BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP IN MIXED AFRICAN COMMUNITIES[1]

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We cannot but highlight the fact that, the nature of the relationship of Africans of different ethnic backgrounds living in their various nations, and of Christians of the same diverse ethnic groupings sharing one parish or Christian community in one part of their country in the continent is still characterized by recourse to primitive ethnicity at critical moments. Moreover, where the local populace do their best to live in harmony, love and respect the other, the elite and often politicians would continue to evoke the divisive elements such as religion, tribe, etc., and exploit these to propagate their personal and political ambitions and interests. This accounts for increase in the rise of hatred, religious and ethnic conflicts in various African nations. This phenomenon is carried into the church.

In my study of the nature of the relationship in African communities and societies, I have been struck by three views coming from three different backgrounds and experiences. At the 1994 symposium of Nigerian Indigenous Priests Association (NIPA) held at Owerri, the participants defined a local church in terms of community other than geographical location (cf. Oborji 1998: 195). The participants intend by this approach, to help the local Christians live and work in love of God and their neighbour in any part of their nation, regardless of which ethnic group one comes from. The second view is from the intervention of Archbishop Albert K. Obiefuna during the Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa. Speaking about the effect of exaggerated ethnicity, the Archbishop noted that among the Africans, when it comes to the crunch, it is not the Christian concept of the church as a family that prevails but rather the adage that "Blood is thicker than water." And by blood here one can presumably include the waters of Baptism through which one is born into the family of the church. Blood relationship is more important even for the African who has become a Christian (cf. Synod of Bishops 1994: *Bulletin* no. 8). Finally, the third view is from the analysis of similar situation from an Asian background, made by an Indian theologian, Felix Wilfred. Father Wilfred opines that what others have learnt from Jesus and the gospel far surpasses in effect what the relationship of Christians in mixed communities has succeeded to convey (cf. Wilfred 2001: 9). This will mean in our own case that the impact of Christianity in a number of African countries for instance, has been through indirect ways than direct ones of the witness of the relationship of Christians in mixed communities.

Basing on these premises, this article attempts to explore ways of forging relationships between Africans of different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds sharing one community or nation. The article presents some trajectories for strengthening and deepening the relationships among Africans of different ethnic groups living in the same Christian community and nation, and between them and people of other religions living in the same society.

The Problem

At this juncture, one is led to ask how come it that Africans of different ethnic backgrounds are finding it difficult to forge a united state and community in their various nations? How come it that African Christians of diverse ethnic groups can not stay together in one parish church or organization without rancor and suspicion of one another? Cultural appeal to primitive ethnicity, artificial boundaries of African nations as created by the colonial powers and failure of leadership in the new African states are counted as the main factors responsible for this situation. Thus, the source of the problem is both cultural and political. Although, one may add religious differences, but often the situation is more complex than that. When religious sentiments are appealed to, it is simply meant to serve the above goals.

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Thus the first factor is ethnic and cultural differences apparent in each of the African nation. In Africa, exaggerated ethnicity is a factor that if not well addressed will continue to frustrate the on-going work of evangelization and church formation in the continent. Because it is a disturbing reality affecting both ecclesial and civil communities. It is for this reason that I have chosen to examine its manifestations in relation to the nature of the relationship of the Africans living in mixed communities of the continent. Hence, our interest here is not to raise ethnic sentiments, but rather to present it as the reality of the Africa's troubled situation.

Ethnicity is not particular to Africans alone. It is a common phenomenon among other peoples of the world as well. But in our context, exaggerated ethnicity is often one of the sources of difficulties in the actualization of ecclesial communion in the African local churches. It is a major factor that militates against healthy distribution and acceptance of native pastoral workers and missionaries (priests, religious, etc.) in some parts of Africa and beyond. Moreover, it creates difficulties in achieving a real nationhood in many independent African states. Indeed, ethnicity has continued to cause wars and produce corrupt leaders and dictators who have plunged Africa into an era of chaos. It is one of Africa's weaknesses which foreign powers employ in manipulating the continent (cf. Oborji 1998: 193). But on its own, manifestations of ethnic consciousness is not bad. There are certain peculiar habits of a people we can not condemn: dress, food, language, music, etc. In fact many of these manifestations are positive and desirable and confer richness on a national culture. But to prevent a citizen from living or working anywhere in his country, or from participating in the religious, social, political, economic life of the community in which he chooses to live is another matter altogether: "Prejudice against "outsider" or "stranger" is an attitude one finds everywhere. But no modern state can lend its support to such prejudice without undermining its own progress and civilization." (Achebe 1983: 7). This is the burden of the local churches and nation states of Africa. We are dealing with a situation in which everything is seen from the prism of ethnicity. But is it not now the time to get back to the central gospel message of universal love? Is it not now the time to put into practice the African renewed image of the Church-as-Family? The universal family of God, which has been burdened and weighed down by a heap of sentiments of cultural, political, ethnic and religious acrimonies. We need to develop in Africa *a language of relationships and a catechesis* of living together in a pluralistic society.

