

The Covenant Rituals in Exodus 24:1-11 and the African-Igbo Cultural Concept of *Igba-ndu*: Their Theological Implications for World Peace

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The text of Exod 24:1-11 contains a two-fold ritual ratification of the *covenant* (Hebrew *b'rit*, Greek *diathēkē*), the stipulations of which were given at Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 20:1-17). This ratification is studied here in the context of the African-Igbo¹ cultural concept of *Igba-ndu* (*covenant*, which literally means *joining lives together*). The main focus of the study is to discover the implications that such covenant ideas have towards fostering world peace. The two ratification acts in the text involve *a blood ritual* and *a ritual meal*, both of which are not foreign to the African-Igbo concept of *Igba-ndu* (*covenant*). In both the Old Testament (OT) understanding of covenant and the African-Igbo concept of it, there is a special relationship established when two persons or two parties enter into it; the persons are now inseparably bonded together. Thus, the ratified Sinai covenant united the ancient people of Israel with God, making them *qāhāl*, i.e., the *assembly* or the *congregation* of God's people. The implication of the union is that God would be protecting them, and they would be obedient to God. In African-Igbo cultural milieu, when two parties are united through a covenant, it is believed that they cannot harm each other without incurring the retributive or boomerang justice known in Igbo language as *Ibenne* (literally *blood-link*, as of siblings of the same mother). In other words, since the same blood now flows in both parties, when one decides to harm the other, he/she invariably harms himself or herself. It is this aspect of the African-Igbo concept of covenant that is relevant for world peace when it is cross-examined with the extended aspect of the OT/Sinai covenant. This extension is found in Jer 31:31-33 in which God says that there would be a *new* covenant since the Israelites were not faithful to the stipulations of the Sinai covenant. This promised new covenant was eventually made effective in the person of Jesus Christ who, while establishing the Eucharistic sacrament at the Last Supper, announced: "This is a *new covenant* in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). He was referring ultimately to his sacrificial death for humanity (cf. Heb 9:11-28). So this new covenant is more embracing than the OT Sinai covenant which involved only the ancient people of Israel. The new covenant is for the whole world, hence Jesus told his disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (cf. Matt 28:18-20). In other words, through Christ, the whole world has been made the new community, *assembly*, or family of God. Viewed from African-Igbo idea of *covenant* as *joining lives together*, the whole world has been brought into mutual blood relationship through Christ, such that anybody deciding to harm his/her neighbour is *ipso facto* deciding to harm himself/herself. This idea will help make every human being regard his/her neighbour as a brother or a sister in the extended or large family of God.

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¹ *Igbo* is the name of a very large ethnic group in the eastern part of Nigeria in West Africa, numbering over 40 million people. Their language is known as *Igbo* language, which has up to six different dialects.

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Introduction

This paper on “The Covenant Rituals in Exodus 24:1-11 and the African-Igbo Cultural Concept of *Igba-ndu*: Their Theological Implications for World Peace” is aimed at finding a theological basis for conscientizing people towards working for peace in the world. The point is that there is much bloody violence in the contemporary world. Even with listening to the news and social media alone, it does not need any effort to discover that some people are very pugnacious, and that even some religious preachers are so belligerent-minded that they goad or induce their unsuspecting listeners into indulging in violent and bloody attacks against their fellow human beings. Such preachers brain-wash their audience into thinking that they are serving God well by brutally killing those they consider to be unbelievers, thereby killing God’s children as part of their paradoxical devotion to the same God.² But a good understanding of the implications of the Sinai covenant, which is ritually ratified in Exod 24:1-11, as well as an exposé of the African-Igbo cultural idea of *Igba-ndu* (covenant), will hopefully help such misguided individuals develop a better reasoning and seek peace rather than bloody violence. In this study it is necessary to briefly discuss the meaning of the term covenant, followed with an exegesis of the text Ex 24:1-11 in both the diachronic and the synchronic dimensions of it so as to get the import of the covenant rituals therein. Then the African-Igbo concept of covenant as *Igba-ndu* or *joining lives together* will be examined. Finally their theological implications for world peace will be presented, leading to the conclusion of the study.

