

ASIAN  
HORIZONS

Vol. 13, No. 4, December 2019

Pages: 629-646

## CULTURAL RATIONALITY AND AFRICAN RELIGIOUS CULTURE

### A Critical Anthropological and Theological Investigation towards Intercultural Dialogue

**Francis Appiah-Kubi**♦

*Kwame Nkrumah University, Kumasi - Ghana*

#### **Abstract**

The situation of the world today, as well as every culture's vocation, calls for intercultural dialogue as a guiding concept, open to the future, when faced with the various interpretations of pluralism. From anthropological and theological perspectives, this article, after delving into an overview of the historic encounter between the African and the European cultures, seeks to drum home the significance of African religious cultural rationality; it stresses on how the ecclesiological paradigm for Africa, the Church Family of God, contributes to the appreciation of intercultural dialogue in the context of pluralism. The objective, then, is to evaluate dialogue's potential within the integration of different cultures. The path of dialogue becomes possible and fruitful when based on the awareness of each individual's dignity and of the unity of all people in a common humanity, aiming at sharing and building up together a common destiny.

---

♦**Rev. Fr Dr Francis Appiah-Kubi**, Senior Lecturer at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, is the former Head of the Department of the Religious Studies Department at the Faculty of Social Science in the KNUST. He holds PhD degree from Institut Catholique de Paris (2005) with specialization in Ecclesiology, and Catholic University, Leuven (PhD in Systematic Theology, 2005). He was a formator and lecturer of Systematic Theology in St Peter's Major Seminary, Cape Coast from 2005-2011. He is a member of *Comitheol*, a theological Committee at the service of African Bishops, SECAM. Among his publications are: *L'Eglise Famille de Dieu: Un chemin pour les Eglises d'Afrique*(2008); *The Theology of Priesthood: Understanding the Specificity of the Catholic Priesthood* (2015). Email: frkubi@gmail.com

**Keywords:** Church, Cultural Rationality, Intercultural Dialogue, Interculturality, Multicultural World, Person, Relationality, Parenthood of God, Pluralism

## Introduction

Cultural values and norms are intrinsically bound up with religion especially from the perspective of African worldview. However, not all African cultural and religious values are appreciated in the same way even by all African societies.<sup>1</sup> In this perspective and in the context of intercultural dialogue the fundamental question that comes to mind immediately is, how can the richness of our cultural differences be understood as expressions of the human race's fundamental unity? To what extent and in what context should we understand that cultural dialogue is a necessity for harmonious living and mutual co-existence and enrichment in our multicultural world today?<sup>2</sup>

The Second Vatican Council, in considering the importance of culture in its document on the pastoral constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, asserted that there is no truly human experience without the context of a specific culture. In fact, "man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture" (# 53). Culture is the particular expression of human beings, their specific way of being and organizing their presence in the world. Using the resources of their cultural heritage, which have been transmitted from one generation to the other through socialization and/or initiation rites<sup>3</sup> the African people thus grow in a serene and balanced way, in a healthy relationship with God, with their environment and with other human beings. Though, these ties with their own culture are necessary and vital, yet in the light of cultural pluralism, these ties should not force them into closing in on themselves. Since our societies of today are multicultural in nature and people of different cultures interact with one another on a daily basis, it must be acknowledged that everyone's cultural links are entirely compatible with encountering and knowing other cultures.

---

<sup>1</sup>J.J. Tevan & W.E. Hewitt, ed., *Introduction to Sociology, A Canadian Focus* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.), Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1998, 52.

<sup>2</sup>L.H. Simon, *Rationality and Cultural Relativism*, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1998, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/rationality-and-cultural-relativism/v-1/>. Accessed (30/03/2016).

<sup>3</sup>P.K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, 33.

Therefore, the essential meaning of culture, which according to the Congregation for Catholic Education, consists

