoing from behind the words were captured in view of their relevance to the development of an African theology of collaboration in the ecology of mission.

In the past decades, scholars from different backgrounds have discussed the theology of collaborative ministry. And each scholar has added to the development of the concept from his or her own rich cultural and theological background. Collaboration is obviously a developing concept. It is, therefore, not surprising that competing terms have continued to emerge: Total Ministry<sup>67</sup>, Local Shared Ministry, Every Member Ministry, Shared Mission<sup>68</sup>. As a developing concept, an African cultural perspective is very relevant and timely, as it would bring about the emergence of a theology of collaboration that is richer

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<sup>67</sup> S. C. Zabriske, *Total Ministry*. University of Nottingham. Alban Institute, New York, 1991, p. 26.

<sup>68</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Collaborative ministry': Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 56-75), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p. 56.

in content. The relevance of pluralistic perspectives cannot be undermined in our age of globalization.

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