The Meaning of the Term Covenant

A covenant, rendered in Hebrew as *bʿrīt*, and in Greek as *diathēkē*, can be described as a binding agreement or a bond between two persons or two parties. A covenant differs sharply from a contract in the sense that in a covenant there is exchange of persons (I am yours, you are mine; I shall be their God, and they shall be my people, cf. Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 34:24, etc.), while in a contract there is exchange of things or services (I do or give you this, you do or give me that—*do ut des*) (Obinwa, 2018, p. 230). In the Old Testament (OT) the term covenant occurs up to 245 times, showing that there are many instances therein of both divine/human and human/human covenants.³ But it is the divine/human covenant at Mount Sinai (between Yahweh (God) and Israel, found in Exod 19-24, from its preparations to its ritual ratification), which this paper is concerned with. It is this covenant that most poignantly united Yahweh and his people Israel. It made the Israelites to become *Yahweh’s Assembly* (*q̄hal ’ādōnai/yhwh*) or *Yahweh’s people* (*‘am ’ādōnai/yhwh*), to become as it were, a family of God.

² In Nigeria, for instance, there is an Islamic extremist group known as *Boko Haram* who have killed hundreds of innocent people through shootings, beheadings, and suicide bombings, as part of their “faithful service” to their God, Allah. For instance on 19/06/2018 this news item about Boko Haram came up: “Borno Suicide Bomb Death Toll Rises to 43”, cf. <https://elombah.com/index.php/news/6-female-suicide-bombers-hit-dambo-borno-32-killed/>. They are still waxing stronger daily, thus Governor B. Zulum of Borno State said *inter alia* on 30th July 2019: “Boko Haram Now Uses Drones to Monitor the Operations of the Military”, cf. https://www.legit.ng/1251793-boko-haram-using-drones-monitor-troops-operations-gov-zulum.html?utm_source=mailfire&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=today.

³ For such covenants or pacts between God and human beings and between human beings and their fellow human beings cf. Gen 9:9-17; Gen 15:18; 17:2-21; 21:27-32; 26:25-29; Exod 19:ff; 24:1-11, etc.

Interestingly, the covenant at Mount Sinai between Yahweh and Israel, which reaches its climax in the two rituals presented in Exod 24:1-11, has some semblances with such Ancient Near Eastern treaties as the Hittite suzerainty treaties of the Late Bronze Age. In the Hittite suzerainty treaties one sees the following features: (a) Identification of the Covenant Giver (his self-introduction), (b) The Historical Prologue (narrating past deeds), (c) The Stipulations (commands and prohibitions which must be accepted), (d) The Provision for Deposit and Periodic Public Reading, (e) The List of Witnesses to the Treaty, (f) The Blessings and Curses, (g) The Ratification Ceremony, and (h) The Imposition of the Curses. In the Sinai Covenant, for instance, the identification of the covenant giver and the historical prologue correspond with what is in Exod 20:1-2 ("And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'"). For the stipulations one can think of the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments given in Exod 20:3-17. There is also provision for deposit and periodic public reading of the Law to aid constant observing of its contents (cf. Josh 24:26; Exod 23:17; 2 Kings 22:8; Deut 27:26). In the Hittite suzerainty treaties the list of witnesses would be the gods and goddess of the land but since Israelite religion is monotheistic, the people themselves serve as witnesses; Joshua even called on the stone standing nearby to serve as a witness (cf. Josh 24:22-27). For the curses and their imposition, one can see Deut 27:1-26, especially v 26. Finally, it comes the *ratification* ceremony which is what Exod 24:1-11 handles, using two covenant acts of a sacred meal and a blood ritual (Mendenhall & Herion, 1992, pp. 1180-1183).

Broadly speaking then, while Exod 19 contains the preparations for Sinai covenant, Exod 20 carries the covenant stipulations or the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments, cf. Exod 20:1-17). The elaborations thereof are found in Exod 21-23, while Exod 24 bears the ritual ratification of the covenant, especially in Exod 24:1-11 where the Israelites were called together through their elders and they engaged in the covenant ratification, involving a sacred meal and a blood ritual. These two covenant rituals engendered a very intimate relationship between the Israelites and their God, making them the Old Testament family of God.