in the fact that it is a characteristic of human life as such. Man lives a truly human life thanks to culture. Human life is culture in the sense also that man is marked out and differentiated by it from all that exists elsewhere in the visible world: man cannot exist outside of culture. Man always lives in accordance with a culture that belongs to him and which, in turn, creates among men a bond that is also proper to them, determining the inter-human and social character of human existence.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, it must be acknowledged that the current phenomenon of multiculturalism, bound up with the advent of globalization, risks accentuating, in problematic ways, the “diversity in unity” that characterizes people’s cultural outlook. In fact, the ever-closer encounter between various cultures, in itself a dynamic process, creates much ambivalence. On the one hand, there is a tendency towards various forms of greater cultural uniformity. On the other hand, the specific nature of different cultures is exalted. One wonders what the fate of the specific identity of African culture will be, given the pressures of the enormous expansion of customs and products resulting in a “westernization” of the world. As a result, pluralism and the variety of traditions, customs and languages, which of their nature produce mutual enrichment and development can lead to an exaggeration of individual identity, flaring up in clashes and conflicts. Such unfortunate tendency of cultural superiority<sup>5</sup> justifies the multifaceted racism, and religio-centrism, ethnocentrism, classism, terrorism, sexism, and other forms of human degradation and marginalization which are considered evils of our world today. A case in point here is the encounter between African and western cultures. Indeed the Church teaches that, cultural diversity should be understood and appreciated “within the broader horizon of the unity of the human race,”<sup>6</sup> in the light of which one can grasp the profound meaning of the very differences, instead of “the radicalization of identity which makes cultures resistant to any beneficial influence from outside.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003, 30.

<sup>5</sup>D. Bosch, *Dynamique de la mission chrétienne*, Paris: Karthala, 1995, 391.

<sup>6</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, 32.

<sup>7</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, 32.

## 1. Interculturality: The Colonial Experience in Africa

Cultures differ from one another, otherwise the question of cultural pluralism would not arise. Cultures are not static but dynamic; they change and develop, especially through mutual contact. This interaction of cultures, termed as interculturality is part of the normal pattern of cultural development. However, such interactions among cultures which are meant to improve and promote harmonious and reciprocal respect of cultures and peoples, unfortunately sometimes end up in dominion and destruction. A paradigm in view is the interaction between the African and the European cultures. African studies from experts and philosophers have over the years revealed the negative repercussion of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism<sup>8</sup> the continent was taken through over nearly 70 years of the African life and culture. African's socio-cultural life, religious traditions and languages suffered the severest of denigration and humiliation in their encounter with the West. C. Eze describes the colonial experience as "a period marked by the horror and violence of the transatlantic slave trade, the imperial occupation of most parts of Africa and forced administrations of its peoples, and the resilient and enduring ideologies and practices of European cultural superiority (ethnocentrism) and racial supremacy (racism)."<sup>9</sup>

Africa being subjugated and eventually dominated through this encounter by the whites, the western mode of thinking and civilization began to thrive and took over the indigenous cultural heritage. Traditional values paved way for foreign way of doing and thinking, as Africans became "fully westernized."<sup>10</sup> For this very reason, the African cultural rationality was seriously questioned and challenged, and eventually it was regarded as primitive, defective, outmoded and therefore needs to be replaced. The dominant form of education that disdains the indigenous religious knowledge and language, the powerful influence of the media and the intrusions against African traditional religiosity were some of the elements that threaten the total annihilation of African culture<sup>11</sup> which consequently led to the loss of cultural

---

<sup>8</sup>Cf. A. Quenon, *Les Eglises Chrétiennes et la traite atlantique du XVe au XIX siècle*, Paris: Karthala, 1993.

<sup>9</sup>C.E. Eze, ed., *African Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998, 213.

<sup>10</sup>D. Arowolo, "The Effects of Western Civilization and Culture on Africa," *Afro-Asians Journal of Social Sciences* 1, 1 (2010) 2.

<sup>11</sup>Dorothy Nwanyinma, Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality in the Context of Africa's Colonial and Decolonization Experience," *African Symposium* 11, 1 (2011) 101-114.

continuity<sup>12</sup> if not the death of culture, ethnocide, to use the expression of A. Shorter.<sup>13</sup>

The alienated state of the African, a product or consequence of forced and unequal partnership, has not only threatened cultural demise, but also retarded development through colonization of his (the African) mind. The conception of moral and ethical matters was drastically put into question and even changed totally. The value of community or family is eroded and has been replaced with individualism; the extended family structure is giving way gradually for the nuclear family system; Homes are constructed to serve the immediate family needs without considering the larger family picture. These and many others have adverse effect on African cultural rationality, especially in the perspective of the family and communal life.

Politically, the indigenous institutions have been submerged and almost completely dismantled and finally been replaced by western ones. With the introduction of western form of governance (eg. democracy), natural boundaries were distorted and re-demarcated. All these are results of forced or domineering intercultural relationship<sup>14</sup> with its consequences of numerous tribal wars, conflicts and under-development on the continent.