The Nature of the Relationship in Traditional African Society

Our call for deepening the relationship among Africans in pluralistic communities or nations, has an encouraging support and root from the traditional culture. One may ask: How did traditional African society organize itself to avert the undue refuge to ethnicity? What constituted the nature of the relationships between individuals, communities, families or societies in traditional set-up? How was family conceived in traditional African societies? These questions will take us step further towards addressing the problem of exaggerated ethnicity in contemporary Africa. We shall approach the questions by considering the concept of the family and pattern of societal organization in traditional Africa.

Family is the basic unit of the society (and therefore of the church) (cf. John Paul 1981: *Familaris Consortio* nos. 75,86). In Africa, this basic fact is a living reality. But it is evident that family is not something peculiar only to Africa, since it (family) exists everywhere and many common elements are found, particularly in the traditional societies. Where then lies the African originality of the family? In the words of Charles Nyamiti, the African originality of the family goes beyond the ordinary accentuation of the term. It lies in the cultural coloring of the term in Africa. In other words, it is only when the family is considered in its cultural context that its African individuality or originality appears. Thus for instance, in many non-African societies, family is made up of the husband, wife and their children.[1] It is also seen as fount from which one is gradually introduced into the society. However, the African family is more extensive, as Nyamiti explains. It includes all living members of these groups, besides being mystically connected to the

ancestors and, through social pacts, to outsiders such as friends and others. Besides, membership within the African family (clan or tribe) is usually brought about by special initiation rites showing thereby the sacredness of the family. In other words, the term "family" in Africa evokes not only blood communal membership of few living members, but also the themes of clan, tribe, affinity, maternity, *patria potestas*, priesthood, ancestors (thereby including the themes of mythical time, *archtypes*, heroes, founders), initiation and hence fecundity, life, power, *sacrality*, and so forth (cf. Nyamiti 1987: 39). This extensive concept of family in Africa shows that, although, the formal content of the term "family" is identical in Africa as it is in many other societies, the mode of its integration in its cultural contexts is different. It is particularly in this concrete mode of integration and all-embracing, that is, in the local cultural and its universal coloring that the originality of the African concept of the family lies (cf. Healey & Sybertz 1996: 104-167).

Now, what is the relevance of the African family to the issue of the relationship in mixed communities? The answer to this question is that African spirituality and life is based on the centrality of human beings and the relationship of communities living in the concrete circumstances of life. In their traditional religious beliefs, attitudes and practices, traditional Africans strive to reach out toward the super-sensible realities (God, the spirits, ancestors, and the invisible forces in the universe), in order to continue to maintain the harmonious, good and worth relationship among themselves and with their neighbors. Indeed, the goal of religion for the traditional Africans is to enlist the help of God, the deities and ancestors, to harness the forces below man to strengthen human life and the relationship on earth. The overall aim is to maintain the harmonious relationship between human beings in the universe, especially, between one and his neighbor, to strengthen them and to make their life pleasant and joyful. This communion through relationships established while living in flesh on earth is expected to continue even after death, in the ancestral communion. In other words, one is judged or accepted into the hereafter life, into the communion of ancestors because of his participation in the life of relationship while on earth (cf. Oborji 2000: 72-73).

Furthermore, for traditional Africans, humanity (individuals and community) is at the center of consideration. As Patrick Kalilombe notes, for traditional Africans, humanity is first and foremost the community. In the first place is the extended family based on blood kinship or on affinity through marriage, and then the clan, the tribe, or the nation. Kinship and affinity create a special kind of bonding within which mutual rights and duties are exercised unconditionally. Individuals acquire their basic identity through these relationships, and they enjoy a feeling of security in life as long as the exchange of these rights and duties is guaranteed (Kalilombe 1994: 122). It is often been said that where Descartes said: "I think, therefore, I am" (*cogito ergo sum*), the African would rather say, "I am related, therefore, we are" (*cognatus ergo sum*) (cf. Pobee 1979: 49). The people of Madagascar use the word "*fihavanana*" (relational in life) to express this fact. For them, the life of human is a network of *fihavanana*, which consists of relationship with God, the ancestors, the spirits, the living, and even with nature. Hence, the Malagasy can say: "*je suis en relation donc j'existe*" (I am in relation, therefore I am) (cf. Benolo 1994: 13). Thus, for traditional Africans, the value of interdependence through relationships comes high above that of individualism, personal independence, and ethnicity. By the same token, the practice of cooperation is more relied upon than competition.