It was also through a covenant that Jesus Christ, the God-incarnate (John 1:1-3, 14), established a new *Yahweh's Assembly* (*q^ehal 'ādōnai/yhwh*), or the New Testament family or *household* of God known as the Church (*ekklēsia*, cf. 1 Tim 3:15). This new family of God is meant to replace the OT one because it is now universal (embracing the whole world), no longer parochial or restricted to a single race (Israel). Jesus Christ established this new family of God by calling and teaching his disciples, and finally asking them to invite the whole world into the intimate relationship with God through their preaching (cf. Matt 28:18-20). To show that he intended to make a covenant, Jesus said over a chalice of wine while establishing a Eucharistic sacrament at the Last Supper: "This is the *new covenant* in my blood" (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), thus sealing the new covenant with his blood shed on the cross for all humanity, different from the blood of animals used in Exod 24:1-11. So the OT term *qāhāl* which means the *Assembly* or the *congregation* (of God's people, the OT Israelites), is now replaced by the Greek term *ekklēsia* which bears the same semantic import with it and refers to the *new congregation* of God's people, *new the Israel* or the NT family/household of God (cf. Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15).

The African-Igbo concept of a covenant as *Igba-ndu* (or *joining lives together*) encapsulates equally the idea of being a unifying force, something bonding people together. Sometimes there are cases of a covenant

uniting people with a deity, as can be exemplified in the phenomenon of voluntary *Osu*-caste system.⁴ In the African-Igbo traditional covenants between human beings, there equally exists an intimate relationship among the covenant parties, just as there are also blood rituals and sacred meals similar to those described in Exod 24:1-11.

The Exegesis of Exodus 24:1-11

There are no serious textual problems in Exod 24:1-11. However, with regard to v 1, Thomas B. Dozeman says that “The absence of subject for the verb *’amar*, ‘he said,’ is unusual, most likely relating the instruction in the introduction to the Book of the Covenant in 20:21-22” (2009, p. 560). Going further, he notes that the initial *waw conjunctivum* on *w^e’el-mōšeh* (*and*, or *then* to Moses) is disjunctive (*but* to Moses). The apparent problem would, however, disappear if one reads the 24:1 synchronically with the last statement in the preceding Chapter 23. In other words, the sentence: “They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me...” (Exod 23:33) can very smoothly join up with: “And he said to Moses...” (*w^e’el-mōšeh ’āmar*, Exod 24:1). This would then bring out the clear fact that God is the subject of the verb *’amar* (*he said*), and that the divine instruction to Moses in Chapter 23 is extended without any interruption into Chapter 24.

From structural point of view, Exod 24:1-11 is a textual unit which yields itself to a dual-partite division, according to the two major themes in it. The first part (verses 1-2, 9-11) dwells on the theme of a sacred meal as a part of the ratification of the covenant, while the second part (verses 3-8) deals with a blood ritual for the same purpose of covenant ratification. When the text is viewed diachronically, it seems that the two covenant rituals came from two different covenant accounts (Laymon, 1971, p. 39) or two traditions; Yahwistic (J) and Elohist (E), which must have been glued together by Deuteronomistic historians or by some other editors. In the first part (1-2, 9-11, J) Moses was commanded by God to come up the mountain with Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu, as well as the seventy elders of Israel, who represented the whole Israelite people. However, v 2 which says that Moses alone would approach God tends to contradict the instruction in v 1 that the people’s representatives would go up with him. Thus E. W. Nicholson says: “The direct vision of God by ‘the leaders of Israel’ (24:10-11) creates tension with the divine command in vv. 1b-2 that only Moses ascend the mountain to approach God” (Nicholson, 1982, pp. 74-86). But it is likely that this was a later addition (Laymon, 1971, p. 39), most probably meant to enhance the status of Moses as the only person allowed to speak with God face to face (cf. Exod 33:11). It may therefore not be given any serious consideration while dividing the text into the two thematic parts. For clarity the first part of text is presented here (1-2, 9-11, RSV)⁵, with v 2 put in parenthesis:

And he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. [Moses alone shall come near to the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him....]” Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