Indeed, the African's religion/culture has not been understood and appreciated by other cultures. The African worldview and cultural rationality, when juxtaposed with western cultural civilization were judged as primitive and irrational. Gradually, the western culture succeeded in subjugating the African culture, and completed the subjugation with an intellectual coup d'état, where almost every aspect of African life and culture was evaluated from the western point of view.

Unfortunately and sadly, some of the educated Africans today are merely echoing the ignorance and prejudices levelled against such rich cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup> The situation is even worsened by the creeping in of globalization through which the western cultural civilization has become the hallmark and determinant for every culture and every individual. This has not only gradually and

---

<sup>12</sup>Arowolo, "The Effects of Western Civilization," 2.

<sup>13</sup>A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999, 28.

<sup>14</sup>Arowolo, *The effects of Western Civilization*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: African University Press, 1987, 12-13.

surely pushed the traditional religio-cultural educational values and systems to the verge of demise; equally, it has not permitted any respectful dialogue between the two traditions.<sup>16</sup> How is it possible for the African to engage in dialogue with other cultures within the context of multicultural differences and diversity that characterize the world of today? All the above cited instances exhibit the idea of dominance when the interaction between the Africans and the Europeans is carefully scrutinized, regarding what Africans authentically believe and think,<sup>17</sup> and how such interaction becomes a harmful obstacle to meaningful intercultural dialogue. Oluwagbeni-Jacob gives us a summary of the African situation:

The west in their encounter with Africans arrogantly disparaged the ways of native Africans as uncouth, savage and primitive. This attitude was inconsistent with interculturality which calls for recognition of one culture by another as a credible culture and positive reservoir of values. It was devoid of every sense of embracing diversity that makes it possible for every different elements to influence each other to the point where each is reformulated, maintaining its own specificity but not taking into consideration the specificity of the other elements. It was a contact based on unequal relationship.<sup>18</sup>

It is evident from the above that what happened between the imperialists and Africans was a case of two cultures interacting but not on the basis of equality. Whatever was uniquely African was short of the ideal and inconsistent with what they considered to be rational and true and that happened to be European values. Believing in the superiority of their religion, race, economy and culture, the Europeans tried to order the African culturally, economically, religiously and politically in line with Eurocentric vision through formal education both secular and theological.

We can therefore stipulate from the above analysis that such model of interculturality cannot promote cultural dialogue since it is characterized by hostility, ignorance, intimidation and imposition.

Thus, for genuine dialogue to take place there should be equal treatment and respect of values from different cultures. The African

---

<sup>16</sup>D.J. Greenstone, "Culture, Rationality, and the Underclass," in C. Jencks and P.E. Pertesen, ed., *The Urban Underclass*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1991, 404-405.

<sup>17</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 10.

<sup>18</sup>Oluwagbeni-Jacob, "Interculturality," 10.

rationality cannot be critically articulated without recourse to its religio-cultural and anthropological context, for the African is a religious and cultural being.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Rationality and African Religious Culture: Anthropological Perspectives

From African worldview the human person is primarily conceived as a relational being before being considered as rational or irrational. The rational person is not the one endowed with Aristotelian analyses and speculation, but anyone who recognizes and appreciates his/her belongingness to the community or family into which he/she is born. Such individual participates and contributes in the communal religio-cultural life and activity of the community without which he/she is considered an alienated or irrational being. One's membership or belongingness is so critical and crucial to the African that one must do all it takes to preserve it for fear of losing one's identity and security or being alienated. To be born an African is to be born into a community, and to be born into a community means to be born into a culture which is intensively and pervasively religious.<sup>20</sup>

In this regard, detaching oneself from community life is to disrupt the very essence of one's very being and is tantamount to being irrational. This results eventually in losing the meaning of life, socio-religious security and communal membership.<sup>21</sup> As a result, to fully understand and appreciate the rationale behind the acts and deeds of the African, his/her religious/cultural world must be taken into serious consideration.<sup>22</sup>

It is also significant to emphasize that African culture frowns on individualism. Though an individual is a product of culture, culture does not produce individualistic agenda. It is expected of every individual in the community to contribute to building a lasting religio-social cohesion. When an individual's quota becomes acceptable, the wider society buys into it and it becomes a normative cultural heritage for all. K. Gyekye, a Ghanaian scholar emphasizes: "as an enactment of a community of people, culture is the totality of shared meanings that people in a given society attach to their experiences, the basis on which they understand themselves and their

---

<sup>19</sup>J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Bostwana: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1999 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 3.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 3.