The foregoing fact is also reflected in the pattern of societal organization in traditional African societies which was based on creating the relationship and linkages among the different village-groups or communities. A closer look at the pattern of societal organization in traditional Africa reveals a broader view of the relationship among peoples and communities of diverse backgrounds. Recent studies by ethnologists present us with two broad categories of societal organization and relationship in traditional African communities: dispersal and centralized authorities. In communities with dispersal authority, an elder or kindred head, assisted by or along with family heads, assume the religious and socio-political leadership. This pattern of societal organization is found mainly among bands of hunters and gatherers such as the Pygmies of Central Africa, the San of the Kalahari Deserts, the Fulani of Northern Nigeria. These are small autonomous

groups. However, this pattern of societal organization is found also in fairly populous ethnic groups which are not receptive to a strong centralized authority, like the Igbo of Nigeria, Kikuyu of Kenya, Massai of Kenya and Tanzania, and some groups among the Yoruba of Nigeria. The organized pattern among these people is village-group. The village-group is the federation of clans. The clan is composed of kindred, and the kindred is made up of extended families, including others who have joined the clan through pacts as sanctioned by the customs and traditions handed down from the ancestors. So it is a union of clans and neighboring communities who have decided to come together to form their own society or nation. According to E. Uzukwu, in these groups contact with neighboring groups is mainly through exogamy and trade. Disputes and wars are settled through treaties and agreements which ensure the safe passage of citizens through others' territory. The settlements are done through persuasion rather than in coercion (cf. Uzukwu 1996: 15).

The second pattern of societal organization, the centralized authority, is found in the ancient African kingdoms, such as the Ganda, the Oyo, Bini, Ashanti, Abomy, Zulu, Kongo, Hausa, and Egba. The authorities in these societies are structured in form of monarchies, for instance, following the pattern of oligarchy. There the monarch rules with the council of chiefs. The exercise of authority is collegial. Each kingdom embodies different village-groups. It is a kind of confederation grouping together different units, clans, neighbors and families who have decided to unit and form their society or nation with a centralized authority.

Therefore, one can reaffirm that for traditional Africans the stress is on togetherness, on communion, on respect for traditions and on unquestionable acceptance of what the ancestors have practiced, sanctioned and established as the way things are done for maintaining the relationships. This implies, however, that recent events in Africa, where members of the same or different clans, ethnic groups or families, exploit one another and engage in communal strife, tribal conflicts and civil wars, are alien to the practice in traditional African communities and culture (Oborji 2001: 123).

The Political Intrigue

One of the major obstacles to arresting the situation of exaggerated ethnicity and of deepening the relationship in Africa is the constant appeal to the arbitrary colonial boundaries in the continent. Some have reasonably argued that the increase in ethnic conflicts in various parts of Africa today owes its origin to the artificial partitioning of the continent during the colonial era. They argue also that the continued political intrusion of the foreign powers in the internal affairs of Africa is hardly out of good will. People of different cultures, languages and traditions merged together by European colonizers in Africa are finding it difficult to live together as one nation or community. The artificial boundaries indeed present a political intrigue in Africa. As John Paul II says in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*: "It has been rightly noted that, within the borders left behind by the colonial powers, the co-existence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages, and even religions often meets obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility." *Tribal oppositions* at times endanger if not peace, at least the pursuit of the common good of the society. They create difficulties for the life of the churches and the acceptance of pastors from other ethnic groups. This is why the church in Africa feels challenged by the specific responsibility of healing these divisions (John Paul II 1995: *Ecclesia in Africa* 49). Aware of this situation, the founding fathers of the African independent states developed a Pan African ideology, which later gave birth to the Organization for African Unity (OAU) now about to be transformed into *African Union*). The elderly state-men like Kofi Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, among others, had such a lofty dream of a united Africa in which the colonial divisions and the primitive ethnicity will give way to brotherly love and co-existence among neighbors in the African continent. Thus, subsequent African leaders, instead of addressing the arbitrary colonial boundaries have continued to maintain them at all cost (cf. Mbiti 1990: 100). Any community with diversity of members and interests will not be entirely without conflict. Conflicts indicate there are tensions in the community and they may

be due to historical experiences of injustices, discrimination and misunderstanding. The community should be able to intervene in such problematic situations, resolve conflicts and restore justice. What is important is not to try to avoid conflicts, but to solve them in creative ways without allowing the eruption of violence (cf. Amaladoss 2001: 2). This effort has as its background the creating of the relationship among the parties involved.