⁴ Traditionally among the Igbo people of Nigeria there are two types of *Osu* (meaning a person dedicated or “sacrificed alive” to a deity). The first is someone (usually a slave) who was forcefully dedicated to a deity at the instance of an oracle to clear an offence or abomination committed by the one dedicating/sacrificing the *Osu*. The *Osu* is not killed, but he/she remains the “property” of the deity, with the attendant social stigma of inability to mix freely with others. The other is the voluntary *Osu*, i.e., someone who willingly ran to the shrine of a deity and dedicated himself/herself to the deity for protection, especially in the days of inter-tribal wars. The person would enter into a kind of covenant with the deity, with the obligation of *serving* the deity, and the privilege of *being protected* by it.

⁵ The Revised Standard Version (RSV) is employed because it is very close to the Hebrew original.

This first part is from Yahwistic tradition and it begins with the divine invitation: “Come up to the Lord” (*‘alēh ’el-yhwh/’ādōnai*, v 1). It indicates that it was a bilateral covenant relationship that was being formed, though not a parity type or between equals. The invitation was from God (the superior covenant party), the response of the invitees (the inferior party) is expressed thus in v 9: “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up”. Through their leaders then, the whole Israelite community was invited for a sacred meal. The exact identity of the mentioned seventy elders of Israel is unclear, however (Dozeman, 2009, p. 561). They were probably the selected seventy elders on whom Yahweh bestowed his spirit to enable them help Moses in ministering to the Israelites (cf. Num 11:25) because the Septuagint has it as *tōn epilektōn tou Israēl* (the selected group of Israelites). Only Moses, his spokesman Aaron the priest, and the children of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, are named in the Masoretic text (*MT*), but the codex *Hebraeo Samaritanus* adds the other two sons of Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar.⁶ It is, however, clear that those who went up the mountain were the representatives of the whole Israel comprising Moses, their leader, Aaron and children, the priests, and the selected seventy elders. There “they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (v 10). It is noteworthy that “The ‘sapphire-like stone’ under the feet of God is the precious stone, lapis lazuli, used in temple construction in the ancient Near East” (Dozeman, 2009, p. 567). So Yahweh was probably using the invitation to a covenantal ritual meal to form a *congregation* (*qāhāl*) that would eventually construct an earthly temple for the earthly worship of God, as a foretaste of the eschatological heavenly worship (cf. Heb 12:18-24). The text ends by saying that “... he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank” (v 11). This means that Yahweh adopted them into his divine family, granting them the privilege of setting their eyes on God without dying, thereby exempting them from the OT idea that nobody can see God and still live (Huesman, 1984, p. 61) (cf. Exod 33:20). The two verbs employed for the act of *seeing* or *beholding* (*rā’āh*, v 10) and (*hāzāh*, v 11), each of them has the nuances of being used for *physical seeing* and for *prophetic* or *ecstatic vision*, but their use in this context is surely that of physical seeing, hence the emphasis on their being left alive still after such a privilege of *seeing* God. The rendering in the *Einheitsübersetzung* (“*sie durften Gott sehen*”—“they dared to see God”) sharpens this enormous privilege they enjoyed.⁷

They even ate and drank in God’s presence (v 11), meaning that they practically ate and drank with him, because in a ritual meal which worshippers eat before their deity, they make a deity dine with human beings as it were. They are communing with the deity and among themselves, such that there is both vertical and horizontal relationship. Therefore, a ritual meal is theologically a communion, unifying the human communicants as well as the divine and the human. The meal under discussion was then like a family meal between Yahweh and the Israelites.

Indeed, in the OT times and places part of the meat of a sacrifice was given to the worshippers to make a feast with. As William Barclay notes:

At such a feast it was always held that the god himself was a guest. More, it was often held that, after the meat had been sacrificed, the god himself was in it and that at the banquet he entered into the very bodies and spirits of those who ate. Just as an unbreakable bond was forged between two men if they ate each other’s bread and salt, so a sacrificial meal

⁶ The manuscript *Pentateuchi Textus Hebraeo-Samaritanus* adds Eleazar and Ithamar, the two remaining sons of Aaron; “Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar” (Ex 6:23). See the Critical Apparatus in the Hebrew Bible; *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