<sup>21</sup>A.C. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its People*, London: Frank Cass, 1966, 429ff.

<sup>22</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 12.

identities, and interpret their experiences. Culture is a shared experience.”<sup>23</sup> The African cultural rationality therefore is oriented towards the development of the individual in a manner that ensures personal stability and smooth running of the humane society with which the individual relates, and this is of utmost importance for both moral and spiritual guidance.<sup>24</sup>

The individualist anthropology in African culture is, according to Olúfemi Táíwò a creation of modernity imposed on African cultural anthropology. He made this assertion when he remarkably pointed out that one of the major challenges to the evolution of African culture is modernity, which, in his view, promotes individualism, a contradiction to African social and cultural existence. He reaffirms his views further as he declares:

No doubt, the idea of individualism predated the modern age. My contention is that the notion of the individual that is dominant in the modern age is without precedent, at least in the Euro-American tradition from which the remaining parts of the world who have embraced modernity extracted it [...]. It is under the modern regime that individualism is the preferred principle of social ordering and almost everything else is understood in terms of how well or ill it serves the interests of the individual. Thus, although it is true that there was some recognition of the individual in pre-modern epochs, it is in the modern epoch that the individual is not merely supreme.<sup>25</sup>

Essentially, the African cultural philosophy is a philosophy of the person. Though it has cosmological ramifications, these considerations explain and justify the prominent position occupied by the concept of the person within the African anthropological and contemporary philosophy where interdependence rather than competition is a primary social value.

It is generally an acknowledged fact that, in Africa it is difficult and almost impossible to distinguish religion from culture and the vice versa. The African culture has been described by many African scholars, both theologians and anthropologists, as religious culture.<sup>26</sup> Such cultural religiosity might have portrayed African

---

<sup>23</sup>Gyekye, *Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity*, Washington DC:, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004, 142.

<sup>24</sup>Gyekye, *Beyond Cultures*, 139.

<sup>25</sup>Olufemi Taiwo, *Africa and her Challenge to Modernity*, Seattle: Seattle University, 2009, 3.

<sup>26</sup>Read J.S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1991; P.K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974.

ways of thinking, an African's perception and interpretation of events and practices and customs as more mystified and mysterious, at times incomprehensible to foreign minds and to the extreme, apparently non-intelligible to other cultures. This has resulted in the derogatory terminologies used to describe the African, and his/her religious culture as primitive, and as heathenism, spiritism and paganism.

In the view of F.T. Saez, "intercultural competence represents the development of our cognitive environment motivated by the appreciation of diversity."<sup>27</sup> He defines interculturality in the spirit of language teaching in which the individual is made aware of the cognitive environment which manifests itself in cultural diversities. It also promotes individual's attitudes towards cultures with clear limits and features to compare in cultural differentiations. In doing so, Saez believes that interculturality so defined in terms of building attitudes is intended to reduce ethnocentrism, develop a general comprehension of cultures and to modify the learners' attitudes towards more positive stances.

African philosophers like G. Bekele have contended that, there are different philosophies and that it is important for proponents of these philosophies to engage in dialogue or ideally, polylogue. The ability to comprehend humanity's problems in a global age requires that representatives of different cultures and philosophies should make effort to understand one another. This can be productive if it is approached from hermeneutic and intercultural perspectives.<sup>28</sup> African philosophical activities from intercultural dimension have established the common sense approach to the view that reason is a universal human trait, and one does not need to be born or live in a particular region or continent to experience it.<sup>29</sup>

Flowing from the foregoing, interculturality could be defined in terms of the interactions of people from different cultural backgrounds. The individual or group has the opportunity to

---

<sup>27</sup> F.T. Saez, "Towards Interculturality Through Language Teaching, Argumentative Discourse," [https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/cauce/pdf/cauce25/cauce25\\_07.pdf](https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/cauce/pdf/cauce25/cauce25_07.pdf) 2002, 103, accessed March, 2017.

<sup>28</sup>G. Bekele, "The Need for an Intercultural Approach in African Philosophy, in B. Gutema and D. Smith, ed., *African Philosophy at the Threshold of the New Millennium: Papers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the International Society in African Philosophy and Studies*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2005, 205-214.