However, amidst this situation, there are some authors, who, with every good intention and purpose advocate for devolution or "de-partitioning" of the colonial boundaries. For them, many of the African nations do not fit into the traditional definition of states by social scientists. Traditionally, political scientists have employed two terms to identify the structure of political entity known as the state: homogeneous and heterogeneous. The homogeneous state – the nation per se, is defined as "a single people, traditionally living on a well defined territory, speaking the same language, practicing the same religion, possessing a distinctive culture, and united by many generations of shared historical experience." Japan and the two Koreas are good examples of the homogeneous state. Heterogeneous or multiethnic state or nation comes about after the gradual fusion that may occur between the diverse national and cultural groups within the state after a prolonged maintenance of political control by the central government over the given territory and its inhabitants. United Kingdom (or Great Britain) is a classical example of a heterogeneous state.[2] Authors of this view argue that most of the African nation states lack at least three elements necessary for nationhood: a national language, a predominant religion and a long history of organized cohabitation among its various peoples (cf. Nnorom 2001: 1ff). Thus, this school of thought suggests that the African problem will only end with a permanent separation of the ethnic groups involved. They argue that the real situation in Africa is not as a result of acute poverty (or of any lack on the genes of the people as some foreigners appeared to have stereotyped the Africans in the past), but a struggle for second independence from domineering indigenous ethnic groups. Government in Africa is in essence winner-take-all. As a game of numbers, democracy in Africa favors only the domineering ethnic group and those in the corridors of power. Thus, the advocates of this view believe that the issue of nationhood in Africa must be resolved before genuine democracy and community development as well as real relationships among neighbors can take root in the continent (cf. Ihenacho 2002: 8).

Again, these are genuine concerns which need to be addressed no doubt. But they may at the same time imply that Africans do not love themselves and that they cannot cooperate among themselves to build a united multiethnic, cultural and religious society. It may also mean that modern African leaders are incapable of organizing their people and fashion a united state. One would suggest that instead of calling for devolution, African elites should exhibit objectivity and intellectual vigor at this critical moment of the continent's life. In this way they would be able to participate and develop for their individual countries, a constitution of a really federal character as the panacea of problems of the nation concerned and as ingredients for successful government in a plural society (cf. Achebe 1983: 11-12). This would then validate both equality and diversity as well as encourage interdependence among the component parts of the country in question. African states need to develop creative constitutions as well as common laws and legal system that are both neutral to all ethnic groups and religions operative in each country. Any act of favoritism of the state (constitution and legal system) to one ethnic group or to a particular religion in a pluralistic society destroys the foundation of that society or nation. This is a great temptation which African leadership must try to avoid if a good relationship is to be a reality in pluralistic African countries. In other words, in Africa there is need to redefine the nature of relationship between the state and religion as well as between the federal government and the component ethnic groups that make up the country. If there is anything we can learn from the present Europeans it is the fact that they can handle their problems and create avenues for the common masses to appreciate being Europeans and extend the same to others. This is why today they have European Union, Parliament, common Visa, currency, political parties, constitution, etc. The Western Europe is moving towards becoming

one nation. After the World War II, European leaders have vowed never to allow exaggerated ethnicity separate them again. What can Africans learn from this?

Building the Relationship in Pluralistic Communities

Our starting point is on building bridges across the things that divide the Africans of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in their various nations, and of creating linkages, networks and the relationship between Christians who share the same parish or church-community. The Angolan theologian, José Chipenda tells us that in his native language (*Umbundu),* people say, *"kowini keyau"* (where you find people, if there is a river you also find a bridge) (cf. Chipenda 1979: 72). It is on this fact that I will like to base my proposals for building the relationship in Africa.