⁷ Thus *Einheitsübersetzung* has it as: “Gott streckte nicht seine Hand gegen die Edlen der Israeliten aus; sie durften Gott sehen, und sie aßen und tranken” (Ex 24:11).

formed a real communion between the god and his worshipper. The person who sacrificed was in a real sense a sharer with the altar; he had a mystic communion with the god. (Barclay, 1982, p. 91)

John Craghan traces the ritual meal (v 11) back to that ancient tradition (Craghan, 1989, pp. 104-105). In the NT Paul says to the Corinthians:

Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? ...I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. ... You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. (1 Cor 10:18-21)

By this he indicates that ritual meals unite the worshippers with their deity, so they should not be united with the Lord by eating the Eucharistic communion and also with demons by eating the food sacrificed to idols.

Even normal meals mean more than just sitting together to eat. "Sharing meals is for the Jews a sacred thing; it is a sign of deep or family relationship" (Obinwa, 2012, p. 22). For the Jews, eating together is covenantal, such that people who share table fellowship are not expected to think or do harm against each other. That is why Jesus laments in Matt 26:23 saying: "*He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, will betray me*". The four Gospels equally have the same expression of disappointment by Jesus (cf. Luke 22:21; Mark 14:18; John 13:18). In saying this of Judas who betrayed him, Jesus surely had the text of Ps 41:9⁸ in mind: "*Even my bosom friend ('iš š'ômî) in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me*". The emphasis here is on betrayal (Craigie, 1983, p. 321), which is described as breaking a covenant in Ps 55:20 ("My companion stretched out his hand against his friends, he violated his covenant", see also Ps 7:4; Ps 55:12-14). When intimacy or friendship is built, it is like a covenant. When it is violated it is like breaking a covenant. Yahweh has therefore brought the Israelites into intimacy or friendship, into his family as such, through the sacred meal eaten by the people before him, and so with him (v 11). Through that covenantal ritual meal, the OT Israelites were then bonded together into a family among themselves and with their God.

The second part (verses 3-8), from Elohist tradition, deals with covenantal blood ritual which has also united Yahweh with the Israelites, forming them into the people or *congregation* (*qāhāl*) of God. The RSV text reads:

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses ... built an altar And he sent young men ... who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you"

Before effecting the union of Yahweh and his people Israel through the blood ritual, Moses had to get the people hear the stipulations of the covenant, by reading out the Law or the Book of the Covenant for them to hear and accept or reject. But they accepted it by saying: "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do" (v 3). As Thomas B. Dozeman has noted, the people thereby accepted the authority of God, the Covenant Giver (2009, p. 566). In performing the covenantal blood ritual (Exod 24:3-8), Moses set up an altar which represented the presence of God among his people (Ellison, 1985, p. 136). Then, having made the people to

⁸ It is v 9 when the superscript—*for the musical director, a psalm of David*—is not numbered as a verse, but it is v 10 if the superscript read as v 1.

accept the instruction of Yahweh, he caused the immolation of oxen as sacrificial victims. The sacrifice made was called *peace offerings* (*z^ebāḥîm š^elāmîm*) because the occasion was a covenant-ratification one, a special occasion for establishing lasting *peace* between Yahweh and the people. Moses then sprinkled part of the blood of the animal-victims on the altar and on the people,⁹ thereby linking them together into a family union or covenantal blood relationship. The people are, as it were, of one blood with their God (Obinwa, 2012, p. 21; McKenzie, 1978, p. 155). The blood ritual sealed or ratified the covenant which God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai "... on the day of the assembly" (*b^eyôm haqqāhāl*, Deut 10:4), the day the Israelites were constituted into the *Assembly of God* (*qāhāl*) (VanGemerén, 1997, p. 889),¹⁰ a special "people ('*am*) of God" (VanGemerén, 1997, p. 429).¹¹

The Hebrew term *qāhāl*, the *Assembly of God's people*, carries the same semantic import as the Greek term *ekklēsia* which is translated as "church" (*NTC's New College Greek and English Dictionary*, 1985, p. 67). *Ekklēsia* is given in *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, as