<sup>29</sup>G. Bekele, *The Intercultural Dimension of African Philosophy*, African Study Monograph, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2015, 139.

experience the culture of another person or group for better cohesion and co-existence among cultures. Interculturality advocates for a shift from the domination of one culture by another to promote a plurality of cultures that respects differences and fosters the ethic of solidarity and mutual enrichment and dynamic intercultural dialogue.

### 3. Towards Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural dialogue, according to the Congregation for Catholic Education, is a process that comprises of an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes.<sup>30</sup>

Intercultural dialogue, for A. Doron, is distinct from debate, for it involves a form of listening that is beyond position or profession.<sup>31</sup> Such a dialogue may request from its participants to see each other not as an abstract being, but a concrete particular individual and the process as one of accepting the other. Such a dialogue can be successful only when all parties are permanently stretched beyond their opening views.<sup>32</sup> However, we must admit that dialogue cannot be accomplished merely by holding conferences, but should be built into the very structure of the cultures of the world. This is why Doron argued that dialogue is a rational conversation between two parties in an atmosphere of freedom, respect, equality, trust and commitment to truth.<sup>33</sup> That demands the usage of appropriate language in a way that demonstrates knowledge and understanding of cultures, the ability to be open-minded, interested and curious about a person and his/her culture.<sup>34</sup> Oluwagbemi-Jacob argues that “interculturality is not culture bound, and is not the preserve of any nation. It takes cognizance of

---

<sup>30</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to intercultural Dialogue in Catholic School*, Vatican 2012. [Available at: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) ] (Accessed on 11/04/2016).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. A. Doron, *Peace, Literature and Art*, Vol. II. *Towards a Definition of Intercultural Dialogue*, 2 [Accessed from [ww.eolss.net](http://ww.eolss.net)]. 11/4/2016).

<sup>32</sup>Doron, *Peace, Literature and Art*, 2.

<sup>33</sup>Doron, *Peace, Literature and Art*, 6.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. F. Dervin, *Interculturality in Education: A Theoretical and Methodological Toolbox*, London, Palgrave, 2016, 120.

the mixture of cultures. It is thus, a contribution to a new understanding of pluralism, a new way of (thinking) valuing and embracing diversity and difference."<sup>35</sup>

It implies that interculturality shies away from any assumed "common experience," which seems to mask differences, to pretend that there is a unique way of knowing for all and sundry. It does not see our experience as fixed and universal. Many a critic may suggest, that intercultural philosophy leads to total relativism. In response to such a criticism, Oluwagbemi-Jacob, insisting on cooperation, mutuality, dialogue and polylogue, concludes that the "isolationism inherent in individualism, superiority inherent in the claims of uniqueness, hegemonic effect of false universalism, all of which are intrinsic elements of absolute relativism, are dissipated." <sup>36</sup> The specificity of interculturality cannot be qualified as "anything goes" philosophical attitude. It is rather a denunciation of inadequate and false universalism that ignores specific issues and challenges of periphery cultures.<sup>37</sup>

Dialogue is essential to interculturality, which involves the unity of action and reflection for the purpose of transforming and humanizing the world. Dialogue in this context presupposes that the participants recognize each as equal and abhors the imposition of the truth of one person on the others. It is not an instrument of domination of one culture by another. Humility also characterizes dialogue and requires that no party in the dialogue should consider himself/herself as the owner of truth or be offended by the contributions of others.<sup>38</sup>

Undoubtedly, self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue, for at the point of encounter, neither parties should claim to have the monopoly of wisdom or be totally ignorant. Therefore, dialogue presupposes an open mind, an acknowledgement of other possibilities or alternatives different from one's own. This overrides the bigotry and fanaticism that ethnocentrism begets. Mutual enrichment and self-actualization are likely benefits of interculturality through the instrumentality of dialogue. According to P. Schineller, imposition shows no appreciation, no

---

<sup>35</sup>Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality," 102.

<sup>36</sup>Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality," 102.

<sup>37</sup>Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality," 103.

<sup>38</sup>Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality," 104.

respect or regard for the values and customs and religious traditions of a group.<sup>39</sup>

Also, for cultures to mutually interact, there ought to be the avoidance of prejudice, a partiality that prevents objective consideration of an issue or a situation. There is the need to do away with all preconceived biases, and open up, in order to understand why things are done or seen in a particular way by adherents of such tradition. For effective intercultural dialogue, cultures should be open to be able to interact well.