Building the relationship in African Christian communities
The first point to stress concerns building the relationship in Christian communities in Africa. It is creating Christian communities that are pluralistic, non-discriminating, loving and welcoming. In this way African local churches would become models for deepening the relationship in a mixed environment? The fact is that till now local churches in Africa (despite the creation of national Episcopal Conferences), are fundamentally ethnic based. Though this has positive aspects like promoting common cultural elements for the inculturation of the gospel within the particular group and helping the people to retain their identity in a multi-ethnic nation. But the problem starts when people of different ethnic groups that make up the nation-state begin to migrate to other parts of the country and interact among themselves and with the others in various areas of human endeavors. Furthermore, wherever the people go, they also move along with their religion. So much so that Christians from different cultural, ethnic groups are beginning to form a kind of "international" community in different parts of their country. This is the reality of migration. In such a situation what should characterize the nature of the Christian community?

As the Onitsha Archdiocesan priests indicated in their paper at the Owerri symposium of the Nigerian Indigenous Priests Association (1994), in an African context, a local church-community should be defined concretely, as "… an integrated church community in a particular locus whether it be a town, a station, a community, a parish or even a diocese where the members by themselves interact in order to provide for all they need for the life and the work of the church community in the particular locus of our reference" (quoted in Oborji 1998: 195). This means in essence that where a group of Christians in a definable church community, within a definable locus, work together to provide all that they need for life, work and progress of their particular community, such a community would qualify as a local church and all its members as local church community members. Here the emphasis is more on community than geographical location. A local church community therefore, does not mean the same thing as "indigeniety" with the geographical location of that community, but rather with the integrity of the church community situated in a particular locus.[3]

An example of such a local church community will be where a group of Lebanese Catholics live together and set up a church station in a village in Mbaise (Nigeria). They set up a basic church community in that place, which they contribute to build up from their resources, their church community would, in this regard, qualify as a local church community in that particular geographical location under the diocesan bishop in Mbaise. Care is to be taken that it be not understood that the said church community is exclusive to only Lebanese. A second illustration would be where the Christians from different parts of the world or of a particular country gather as a community and from their efforts, and resources corporately strive to build up a church community in a particular place. The community so built up qualifies as a local church community in that place. Another example would be, where Christians, who are living in their own geographical native place together with Christians from other places of origin but residing in that same place and integrating

with the indigenes of that geographical location, build up a church community from their corporate resources together with the indigenes of that geographical location. They form one local church community even if those of the other non-indigenous members might be lending support or help to the church formations located back in the places of origin of their ancestors (cf. Oborji 1998: 195-196).

My submission is that the foregoing descriptions of church formations have one common goal of assisting African Christians towards overcoming the menace of exaggerated ethnicity. Building a self-reliant church in Africa also rests principally, on liberating the people from the incident of primitive ethnicity that disturbs them in their various situations in different African nations. To be true disciples of Christ, African Christians have to over-grow exaggerated ethnicity. It is only in this way that they can creditably launch out to the task of evangelization of their people and others.

Biblical Perspective

In African local churches and societies, there arises the need to emphasize the importance of the universal dimension of Christian communities as practiced by the early Christians. Thus, cultural manifestations of exaggerated ethnicity challenges us to go back to our Christian roots, the New Testament (NT) and recapture once more how the whole efforts of the early Christians is to create a universal community of the Spirit, a loving multi-cultural church. The Lucan tradition of the Pentecost event dramatizes this. The transformation of a local community (of Jewish descent) into a universal one is consistent with Lucan hermeneutic tradition of self-inclusion: his reinterpretation of the Jewish dominated Christian community to include himself and his gentile friends while not excluding the Jews. Luke's infancy narrative, for instance, presents Jesus both as "a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel" (Luke 2,32). As Teresa Okure argues, this inclusion of the Gentiles is the primary reason for his undertaking to write an orderly account of the "events which happened among us" so that the Gentile, Theophilus may understand accurately and participate in these events as an insider (Acts 2,5-13). Furthermore, scholars have long noted, Luke's genealogy of Jesus goes backwards beyond the Matthean "son of Abraham" to "son of Adam, Son of God" (Luke 3,38). For Luke, the significance of Christ-event and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles necessarily transcends the cultural, ethnic and national boundaries of Judaism (cf. Okure 2001: 269). For Luke, Jesus is the God's universal Messiah for all peoples of all times, and the community founded on Christ is a community of all peoples who have come to believe in the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ himself.