1. The popular or legislative assembly in Athens and other ancient Greek states in which every free citizen could vote.
2. A body of Christians organized for worship and religious work; a church; congregation. Latin; *ecclesia*, Greek; *ekklesia*, from *ekkalein*, to call out (*ek* = out, *kalein* = call). (2004, p. 1)

The idea of "calling out" emphasizes the invitation by Yahweh or his *calling* on the people to come up to him (Exod 24:1), while the point that "every free citizen could vote" accentuates the privileges God offered them to see him and even eat before him. It can then be inferred that through the covenantal sacred meal which made the Israelites members of God's family, and the blood ritual which symbolically made the Israelites consanguineous with God, the *Assembly of Yahweh* (*q^ehal 'ādōnai/yhwh*) or the OT Church, so a process which can be described as a call-response-covenant is essential in becoming God's people in the OT (Obinwa, 2011, p. 122). But since the Israelites did not live up to the covenantal expectation, God said: "Behold, the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31). This promised new covenant got fulfilled in the blood of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).¹²

Jesus began gathering the new children of God, the new Israelite people, through his individual call of the apostles and their spontaneous positive responses (cf. Matt 4:18-21). He continued enlarging the new community through his preaching and his miracles. Later, to his disciples whom he chose and called to bear lasting fruit,¹³ he entrusted the continued growth of the new people of God till it would embrace the whole world (cf. Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). So the new covenant in Jesus' blood has made the whole world a large family of God, with all human beings sharing spiritual blood relationship in God.

⁹ For the OT ritual of blood sprinkling, one can think of Aaronic priestly ordination (Lev 8:22-30), where the blood of the sacrificial animal, which imbibes divine powers through acceptance by God, is sprinkled on the candidate for ordination to empower him.

¹⁰ Eugene Carpenter describes *qāhal* in: Willem A. VanGemerén (Ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, Volume 3* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), p. 889. He gives the verb *qāhal* (*niphal*) as "gather together, assemble"; *hiphil* "call together, bring together, convoke..."; noun—"gathering, assembly, throng, great assembly congregation".

¹¹ Robert H. O. Connell describes '*am* (people) in: Willem A. VanGemerén (Ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, Volume 3* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), p. 429, as singular—"populace member, citizen, kinsman, relative; collective—people".

¹² For more details on the new covenant, see 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24; 13:20.

¹³ He says to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16).

African-Igbo Concept of Covenant (*Igba-ndu*)

There are very many tribal communities in Africa and so there are very many languages and dialects. Each of them has a concept of covenant. But since it is almost impossible to examine all of them, the Igbo¹⁴ concept of the term can serve as an example. The Igbo word for covenant is *Igba-ndu* which literally means *joining lives together*. The semantic import is that those who enter into covenant relationship have thereby unite their lives together. There are processes of coming into such union are: first, through family blood relationship which can be described as natural covenant. The family members are naturally consanguineous in such a way that it is the same blood that is flowing in them. There then is what is known as *ibenne* holding them together; *ibenne* means literally *blood-related as of the same mother*. This has generated the belief is that if any member of a consanguineous group tries to harm another openly or secretly, there will be retributive justice, and the harm will boomerang on the actor since he/she shares the same blood with the intended victim.

Secondly, one can enter into a covenant (*Igba-ndu*) through *nligba* or *oliko* which is a ritual meal taken together containing *salt and oil* (*nnu na mmanu*), the two cooking ingredients that are ordinarily compatible or friendly to each other. The idea is that the covenant parties who partake of this special meal are expected to remain friendly to one another, otherwise they would suffer retributive justice for breaching the covenant. Traditionally, such a meal was taken before a village deity who would serve as a witness. Thirdly, there is also a blood ritual in which the covenant parties make incisions in their bodies, extract blood, and mix their blood together in a cup with some water or juice and drink the mixture. By so doing, they enter into one another inextricably as it were. Their situation now resembles that of consanguinity (*ibenne*) in which they harm themselves if they harm any covenant member. No matter the type, African-Igbo covenant unites people just as the biblical covenant does. African-Igbo people are held together by the natural blood-covenant of consanguinity at the level of *family* (*ezi-n'uno*) which is a natural community, and which is extend to the *kindred level* (*umu-nna*, literally, *children of a great ancestor*), all unified by the fact that the same blood of the great ancestor is flowing in them, and also by their worshipping together before their village deity, before whom, and with whom, they shared their ritual meals. As in the biblical tradition, their eating together before the deity was covenantal in nature and it unified them into *the people of the particular deity*.¹⁵ The point is that both biblically and in the Africa-Igbo tradition, covenant unites people into a consanguineous community.