Besides the avoidance of prejudice, there is the need for cultural reappraisal of inappropriate values. It is true that there are pitfalls in every culture. Cultures interact in order to develop, therefore, through encounters, cultures can borrow from each other values which would not be inimical to the well-being of its adherents. The good aspects of every culture are worthy of emulation, but not blind copying. Their encounter is to enrich each other, and not to claim monopoly or exhibiting traits of self-sufficiency or being totally ignorant or naïve.<sup>40</sup>

The Catholic Church, recognizing the multicultural nature of today's society, equally indicated that the overlapping presence of different cultures is a great resource, as long as the encounter between those different cultures is seen as a source of mutual enrichment. However, significant problems can arise if multicultural society is seen as a threat to social cohesion, or as a threat to the protection and exercise of rights pertaining to individuals or groups.<sup>41</sup> In this perspective, he opines that any meaningful intercultural dialogue should be a process that "comprises an open and respectful exchange of interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews."<sup>42</sup>

The Catholic Church proposes that intercultural dialogue processes or encounters are to go beyond a mere "tolerance" of the "other" and can involve creative abilities that convert challenges and insights into innovation processes and into new forms of expression. The "shared

---

<sup>39</sup>P. Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, Ibandan: Intec Printers Ltd, 1990, 14.

<sup>40</sup>Oluwagbemi-Jacob, "Interculturality," 103.

<sup>41</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to intercultural Dialogue in Catholic School*, 1.

<sup>42</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to intercultural Dialogue in Catholic School*, 1.

space” which such processes take place can be located outside physical spaces, situated in the media or in a virtual environment.<sup>43</sup> In addition, for there to be a practical intercultural dialogue, the need to cultivate the virtue of humility among cultures is paramount. Cultures should be humble enough to accept their flaws, and corrections so as to forge towards an improved future. We would like, to emphasize that interculturality does not mean ironing out diversity, but instead, it is the strategy where dialogue and complementarity are crucial. In this regard, let us see how the paradigm Family of God can be susceptible in promoting intercultural dialogue.

#### **4. Theology of the Church Family of God and Intercultural Dialogue**

There are many ways according to which God’s presence is made real in human life. Some are known, practiced and articulated, whilst others are neither known nor expressed but are simply lived. Our relationship with God, whether known or simply lived, pushes us to go out of ourselves to look for the other.

The systematic and critical reflection on the relational dimension of the theology of the Church family of God is articulated around the fact that the relation with brothers and sisters from different cultural backgrounds is neither dominion nor servitude. It is not a master-slave relationship but is based on communal baptismal gifts of filiation and fraternity. Thus, encountering others implies theologically being with brothers/sisters, which means being beside them on the same scale as we are. Not above them, but with them; not below them, but only with them. In other words, it is neither about a position of superiority nor of servitude: No one is oppressed nor anyone is the oppressor. As H.U. von Balthasar has emphasized in his book, *l’amour seul est digne de foi*:

If Christ was born to free from sin the least of his brothers/sisters, then we have to consider this brother/sister in faith and in love in the perspective of the image that he possesses before the heavenly Father. Only this image is true and permits a true intercultural dialogue. The Christian meets Christ in the neighbour, not behind him nor above him; only this corresponds to love of incarnation and sufferings of the one who

---

<sup>43</sup>Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to intercultural Dialogue in Catholic School*, 1.

calls himself “Son of man” (Jn 5:27) and who is identified with anyone. When I meet anyone, I have before me the Son of man.<sup>44</sup>

From the perspective of the theology of the church family of God, such recognition should inform any expression or strategy of intercultural dialogue. In other words, the source of these bonds is not nationality, nor ethnicity, nor clan, but the biblical ontology of communion in the family. Consequently, while maintaining a coherent realism as far as this issue is concerned, the African Christian theology of the Church Family of God cannot consider the struggle for pre-eminence and rank as being in accord with the will of God. The theology of the Church as family of God underscores the immediate implication of the being-with-God, the parenthood of God, the human fraternity. The parenthood of God<sup>45</sup> radically commands a relationship of equality and respect among nations and peoples of diverse cultural realities. For, due to our relationality with God’s sovereignty, no human creature can legitimately be considered superior, subordinate or inferior to the other. “You are all brothers” (Mt 23:8). We are at the service of one another. This made H. Küng insist on the fact that the Christian faith is not lived in isolation. There is nobody who does not need the other. That is why the Church the community of believers, is not an end in itself, but is at the service of humanity.<sup>46</sup> In other words, due to the fact that the very sovereignty of God the Father is supremely expressed in the suffering service of his Unique Son, our relations towards one another must signify that every human being is called to serve the other. Nobody is a servant, but all must serve.