This Lucan account of Christ event and the Pentecost gives an arguably universal significance to church establishment. It moves the Christian community (deliberately) from its Jewish moorings to the universal plane. Luke is the only known Gentile among the evangelists, if not among the NT and biblical authors generally. For him, what the church was at the beginning and what it will be at the end of time was already manifest in the Pentecost. As the book of Revelation shows, in the Christian community, there are uncountable number of different people of various nations, languages and races, who have come together to worship the victorious Lamb (Rev.7). The church therefore, is in essence, a diversified community of many nations, ethnic-groups, and languages. The churches in Africa or any other are not excluded from this essential quality of the church. The idea of a Christian community that is constricted or closed to itself, within its own locality or ethnicity is foreign to the New Testament and entire Christian tradition. Every validly established Christian community is by its very nature universal, multi-cultural and therefore should be open to receive the faithful from other parts of the nation and beyond. As the Lucan tradition shows, the community that was inaugurated at the Pentecost is the universal church, a supra-national community intolerant of any form of parochialism, ethnicity and nationalism. In other words, every Christian community is a super-national, super-international gathering of believers in Christ that will at every age address herself to a multi-ethnic and diversified community. So this is the value of the church of Christ which has come down to us in Africa. The

flourishing of the Christian community in Africa will be measured by the quality and depth of the relationships it will forge among its members and with other communities. The ethnic, cultural and religious consciousness of the people is not, then, a matter of withdrawal and seclusion from others, but a consciousness of being bound up intimately with the people and communities all around.

Furthermore, ethnic manifestations of uncontrollable magnitude will have a damaging effect on theology and church history since it is alien to the universal significance of the Christian community or the church. The tendency will be to limit the universal dimension of mission and the church to one's ethnic group. The ends of the earth of the missionary mandate, in this case, would mean my own ethnic confines. It is like advocating for a national or ethnic churches and not one, holy, apostolic and universal church of Christ. The presence of Christians and ministers from other ethnic groups or nationalities who speak with foreign accent in such a national ethnic church would at all cost be resisted. This is because, such an ethnic based church is not universal and missionary but an anti-Pentecost and tribal community. However, a Christian community that is universal and missionary, a spirit-filled church would be welcoming and loving. It will be a community where everyone would feel at home. In other words, a Christian community purportedly in possession of the Spirit should receive with joy and love Christians of other ethnic or nationalities who, due to some accidents of history have found themselves in the new environment. This will not be inconsistent with the operation of the Spirit of God in the church. Since the universal dimension of the church is founded on the Christ-event and the descent of the Holy Spirit, every other Christian community established anywhere should be faithful to this principles and characters of the church, as a community which derived from the descent of the spirit and Christ's universal love. It is a universal family of God, a community of brothers and sisters of various tongues and cultures united by the blood of the first born Son of God. The animating factor of such a community is based on the biblical injunction on reconciliation of the Jews and the pagans with one another and with God (Ephesians 2,11-22). To follow the contrary will be to contradict the principles and teachings of the gospel.

Building the relationship in African nation-states
In African societies or nations, there should develop a new vision of community. Today we have nation states everywhere, covering a certain geographical space, created by various kinds of historical circumstances. They all have within their national territories different kinds of ethnic, cultural or religious groups. Conflicts among these are common even today, although they are not violent everywhere. How do people construct community in such situations? Some may opt for a kind of political theory that developed in Europe during the Enlightenment which sees the state as a collection of individuals, who have their inalienable rights, but who, in pursuit of their own self-interest, come together to set up structures of common living, spelt out in a contract. They insist on the dignity and rights of every individual. This principle, however, promotes healthy social contract of individuals, but on the contrary, it ignores natural communities like families, kin groups, etc.

So, we can not base construction of the relationship in mixed communities in Africa on this theory of individualism. The basis of community in African culture is relatedness as we tried to demonstrate earlier on. Every human being has the experience of being in relationship with others for his origin, life, culture and celebration. To live in community is to develop such sustainable relationships. Relationship is found in such qualities as a respect for the traditions of one's own and others' cultures; recognition of one's shared humanity; and an understanding of, and even empathy for, the meaning others impart to their beliefs, values and needs Duke 1996: 169). As Michael Amaladoss notes, once we go beyond individualism as the basic element of society, then we discover that a nation is actually a community of communities, because a nation is not a conglomeration of individuals, but is made up of a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious groups (cf. Amaladoss 2001: 3). This reality has been explored, particularly with reference to multiculturalism (cf. Gutman 1998). People in a national community do not relate to each other only as individuals, but as members of particular groups, each with its identity. Each group attempts

to protect its identity and deserves recognition and respect. Of course, the groups should not be allowed to stifle the freedom of individuals in the name of preserving and defending group identity. But the groups have a right to be recognized, acknowledged and respected. In other words, respecting community identity goes side by side with citizenship of individuals. The contrary will be communalism.

