

**A REVIEW OF THE IGBO-AFRICAN KOLA NUT AS A 'TYPE' OF
HOLY COMMUNION: IGWEBUIKE AND THE MISSIONARY
MISSING LINK**

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The title of this article naturally commands widespread interest from scholars in the area of comparative religion and missiology. This is particularly so especially in Africa where Christianity is still struggling to settle itself as the authentic religion of the people, just like it did in some parts of Europe and the Middle East.

Christianity's encounter with the indigenous religion of the Africans has provoked divergent reactions and interpretations from scholars of various hues. According to Nwadiolor (2018), "Ever since Christianity made its first attempt to be established in African soil, there have been varieties of indigenous response ranging from resistance at the early stages; acceptance through colonial imposition and social evangelism; through the breakaway movements in the 19th centuries coinciding with political and cultural nationalism; to the development in the late 19th century and early 20th century of prophetic movements; and the recent emergence of neo-Pentecostal Christianity" (p. 1). Missiologists have also echoed this trend in time perspective, Prof Kanu has added his voice to this range of analyses. His paper examined kola nut as an Igbo tradition ritual and compared it with the ritual of the Eucharist in Christian religion. The paper echoes Njiku (2005) argument that the dominant adoption of the oral techniques and forms of storage for the theology of the Traditional Religions was partly responsible for the reduced visibility of the theology of the Traditional Religions. The paper further argues that the white missionaries who pioneered missionary enterprise in Africa were overwhelmed by the prevailing superiority complex of Europeans of the time, which informed their inability to understudy the theology of African Traditional Religion with the view to finding its usefulness for a better understanding and acceptance of Christianity. This sentiment, the paper argues, manifested in the missionaries' view of African people and their culture, reducing everything to be the extension of satanic kingdom that needed a redemption that must come in form of imposition of Euro-Christian worldview.

Kanu gave a detailed analysis of kola nut and its pride of place in Igbo ritual of everyday life. For him, it is very important and central to the life and ceremonies of the Igbo. He highlighted the metaphysical significance of kola nut as a ritual that bonds the living and the living dead in African world. In a nut shell, he described kola nut in its Eucharistic significance that if well understudied and understood by the early missionaries, would have given Christianity an indigenous shape in Africa.

Agreeing that theology often develops when faith encounters philosophy, Kanu traces the development of Christian theology to series of philosophical encounters that challenged the intellect of the Christians of the early centuries into an enterprise that produced what today can be called Christian theology. He argues that the enterprise produced typologies of theology arising from different cultural encounters with the Christian faith. It, therefore, follows, Kanu argue, that this development could be endless as Christianity continues to encounter new cultures in its expansionist programme.

In a tabular form, Kanu made eloquent and convincing expositions of how the Christian Eucharist could be likened to Igbo ritual of kola nut celebration.

The paper concludes with a recommendation that further missiological efforts should attempt to forge a synthesis between Igbo ritual of kola nut celebration and the Christian Eucharistic ritual.

However, the paper described Igbo ritual of kola nut celebration as a photocopy of the Christian Eucharistic practice which was only undertaken unwittingly by the Africans as a preparation for the reception of the Christian Eucharist. This is clear in Kanu's unwillingness to equate the Igbo ritual of kola nut celebration with the Christian Eucharistic ritual. This position seems to reduce Igbo ritual of kola nut celebration to an inferior position *vis a vis* the Christian Eucharist, leaving an impression that Christianity should have been welcomed by Africans as a movement that has come to put African Traditional religious practices in their proper perspective. This notion should be corrected because no religion should be seen as an inclusive enterprise that absorbs the other to make it better. Religious traditions encounter each other on equal basis and have an interaction that would forge a synthesis that will serve the adherents in their spiritual and mundane goals and not a fruitless engagement of superiority contest. There is no reason, therefore, why the Igbo ritual of kola nut celebration should not be

equated with the Christian Eucharistic ritual since they both serve as channel through which there is communion between the living and the dead in both worldviews.

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