C. Geffré, on his part affirmed: “I acknowledge that I receive my existence from another person, but at the same time I identify myself as son and as man called to work with others in view of the kingdom.”<sup>47</sup> If God is one in three persons, it means that He is essentially relationship and love. God is Father only in the relation with Jesus his Son, and in the relation with the sons/daughters in the Son. This is only possible when one frees himself/herself from

---

<sup>44</sup>H.U. von Balthasar, *L’amour seul est digne de foi*, Saint Maur: Paroles et silence, nouvelle édition, 1999, 90.

<sup>45</sup>J.S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, London: SPCK, 1977 (4<sup>th</sup> ed), 90-93. The idea joins that of J. Galot on the fusion between paternity and maternity applied to God, due to the infinite distance that exists between divine paternity and human paternity: “*Petite catechese sur le Pere. Père qui es-tu?*”, Versailles: Saint Paul, 1996, 30-32.

<sup>46</sup>H. Küng, *Garder espoir. Ecrits sur la réforme de l’Eglise*, Paris: Cerf, 1991, 193.

<sup>47</sup>C. Geffré, *Le Christianisme au risque de l’interprétation*, Paris: Cerf, 1994, 185.

his/her vision of the world of dominion and superiority to enter into that of God.

This relational category, a fundamental condition for intercultural dialogue is placed within the Christ event, presented at once as a Trinitarian structure,<sup>48</sup> a perfect place and sign of exceptional Revelation of the love of God the Father who has so much loved the world that he sent his only Son to expand his spirit of love in the hearts of humanity. Consequently, the Church is born as “community of brothers and sisters,” where “the social, cultural, racial and sexual dominion, are abolished.”<sup>49</sup> So, the theology of the Church as family of God makes no alliance with any “form of ethnic tribalism, racial clanism, autonomist nationalism,”<sup>50</sup> else it would lead to the denial and to the destruction of the very foundation of its existence, namely the Trinitarian love. Humanity enjoys and participates in the filial relationship with the Father as revealed by the unique Son, Jesus Christ. The revelation of the paternity of God to men is inseparable from the revelation of the unique filiation of Jesus in which the members of the family, the believers, participate. To use the expression of C. Geffré, “there is paternity because there is filiation, and there is filiation because there is, through the gift of the Spirit, communion with the Only Son.”<sup>51</sup>

In this sense, all racist discrimination,<sup>52</sup> all ethnocentrism,<sup>53</sup> all intellectual rationalism, in other words, all depreciative and persecuted behaviour vis-a-vis the other, is contrary to the mission of the Church, and to the spirit of intercultural dialogue because it falls out of Christian principles and norms regulating an authentic Christian fraternity. The theology of the Church family of God which is totally opened to the world, and which does not absolutely exclude any culture nor any civilisation, will be the best way to fight against racist rationalism in order to promote genuine intercultural

---

<sup>48</sup>Cf. E.J. Penoukou, *Quel type d’Eglise pour quelle mission en Afrique?* in *Spiritus* 123, t. 32 (mai 1991), 197.

<sup>49</sup>J. Moltmann, *L’Eglise dans la force de l’Esprit. Une contribution à l’ecclésiologie moderne* (col. “Cogitatio Fidei” n. 102), Paris: Cerf, 1980, 409.

<sup>50</sup>alMoltmann, *L’Eglise dans la force de l’Esprit*, 9.

<sup>51</sup>Geffre, *Le Christianisme*, 179.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. M. Girod, *Penser le racism. De la responsabilité des scientifiques*, Paris: Calmann-Levy, 2004.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Bishop M.F. Kpakala gives a passionate typical example of racism and ethnocentrism and their consequences in Liberia. “The Church in Africa Today. Sacrament of Justice, Peace and Unity,” in M. Browne, *African Synod, Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, 110-130.

dialogue. The acknowledgment of the revelation of God the Father overthrows what is merely a relationship of overconfidence and of competition between man and God, and among men. The relationship of *filiation-fraternity* must substitute the relationship of *master-slave*. The only attitude which corresponds to the Word of God is that of the sons and daughters, children born from God, participating in the divine filiation of the Only Son, who lives his resemblance in the acceptance of his difference. The theology of the Church family of God in which is discovered our filiation to God the Father and fraternal bond to one another in Jesus Christ has the capacity to transcend not only differences, ethnic and tribal particularisms, but also racial and national barriers. It affects global communication without dominion and, finally, towards an absolute opening to God the Father.