Theological Implications of the Covenant Rituals for World Peace

The OT covenant relationship made the ancient Israelites a people or an *Assembly* (*qāhāl*) of God. Similarly, covenants of various types tie the African-Igbo people together into a large or an extended family, a community under God (formally, before the advent of Christianity, it was under their various deities). Likewise in the NT, covenant relationship has made the whole human race, for whom Jesus Christ sealed the *new* covenant in his blood, into a new *Assembly* (*qāhāl*) of God, the new Israelites. These points have theological implications for world peace. The first implication is that God desires the unity of all human beings, indicating that humanity has the same primogenitors, Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 1:26-28). Then when humanity grew large,

¹⁴ Igbo people, whose language is equally known as *Igbo language*, form a very large ethnic group in Eastern Nigeria, numbering over 40 million people. The researcher hails from Igbo land, and is very much acquainted with the language and culture of Igbo people.

¹⁵ An Igbo town known as *Nnewi* was, for instance, known as *Ana-Edo* (*the land of Edo*, purporting *the people of Edo*) due to their yearly very big communal festival (involving a ritual meal) in honour of their biggest deity, the goddess *Edo*.

God decided to gather all human beings together through a covenant, starting with Israel who formed the embryo of the universal family of God (Jensen, 1978, p. 43).¹⁶ Secondly, God has eventually formed the universal family of God through who effected God's *new* covenant in his blood shed on Calvary for the redemption of whole world. The African-Igbo idea of extended or large family under an ancestor (*umu-nna*) is now extended wide enough under Jesus Christ to encapsulate the whole of humanity, making all human beings consanguineous brothers and sisters in God's large family. The implication then is that any human being of any race who tries to harm another person will be harming oneself unknowingly, under the law of *ibenne*, the boomerang or retributive justice, which some people call the law of *karma*.

Conclusion

From the above discussions, it has been seen that the Sinai covenant made the Israelites the people of Yahweh or an *Assembly* (*qāhāl*) of God. Similarly, it is clear that the *new covenant* in Christ's redeeming blood (cf. Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26) sealed the new covenantal relationship between God and all humanity, the new people of God, the universal Church (*ekklēsia*).¹⁷ In the same way, the various types of African-Igbo covenant rituals unify individuals and communities under God (for the traditionalist, under their particular deities). It means then that covenants are essential in becoming the *assembly* or *community* of God's people (*qāhāl* or *ekklēsia*, the universal Church), because they are fundamental in gathering together such a community. In 1 Tim 3:15, Eph 2:19, and 1 Pet 4:17 the Church is described as the *household of God* or *family of God*, showing that the adoption of Israel into God's family in the OT is now extended to the community of the followers of Jesus Christ, that means, *all human beings* follow Christ's principles of *love of God and love of neighbour* (cf. Mark 12:28-31). So the same intimate or blood relationship forged between God and Israel through the ratification of Sinai covenant (Exod 24:1-11), has now been inherited by *all people of good will*, i.e., all professed Christians and anonymous Christians or those who, knowingly or unknowingly, follow the teaching of Christ on *loving* God and one's neighbour. Therefore, the OT and the African-Igbo concepts of covenant call on all human beings to always show *love*, to work for peace and harmony in the world, since all human beings form a large family under God, and thereby become consanguineous brothers and sisters. None should then harm the other out of reverence for God who owns all human beings, and also to avoid eventually experiencing here or hereafter the effect of *ibenne* (the boomerang action) or the retributive justice (the law of *karma*).

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¹⁶ Cf. Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 43, where he says: "God wanted to use Israel as his channel of communication to the rest of the world".

¹⁷ This *Church* is Catholic in the sense of its being *universal* or embracing all human beings of good will, not in the sense of its being the Roman Catholic Church which restricted in its embrace.

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