

**METAPHYSICS OF KOLA NUT: TOWARDS AN
AUTHENTIC AFRICAN IGBO COMMUNION; A
CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANITY**

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1. Point of Departure

Apart from economic and medicinal importance of kola nut, its metaphysical significance especially among the traditional Igbo Africans, calls for more exposition. In this paper, within the context of Igbo Africans' worldview, we shall expose the nature, existence and reality of kola nut especially the traditional Igbo specie called 'Oji Igbo' botanically called 'cola acuminata' or 'atrophora'.

Oji Igbo is commonly held to be ontologically sacred to the extent that certain taboos are hedged around it. It is not an ordinary tree and so not rampantly seen like any other trees. This scarcity portends a signal that it is exclusively created for a purpose which Igbo generally construed to be a sure key to unlock the hearts of men and gods¹. Further for Igbo Africans, it signifies clean mind, pure intention...¹ These and other issues related to 'Oji Igbo' functionality we are going to treat in the entire paper. Again, we shall consider whether the metaphysics of Oji Igbo and its functions thereof qualify it as a veritable ingredient to be used as an authentic Igbo African communion. We may like to compare and contrast sharply the Igbo African kola nut as Holy Communion and the Communion of Wine and Bread as used in established churches throughout the Christendom.

On the whole, we shall see the possibility of kola-communion as one of the bases for authentic African communion, a challenge to enculturation. In this way, it becomes possible to penetrate Christian religion into our culture. This paper will signify an invitation to indigenize, Africanize, Nigerianize and even Igbonize Christianity while retaining its essence.

Oji Igbo, 'Cola acuminata' is quite distinct from others in that it is used traditionally for rituals, for marriage ceremonies, title taking, offering of prayers at traditional ceremonies, to welcome visitors and to introduce very important discussions and requests¹.

Kola nitida 'Oji Awusa' is broken and consumed but not acceptable for any form of rituals. It is not ritualistic and cannot be a mere substitute in itself unless adequate form of prayer of transubstantiation is said over it, requesting the god's permission and people's consent to use kola nitida in place of cola acuminata perhaps, because of the immediate unavailability of the latter.

Among Igbo Africans, the aspect of communalism are celebrated with kola nut which is both a spiritual and physical symbol of unity. 'Ofeke', or the excommunicated or the unqualified or the socially stigmatized does not partake of the communion of kola. A condition of admittance is Igba Oriko a banquet of togetherness, a celebration indicating that the ostracized or the rejected or the excommunicated person is now free to relate with his brethren and enjoy the common wealth in sharing love and responsibility. No ceremonies are started without the breaking of kola (Iwa Oji) which all present are expected to partake¹.

It is assumed that all present are worthy members of the community as unworthy and unqualified are formally, not invited. In such communal celebration of brotherhood, the departed members of the community, especially the ancestors, are invited to

partake spiritually hence the belief that every gathering is done in respect of the ancestors whose blessings are sought always before commencing any activity.

2. Kola Nut and Sacramentals

There is nothing, absolutely nothing called sacrament or sacramentals in nature that is held sacred as a result of its privilege of co-naturality. Sacramentals are originally mere artistic impressions of conventional pictures or images of holy persons or sacred objects before appropriate words are proclaimed over them to produce desired effect.

In other words, sacraments and sacramentals are not capable of independent existence; they are objects of intension or adhesion. They are better called accidents and so lack objectiveness of substances as one cannot find them in nature. They are effects of certain kinds of words proclaimed over a person or objects for specific reason and perhaps, under some specific circumstances. For the sacramental, these forms of word make them what they are, and what they started becoming at a certain moment. Until this moment, they were mere objects of artistic impressions. Even after the forms of word proclaimed over them, their appearances remain the same.

Ordinary appearances, which include looks (structures), tastes (bitterness), smell (indescript) and felling (hard) deceive, yet it has experienced transubstantiation. The accidents of sacramentals deceive the unwary into taking them as mere objects. Their substantial nature now is invisible.¹

The sacrament of Holy Communion is made what it is by selected words of consecration used by an ordained priest of the church. Two conditions must be fulfilled before a sacrament becomes holy and acceptable: there must be an ordained priest celebrating a holy

mass who has the faculty to consecrate the mere wafer bread and the medicated wine into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is nothing in nature of the bread and wine, or their combined nature after commingling that presents their pictures as having the proclivity of becoming the communion exclusively. Article 267 of the Traditional Catechism' says "*The bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ by the power of God, to whom nothing is impossible or difficult*"¹. The same change can be brought to bear on any other matter if the power and authority of God is sought for. If sacrament is an outward sign, any matter can be conventionally chosen and the conventionality of the material makes it a variable factor, whereas the form consists of the words.