We have to emphasize that exclusive mutual national solidarity very often “degenerates into negative forms of tribalism and of ethnocentrism”<sup>54</sup> characterized by “tendencies to disunion – selfishness, tribalism”<sup>55</sup> that defy any form of cultural rationality in its openness to others. The effects of such feeling of superiority have been dramatic for humans: war, bloodshed, and social, political and cultural discrimination. Nonetheless, we do not think that the national racism and bloody ethnic and civil conflicts are inevitable. A *modus vivende* is still possible: that is what the dialogue among cultures wishes to suggest.

Concerning the issue of cultural rationality and intercultural dialogue, the theology of the Church family of God, in his articulation of the filiation and fraternity invites us into a relationship with the other regulated not by retribution, but in a non-conditional commitment to not reduce the relationship to calculated exchanges but to renounce to encapsulate such relationships in a frame that can be measured.<sup>56</sup> The non-conditional commitment towards the other must be appreciated and if possible institutionalized to help appreciate respectfully others within their own cultural perspectives.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup>H. Thiandoum, *Relatio ante disceptationem du Synode des évêques pour l’Afrique*, in *Documentation Catholique* (15-5-1994) # 2094, 476.

<sup>55</sup>H. Thiandoum, *Relatio post disceptationem* in *Documentation Catholique*, (5-6-1994) # 2095, 524.

<sup>56</sup>E. Grieu, *Nés de Dieu, Itinéraires de chrétiens engagés. Essai de lecture théologique*, Paris: Cerf, 2003, 268.

<sup>57</sup>J. Moltmann, *Le Dieu crucifié. La croix du Christ, fondement et critique de la théologie chrétienne*, Paris: Cerf-Mame, 1974, 34.

In this light J. Doré proposes to believers to consider their most profane tasks as service to others and to all humanity.<sup>58</sup> In the same vein, R.S. Anderson, endorsing Karl Barth's idea about the human person, stipulated that if there is a basic form to humanity, it must be understood as something determined and upheld by God in its historical and concrete existence. In this way he believes further that it is through the humanity of Jesus as initiated by God in the concrete, historical form that the basic form of humanity as fellow humanity is established.<sup>59</sup>

Anderson traces the meaning Barth brings to bear on his theological anthropology in respect of humanity in relationship with other humanity. Following the thoughts of Barth, Anderson asserts that humans are covenant partners with God, even in their sin, and are inescapably bound up with fellow humanity. This assertion points toward the determination of God himself that all humanity shall be grasped and upheld in an ontological relationship with him and with each other.<sup>60</sup> It implies that all humans have the inalienable and ethical responsibility to freely live for and with the other. For, through incarnation humanity in its concrete and historical form is brought back into its contingent relationship with God and with the other as the concrete neighbour. The incarnation did not "Christianized" humanity, it "humanized" humanity. Humanity in its concrete and historical form as creaturely existence is brought back into its contingent relation to God and to the other as the concrete neighbour.

## Conclusion

We can therefore conclude with H. Kimmerle that interculturality has been identified to provide the methodology of listening, equality and understanding our differences.<sup>61</sup> The ever increasingly multicultural nature of society and the risk that, contrary to their true nature, cultures themselves may be used as elements of antagonism and conflict are reasons for encouraging

---

<sup>58</sup>J. Dore, "La foi chrétienne dans la société pluraliste d'aujourd'hui," in G. Medevielle et J. Dore, ed., *Une parole pour la vie. Hommage à Xavier Thevenot*, Paris: Cerf, 1998, 202.

<sup>59</sup> R.S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001, 132-160.

<sup>60</sup>Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> H. Kimmerle, "Dialogue as a Form of Intercultural Philosophy," <http://www.door-dacht.com/files/pages/Dialogues.doc>. 2010, accessed, 22/4/2018

even more the building up of profound intercultural relationships among both individuals and groups. In this light, the theology of the Church Family of God is the privilege space for intercultural dialogue. In a world, which is ever more marked by multiculturalism, with the danger of an extreme marginalization of the other and of his/her religious cultural experiences, the anthropological question about the full dignity and destiny of human beings should be the hallmark and guiding principle of our communal existence as one Family of God.