

**AN AFRICAN ETHIC OF HOSPITALITY FOR THE GLOBAL  
CHURCH: A RESPONSE TO THE CULTURE OF  
EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

Barely seventeen years into the twenty-first century, our world continues to be plagued by endless wars and violence. Africa is not immune from these crises. As many countries in Africa celebrate more than fifty years of independence from colonial rule, Africa is still the poorest continent in the world. Religious wars, genocides, ethnic and tribal cleansings have come to define the continent's contemporary history. Corruption, nepotism, dictatorship, disregard for human life, tribalism, and many social vices are normalized realities in many parts of the continent. Rather than despair, a radical refocusing on Africa's rich history of hospitality that affirms the flourishing of all life ought to be embraced. This article aims to do exactly this by exploring Africa's role and place in the history of three Abrahamic religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While celebrating Africa's unique role as the gateway for the realization of divine hospitality, this article aims to serve as a witness to an ethic of life that is relevant for the global church's vision and mission to a pluralistic world and for the mission of the churches of Africa to addressing the social, cultural, and political crises faced by the continent. To achieve these, this work appropriates a comparative theological method that sheds light on the centrality of Africa in these three Abrahamic religions with a bias for the flourishing of life.

**Keywords:** Africa, Hospitality, Life, Christianity, Islam, Judaism,

**Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, the world continues to struggle with the gifts and burdens that come with the phenomenon of globalization. Peoples, cultures, religions, communities, and individuals are compelled to renegotiate their previously conceived sense of self in light of the other they are forced to encounter. Many have not responded positively to this expectation. It can be said that this era is the age of struggle for identity. What role can Africa play to help our world come to a sense of purpose and meaning? Beginning with the Abrahamic religions down to the

European explorers, imperialists, and colonialists, Africa has not been known to turn anyone back. Faithful to the African adage, there is always a place for a visitor at the banquet of nations. Looking closely at the history of the Jewish people, the infancy of Jesus Christ, and the early beginnings of Islam, one can conclude that the African continent is a place God leads God's people to in order to protect them from unfathomed evil.

This article will achieve the following; explore the significant place of Africa in the sacred histories of the Abrahamic religions. It will demonstrate a justification for the relevance of Africa and its peoples' heritage as an antidote to the ills that currently plague people of faith in a global community that has become religiously pluralistic. This work will also address specific social and ethical issues pertinent to contemporary discourse. In summary, this article aims to articulate an African ethic of hospitality for a global context.

Methodologically, this article appropriates a comparative theological approach that highlights the relevance of Africa in the theological reading of secular or salvific histories within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A key contribution of comparative theology is that it attempts to build bridges among faith traditions and communities; one that leads to the flourishing of life.

### **Africa: A Place for Encountering Divine Hospitality**

Hospitality is part of the African way of "being in the world" (UZUKWU 1988, 162). Stated bluntly, "Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic among others" (DERRIDA 2005, 16). The content of any culture is revealed by how those who identify with it relate both with themselves and with those outside. Elochukwu Uzukwu reminds contemporary societies that an African reverence for hospitality has endured irrespective of the forces of imperialism and colonialism that have attacked the very core of African social life and identity (UZUKWU 1988, 158). Buttressing this claim of the centrality of hospitality in Africa's socio-cultural worldview is the point made by Gregory Olikenyi; African hospitality points to "an unconditional readiness to share...both material and non-material things...It must be continued and practiced by all the parties involved..." (2001, 106). The significance of hospitality within African societies is that it attains a "ritualized status" (MBITI 1991, 176 – 179). Children are taught the necessity of hospitality in any particular tribe or ethnic group through stories and folklores that demonstrate the link between the survival of the community and the practice of authentic hospitality. The Igbo of Nigeria, for example, have a very elaborate religious ritual surrounding

the breaking and sharing of kola nut when welcoming a guest to the home (UZUKWU 1988, 159).

In African worldview, hospitality is not a propositional claim that lacks any form of concrete expression. In fact, the response of the members of the community to the world around them is saturated with a sense of hospitality. Life is a gift that ought to be received with gratitude. Hospitality can thus be conceived as a response to the gift of life received from God. To understand why Africa plays an important role in the expressions of divine hospitality in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, one has to explore the place of land in African cosmic consciousness. The cosmos, represented concretely by the land, is linked to the human person as noted by Bénézet Bujo (1997, 212). Consequently, to speak of life is to point to a generous connection between land and humanity. Divine hospitality is concrete. It is realized by the active generosity of the land to provide the needs of humans. The land is not just a creation of God, it is also a deified medium that makes for the possibility for the fruition of life. If God is life, then all that God touches is alive and becomes a source of life for others. Thus, everything in the cosmos is alive, because each object makes concrete the gift of life force that comes from the divine. In the words of Bujo:

All beings, organic and inorganic, living and inanimate, personal and impersonal, visible and invisible, act together to manifest the universal solidarity of creation. This is most important for African spirituality, because the cosmos in its variety of forms, speaks a language which reveals the highest form of life, namely God, who triumphs over death. With this view, the cosmos has a sacramental dimension for the African person. (1997, 210)

By implication, access to the source of life cannot be restricted in such a way that life is threatened. The importance of this point is not lost to African consciousness. Achebe dedicated an entire literary work to explore this motif. In his work, *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu, the priest of the deity Ulu, goes against the core principle of African religious consciousness, the affirmation of life. His refusal to perform the necessary rituals needed before the new yam festival begins threatens the community with starvation. The people of Umuaro resurrect what I have called the pragmatic approach in a previous work (AIHIOKHAI 2016, 154 – 157). They refuse to worship a deity whose medium has gone mad. A deity that threatens life is not worth following. They abandon Ezeulu and the deity Ulu. They choose to become Christians because they are told by the Christian missionary that the Christian God

is a God of life (ACHEBE 1969). Consequently, in African worldview, to think God is to see life. It is an unrestricted vision, one that welcomes all life even those of refugees, strangers, migrants, visitors, and so on.