“This is my body”; This is the chalice”

The choice of the matter is conventional and historical, while that of the form (words of consecration) is biblical. The consecrator is the authority who is bestowed with the faculty to proclaim the adequate words of consecration as Christ did in the Last Supper (Matt. 26: 26-28). While the essence of consecration remains unchanged, there are other variables that are not so essential as to remain unchanged. After all, the bread and wine used today in consecration are not of the same species used by Jesus Christ in the last Supper, yet the essence of the consecration still endures.

The efficacy of transubstantiation depends exclusively on the words of consecration which begin with the prayers before consecration, the prayer for the church and ecclesiastical authorities, invocation of the saints, commemoration of the living, oblation of the victim to God, consecration of the host. The efficacy does not depend on the disposition of the priest, but on the authenticity of the priesthood. Its efficacy does not depend on the

species being transubstantiated but there must be something, a sacrifice of praise, gifts or presents which must be of necessity the handwork of man existing as the indices to be transubstantiated. This being the case, nature has endowed humanity with a lot of natural indices with ontological potency of being transubstantiated. The bread and wine were quite relevant in the times of Christ and the commonest foods for satisfying immediate thirst were to serve this very purpose. The Europeans chose another form of bread and wine which served their common dinner as the species to use in the consecration.

Even though we were Christianized or better Europeanized, that should not served as a strong point of argument for us to use the species that are foreign to our culture. Today to Christianize is no longer appropriate but rather to incarnate Christ in different cultures of the world in order to make Christianity relevant to every culture. In this period of new era of evangelization, effort should be made to see Christianity as part of our culture not as a foreign religion that is imposed on the people. Christianity should not be seen as a burden. In order to penetrate Christianity into our culture and in a bid to make Christ more relevant to us in this part of the world, we have to indigenize, Africanize, Nigerianize and Igbonize Christianity while retaining its essences.

The essence of the Communion (Eucharist) lies in its substance, to wit, a principle by which a thing is said to be there, and this principle is lost in invisibility. The principle by which a Eucharist is in existence lies in the powerful words of transubstantiation and not in what is being transubstantiated.

If with words of transubstantiation the bread becomes the body; the wine, the blood, and we know there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the natures of mere bread and medicated wine that makes them capable of changing into new and entirely different substances of

body and blood, except by mysterious power of the words of consecration; such powerful words without conditions can be used on any other materials to get the desired effect. This change does not obey the metaphysical principle of “*Agere sequitor ess*”. This change is not accidental but substantial. If this change is substantial exclusively, it therefore can be predicated of any other material species. Since there is nothing for which a substance is a predicate, it becomes reasonable to think that this substantial change has no boundary in application. If substance ‘A’ changes into ‘B’ by using a constant form, it follows that ‘B’ can change into ‘C’ if the same formula is applied. By logical and mathematical application, if $A \rightarrow B$, $B \rightarrow C$, therefore, $A \rightarrow C$, unless we can argue that there are some necessary and sufficient conditions for the efficacy of the words of consecration, part of such condition would be the choice of the specimen, in which case “the ontological powers of the words of consecration becomes a mere claim”¹ but this cannot be true. If it cannot be true then our indigenous choice of materials like sacred kola nut and Up-wine (Nkwu enu-Palm wine) can equally be consecrated and transubstantiated into body and blood of Jesus.

3. Igbo Respect for Kola

The Igbo respect for kola nut and Up-wine (Palm wine) is predicated on the understanding of their values and inherent sacredness and sanctity. The simplicity of the appearances of the kola nut metaphysically connotes sublimity with which the Igbo regard its various appearances. It is not by chance that some kola nuts ‘*Cola acuminata*’, *Oji* Igbo, are dicotyledonous. Dicotyledonous kola nuts have obvious repulsive implications, ‘it is neither eaten by any titled man – Nze nor by a woman’¹. ‘The significance of tricotyledonous kola-nut is good omen; it is otherwise called *Oji Ikenga* — kola nut for men who have distinguished themselves in noble deeds’¹. The most acceptable is the four cotyledonous kola nut because the four cotyledons are

indices of the acceptance and approbation of the assembly by the gods of the four market days - Eke, Orië, Afọ and Nkwọ'.¹ When the acuminata bears five cotyledons, even though, it is rare, it is an index of productivity and wealth'.¹ The debut of such kola nuts is announced thus: Ojì nke a gbara ise' — this kola nut has five cotyledons! Everybody claims the blessings which are promised by this kola. Thus, signs and symbols are part and parcel of Igbo culture and tradition. No wonder Igbo appreciated Christianity because of their common shade of understanding behind both religions.

It is symbolic that Christ chose to be born in a Stable in a most humiliating manner. By coherent theory of truth, it cannot be said to be out of place if he should leave his sacramental presence in the most common species of our local kola nuts and up-wine, the two essential ingredients in our custom and tradition following an adequate words of consecration.