It is in this context of a nation that is a community of communities that we see the inadequacy of a democratic system that depends on the rule of majority, because in such a system a majority community can always dominate minority communities democratically. For instance, in some African nations of today, the attempt by some ethnic groups in the majority to claim to themselves the right to dominance in national affairs by virtue of their numerical strength shows up the shortcomings of the present liberal democratic system focused on the individual. This is why in a multiethnic, cultural and religious country like Nigeria, people who reflect on conflict resolution are talking of organizing a National Conference where every group that make up the country could be allowed to make their contribution towards ushering in a system of strong or deep democracy. As B. Barber writes, strong democracy complements liberal democracy by developing institutions and structures where every one can actively participate in discussion and contribute to the evolution of policy and decision making that affect every one. Not only individuals, but communities are also respected. Such participative democracy is distinguished from representative democracy, where a few representatives, often more concerned by their own self-interest than by the interest of the people, decide the fate of a whole people (cf. Barber in Duke 1996: 153-162). The principle that the universal illumines the particular holds ground only when each community sees itself reflected at the center and feels being an active participant there. Often, a presence of a representative from a marginalized group at the center or in a commission controlled by the dominant ethnic group, does not necessarily mean his participation. Thus, if the center is dominated only by one section of the community, marginalizing the others, the result would be ethnic conflicts, dictatorship and war.

One who lives in a pluralistic community or nation with the system of participatory democracy is open to pluralism. Such a person does not seek to dominate or impose, but to converse, to dialogue and to search for consensus. In African local churches and societies, the challenge then is to build up a community that respects, integrates and transcends ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism.

Building the relationship through conscientzation and education

Another way of promoting the relationship in African communities is by focusing on conscientization or rather education of the masses about the challenges of living in a pluralistic society. Often the language of relationship in many parts of Africa is characterized by ethnic sentiments. There is need to change this language and focus on those things that unite rather than divide the people. This can be achieved through well organized program of education of the masses. The education may focus on personal transformation of the individual through surfacing and changing incorrect attitudes, through coming to terms with pluralism and through cultivating the capacity for analysis that unmasks the abuse made of ethnic, religious and cultural differences by political forces. Often our attitudes to others are conditioned by our own prejudices and stereotypes, fed by biased information. The only way of changing this is to surface these unconscious attitudes and confront them with experiential reality. Where there are long-standing tensions which seem to indicate that such prejudices are reasonable, we have to create new experiences of community through dialogue. In dialogue one learns to understand, respect and accept the other (cf. Amaladoss 2001: 6). This means that one starts to accept the possibility of pluralism. Such education or conscientization can be done at all levels, in churches, in schools, colleges, universities, at village squares, families, among members of professional and non-professional associations, etc. Mass media and the press have an important role to play in this process of creating communities of healthy relationship in Africa. They should assume the responsibility of educating people about the gains of pluralism and of unity in diversity. A Christian inspired relationship will emerge in our

communities and nations when people are educated on the principles and gains of pluralism. The steady increase in conflicts in various African nations, is a sign that all hands must be on deck towards promoting unity and the relationship among people of different ethnic groups sharing one community or country.

Building the relationship through good governance and job opportunities

African leadership, both at the levels of civil and ecclesial communities are to be at the vanguard of this process of eradicating excessive ethnic sentiments. One area that must be focused is the question of providing equal opportunities to all. But in this case, I will like to single out youth and unemployment. David Ihenacho has recently drawn our attention to the need of creating more jobs in Africa as an answer to many social problems of the continent (cf. Ihenacho 2002: 10-12). When people are gainfully employed, they will have little or no time to dedicate to forces of division and conflict in the society. They will pay no attention to the politicians who specialize in using the poor, particularly, youths in fighting their selfish interest. This means that the joblessness of many Africans is part of the reason for the increase in ethnic conflicts and violence in different countries of the continent. A great majority of Africans have no per capita incomes. It is pointless weighing their none-incomes against what obtains elsewhere. In reality, they have no incomes. And that is the genesis of most social problems of Africa. Africans are largely not employed, not to talk of being gainfully employed. There are no stable establishments in Africa to offer people basic employment. According to Ihenacho, African governments are not well organized enough to offer common people such jobs as picking up the garbage, cleaning the public places, guarding public infrastructures or running minor errands, etc.