Kola nut is a revealer of hearts ... it pacifies and cements social cracks... it is a sure key to unlock the hearts of men and the gods'¹. For M. N. Okonkwo, mgbe ọbụla mmadu chọrọ inye nna ya ma ọbụ nna nna ha nwuru anwu ihe, o buputa okpei ha goọ Ojì were mpekere Ojì tọgbọchaa n'elu ha kelee ha,¹

He went further to say:

'a chọọ iriọ ndinwuru anwu aririọ ọbụ Ojì ka aga-eji riọ ha n'okpesi ha'¹

In the above, Okonkwo explains the centrality of kola nut in Igbo spiritual life.

4. Logic of Igbo Kola Nut as Communion

The present species of bread and wine used in consecration are not so cheap and derogatory compared to the universal king's humility in choosing his birth circumstance and making his debut as a human person. Even his departure from the mortal world was

characterized by humiliating and *infradig* circumstances not worthy of a Messiah.

Even the reasons for reserving the Eucharist outside the mass do not justify the choice of the wafer bread and industrial medicated wine as species to be consecrated. In terms of durability, our local species endure more and do not ferment easily as the wafer bread and medicated wine. In terms of divisibility, our kola nuts are more divisible into smaller particles than the conventional round bread, our local wine is more available in quantity than the ‘Twelve Apostles’. In terms of relevance, our local species are more relevant as traditionally they are already being used at the banquet of love and togetherness which is what the communion stands for. For viaticum our kola nut has inherent sacredness and sanctity and is easily transferable.

An attempt to take more seriously the cultural background of our people in discussing and imparting religious doctrines is necessary to make Christianity much relevant to us. In the light of the above B. Okolo says:

We cannot really deepen the understanding of truth in our people unless the church in Nigeria is really and unconditionally serious about inculturation as a growth and deepening process of the church herself¹.

He went further to say:

we have to be serious about inculturation, or Africanizing the church in all its ramifications ranging from church structures and mode of running the church which are largely western and foreign... even the materials for the Holy Eucharist, for example¹.

Christianity is dynamic and always seeks for an up-to-date renewal in all spheres which had previously been influenced by European culture. Christianity is trans-cultural and so should be incarnated and incardinated in every culture.

Owing to the exigency of having Christianity in African soil, Christianity in Igbo land, I advocate for a Christianity that can be interpreted in an African context. Seeking for an Igbo rites in liturgical worship should not be seen as a strange demand for granting such rites should not introduce ideas which change the meaning and substance of the Christian message.

As an entry point, I advocate for the replacement of wafer bread and medicated wine by Igbo kola nut and palm wine for consecration during Eucharistic celebration. Our local oil should replace the oil of catechumen and chrism used by the priests and Bishops in administering sacraments. If sacraments are outward signs of inward grace, any species can conventionally be used as indices for the grace in question.

Among the Igbo Africans, the aspects of communalism are celebrated with kola nut which is 'both a spiritual and physical symbol of unity¹. Just as the sinner does not partake of the communion until he makes an adequate sacramental confession, the 'Ofeke' (the excommunicated) in Igbo context should not partake of the communion of kola. A condition for admittance is 'Igba Oriko' (a banquet of togetherness), a celebration indicating that the excommunicated person is now free to relate with his brethren and enjoy the common wealth in sharing love and responsibility.

No ceremonies are started without the breaking of kola (Iwa Oji) in which all present partake. It is granted that all present are worthy

members of the community as unworthy and unqualified ones are formerly not invited. In such communal celebration of brotherhood, the departed members are also invited to partake spiritually, hence the belief that every gathering is done in respect of the ancestors whose blessings are always sought before commencing any activity.

In the breaking of the kola nut, just as in the breaking of the bread on the altar, the unity of the faithful who are expected to be worthy recipients is sought, and in communion all who are expected to be worthy receive the same spirit of unity in the unfragmented body of Christ.

Even in praying over the gift (the kola nut) certain *Epiclesis* is used inviting God to come and bless the gathering and the particular intention for which people are gathered. *Anamnesis* is also used to call to memory the good works of our ancestors after whom the living relatives generally believe they are ever in communion with the living. Even in Holy Mass, there is usually an invocation of the saints who are equally our ancestors in faith.

From the foregoing analogy, we observe and are bent to respect this, that the sacredness and sanctity inherent in our traditional kola nut could be likened to that of the blessed bread in the churches. At this level, they cannot be equiperated but if they cannot both be taken to be true, then they are otherwise false.

As the Eucharist is the centre of the whole Christian life, so the kola nut is the centre of Igbo life celebrations. Hence,

It is a sure key to unlock the hearts of men and gods... used whenever the spirits of the ancestors are being conjured or after libation has been poured in order to pacify a particular deity that is injured¹.