Because there are no jobs for most Africans there are no incomes for the great majority of the people. And when there is no income there is absolutely no plan for the future, and when there is no plan for the future one can assume that there is no future for such people. This is why the question of globalization will continue to be an illusion in Africa. Globalization involves incomes or economies. At present Africans have no incomes and the economy of many countries of the continent are in shambles. So for Africa to be part of the globalization process there is need to create avenues for generating incomes to the people. Tackling the issue of unemployment and providing jobs to the masses may be a good start for an African form of globalization. When a large number of people are living their daily lives without any future in view, they are bound to become despondent and aggressive. And what follow immediately after are social upheaval, unrest and wars. In a situation of joblessness every social malady easily assumes a disproportionate prominence. In such a situation, many young people will learn all sorts of tricks and bad behaviors: robbery, promiscuity, etc. All these things are possible where people have no jobs or as the case may be, where people are lazy to hold on to jobs. It has been proved in nations of Europe, North America and elsewhere, that jobs are a great distraction and wonderful control against unwanted behaviors.

Thus, the answer to many social problems in Africa, exaggerated ethnicity included, is jobs. There are some areas to create jobs in Africa: the cleaning sector, the maintenance sector, the areas of middle-level technical manpower, the areas of security, school management, the police force, the military, the postal sector, the telecom sectors, the local government agencies, etc. In many African nations at present, most of these sectors are running at minus points. If a government is well organized or wants to organize itself, there are wonderful employment opportunities available in areas of public institutions. Organized governments in African nations coupled with good taxation system will almost cater for the lower-level employment needs of their countries. In working for the gainfully employment of the citizens, the leadership must show itself to be transparent and above ethnic favoritism. Different ethnic groups can find inspiration and motivation for deepening the relationship if the leadership works for the betterment of all in the society without discrimination based on ethnic or religious affiliations.

This implies that African leadership should take interest in the continent and create jobs for the youth. Leaders of various Christian communities could develop efforts which will ensure that governments, local and international business communities and all people of good will realize how the availability of jobs in Africa could transform the whole social situation of the continent and improve the lifestyles of the majority of Africans. Jobs will indeed help to reduce to a great extent ethnic conflict, disease and poverty which are very characteristic of modern Africa. It will also help in maintaining rule of law and order, discipline in public and private lives, security of life and property, which are basic requirements for existence of any society, but which, unfortunately, African nations at present very much lack (John Paul II 1995: *Ecclesia in Africa* 40). This is one major way we can promote decent living and good relationship in African communities.

Conclusion

In the light of what we have seen in this article, I think that we should move towards a community or a state that should remain a home to all, to all ethnic groups, cultures and religions as the case may be. In African communities and nations, there should be a language of relationship in which all groups are respected and accepted. The goal of the relationship is to build up a community that is multiethnic, cultural and religious. Deepening relationship helps in shaping the consensus of the community through open dialogue and discussion. It helps also in conflict resolution when different ethnic or religious communities come into conflict for whatever reason. Also the aim of the community is to show that people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds could work for peace and live together as a people. The complexity of the contemporary African situation puts those in leadership in a challenging position to respond to the realities of our times. One such reality facing our continent and which we have discussed in this article is the inter-relationship among the various communities and groups of different ethnic, linguistic, religions, etc., that are found in African states today. The differences should not be used as forces of conflict, instead they should be allowed to manifest the cultural richness of the community which could be employed as forces for communion, mutual co-existence and the relationship. To achieve this, Africa needs a leadership that can enhance the culture of relationship among different groups, create job opportunities which could transform the lifestyles of the people and move them towards building decent society where tolerance, reconciliation, peace and justice will reign.

African Christians living in mixed communities have an indispensable role in this regard. Our Christian faith envisages the Kingdom as reconciliation of all things according to the plan of God revealed in Christ. Christians are called to be models of the relationship in a pluralistic communities. Hence, the task of Christians of diverse cultural backgrounds living together and sharing the same community is to learn to forge new relationship with one another and with other communities, and let the universal message of love flow freely in the blood-stream of the society. They have to show the world that it is possible indeed for people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to share one community without rancor, discrimination, and conflict. This would be an African contribution to ethnic and racial redemption of the society and the church.

Notes

[1] However, this image of the family is rather recent and it is as a result of influences found in the technological and industrial societies.

[2] Though the continued struggle of the minorities within the Kingdom shows that all is not yet well with such a fusion.

[3] The foregoing descriptions of church formation tells us some home truth about incidents that disturb African Christians residing outside the confines of their ethnic geographical location. Hence, the description should not be confused with the traditional meaning of the term "local church" which refers to the church at the level of an Episcopal Conference, or of the term "particular church" which refers to the church at the level the call for devolution of a diocese. The concern here is how to help the local Christians live and work in love of God and neighbour in any part of their country, regardless of which ethnic group one comes from.

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