As the priest is the only person qualified to consecrate the host, so is the eldest (Nze n'ozo priestly caste) the only persons qualified to bless the kola and pour libation. The subtle difference lies in the kind of matter (species) used to achieve the same effect. The Christian communion appears under two species of bread and wine, the traditional Igbo communion of kola nut appears equally two: 'Oji' (Kola nut) and 'okwaose' (peppery paste of groundnut and spices). It is either received in one kind or both kinds (both species) just as the communion of wafer bread can be received under both species.

It is our belief and theology that whether received unicamerally or bicamerally, that is, in each kind or both species, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is replete in all his existential totality and completeness.¹

5. Kola Communion and other Kinds: Metaphysical Difference

The sacredness of kola nut is co-natural with its nature whereas the English wafer bread as an industrial product is not sacred in its nature. The Holy Communion enjoys, or is infused with, the sacredness and sanctity of existence, due to the transubstantiating power of the words of consecration carefully used by the priest, an 'alter Christus'. This being the case, the transformation power of the consecration can equally be brought to bear on sacred Igbo kola nut and its peppery paste to achieve the same result.

It becomes necessary here to point out that the efficacy of words of consecration in transubstantiating a substance does not depend on the nature of the substance. This suggests that the possibility of arriving at the same effect while using other correlates is not doubtful.

However, it is germane we point out here that our kola nut whether blessed or not, maintains its ontological and co-natural respect in Igbo cosmetology, whereas the mere appearance of wafer bread and ‘Twelve Apostles’ does not in any way suggest the presence of what should be termed the ‘communion’. Its usefulness does not manifest in its appearance:

The presence of Christ under the species is called ‘real’ not in exclusive sense, as if the other kinds of presence were not real, but par excellence¹.

The sacramental presence of Christ is by invocation whereas the sacredness of kola nut which is a spark of divine sanctity is infused in it. On this note, the successful invocation of Christ to take another sacramental form is not doubtful and Christ’s responsiveness to this invitation cannot be placed on the bargain table.

If sacraments are outward signs of inward grace, the communion being a sacrament shares in this definition. If the sign and the signified are equal, the presence of Christ in the communion is fully domiciled in the communion. To wit, the presence of the communion is both the sign of, and in actuality contains the body and blood of Jesus Christ. If Christ is God and God is spirit, the spirit which Christ himself is, cannot only be represented in one form alone. This form of representation would place a serious limitation which is unhealthy for our understanding. This representationalism may be conventional in outlook, and perfunctory in practice. So it becomes an object one chooses as he wants. If convention applies in matters of sacrament, out of the same convention another communal species may be chosen, consecrated, transubstantiated into the sacred body and blood of Jesus Christ. And this is possible. I mean plausible if the choice of

the species has no incidence in the sacredness and sanctity of the communion.

6. Evaluation

We have come to the age when we shall Christianize our culture and inculturate our Christianity to make Christ incarnate in our own native soil. But let us be reminded that the reality of communion is not strange to Igbo Africans. What is strange is the possibility of changing a substance into the body and blood of Jesus. Coherently and correspondently, if our faith is unwavering in believing its possibility with English wafer bread, the same mystery can be extended to our local substance 'kola nut'.

The choice of the substance has no incidence on the efficacy of the word of transubstantiation as the change is meant to be substantial and not accidental. The choice is both accidental and circumstantial. Transubstantiation does not occur on secondary qualities of a thing such as taste, colour, size etc and this is why every thing looks the same after the change.

The functional relevance of kola nut in Igbo cultural milieu makes its choice uncontestable as the most fit and qualified of all the local ingredients to substitute the western bread. The existential totality and completeness (reality) of God can be felt, represented and anthologized in any culture or religion.

There is absolutely nothing in the nature of the English bread and wine, or their combined nature after commingling that makes them possess extra being of becoming the communion exclusively.

The choice is conventional and historical, while the essence of the consecration remains unchanged: there are other variables that are not so essential as to remain unchanged. The efficacy of transubstantiation depends exclusively on the form (words). This

being the case, nature has endowed humanity with a lot of natural indices with ontological potency of being transubstantiated.

7. Conclusion

If it is doubtful whether our local kola nut (and upwine) can be consecrated to get the desired result, we should equally reject out rightly, without any fear of commission or omission, the potency of the words of consecration, which efficacy does not depend on the choice of the species. We should in addition, reject the wafer bread and medicated 'Twelve Apostles' as foreign and too artificial and inadequate for the type of man and God Christ is.

God may be unhappy to leave himself in a sacramental condition better than a Manger (stable) in Nazareth where his incarnation was consummated. The essence of Christ is not lost if he leaves himself in a condition worse than Nazareth manger. Yet our kola nut is better and more sublime than the manger.