African hospitality is shaped and derives its meaning from divine hospitality. Since divine hospitality is life experienced in its fullness, it follows then that African hospitality leads to the flourishing of life. At the nascent stages of three Abrahamic religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Africa played a prominent role in protecting the founders, prominent leaders, and/or followers from the threat of violence to their persons and thus rescued them from certain death from those who sought to destroy them. In the Hebrew Scriptures, there is a detailed account of God's intervention in saving the children of Jacob, heirs to the covenant God first made with Abraham and which was concretized definitively on Mount Sinai, from certain death. Faced with death through starvation, Jacob and his children journey into Africa; and while there, God utters these words to Israel, "I am El, God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there..." (GENESIS. 46:3ff).

While it is still debatable whether the Exodus event is a historical fact or not, I intend to use this story as a pedagogical narrative that points to the relevance of Africa (Egypt) in the worldview of the Israelites and their descendants (FREEDMAN 1992, 701 – 702; ALEXANDER AND BAKER 2003, 252). Reading the story of Joseph and his brothers' sojourn in Egypt closely, the following come to light; the naming of his sons speak to what Egypt has done for him. In Egypt, Joseph forgets his hardships and experience of slavery. To celebrate this, he names his first son, Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me completely forget my hardships and my father's House" (GENESIS. 41:51). The second son, he called Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fruitful in the country of my misfortune" (41:51). While it is God that brings about this positive outcome in the life of Joseph, the important role of Egypt in this divine plan is not lost to the reader. In fact, as Terence E. Freitheim rightly states, the life of Joseph prefigures that of Israel. Just as Joseph is fruitful in Egypt, so also will Israel be when he and his children take refuge in Egypt (EXODUS. 1:7; FRETHEIM 1994, 624).

Africa is validated to be a place for growth and multiplicity of life. Joseph points this out clearly by placing it within the domain of God. In his words, "God sent me before you to assure the survival of your race on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance..." (GENESIS. 45: 7 – 8). The domain of God's work transcends Israel and the land promised to them. It encompasses the entire universe. It includes all people. Consequently, hospitality shown toward Jacob and

his children is not done solely by Joseph. Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, invites Jacob and his children to dwell in Egypt while instructing them to “Never mind about your [their] property, for the best of all Egypt will be yours [theirs]” (45: 20). Africa is also a place where life is found. Jacob, who mourns the supposed death of his son, Joseph, concludes that he will spend the rest of his life mourning the loss of his son (37:35). However, he ends up finding his son alive and well in Egypt. He does not join Joseph in Sheol, the dwelling place of the dead, but in Egypt (46: 29 – 30). Journeying to Egypt, the biblical text points out the number of Israel’s (Jacob’s) descendants as seventy who accompany him as if to show how God’s promise continues to be fulfilled even in a foreign land (46: 8 – 27). This foreign land has a role to play in the grand plan of God. Even with the advent of an oppressive Pharaoh, Israel’s descendants who journey out of Egypt are said to be “six hundred thousand men not counting their families” (EXODUS. 12: 37).

The Book of Exodus begins by describing the new realities faced by the Israelites in Egypt. For “four hundred and thirty years” they lived in peace and were shown hospitality by the Egyptians. It is the result of this hospitality which leads to fruitfulness that they are considered a threat. The new Pharaoh does not miss words, “Look, ...the Israelites are now more numerous and stronger than we are. We must take precautions to stop them from increasing any further, or if war should break out, they might join the ranks of our enemies...” (1: 9 – 10). All his plots, intended to reduce the growth of the descendants of Israel, end up futile (1:10 – 22), as though to remind all who read the text that God’s blessing of Africa to be a place that brings about flourishing of life will endure irrespective of human agents whose agenda go against the plan of God.

The identities of all Jews, dead, alive, and yet to be born are intricately tied to the collective relational connectedness to all the tangential events beginning with Noah; heightened in the response of Abram to the call from Yahweh to leave his ancestral home of Ur of the Chaldeans and journey with his household to the land where dreams are realized; the fidelity of Isaac to the God of his father; to Jacob’s fidelity to the God of his father Isaac and forefather Abraham; Israel and his descendants’ journey to Africa to gain strength in number and skills needed to inhabit the “...country flowing with milk and honey...” (33:3); the political intrigues that eventually ensued while being faithful disciples of their ancestral God; the intervention of this God in preserving them from the intended destruction from a Pharaoh that refuses to embrace their ancestral God; and to the liturgical, juridical, and social enactment of a covenant between God and themselves who are now a nation. The content of this Sinaitic Covenant and the rituals

before and after its enactment ground and make the entire existential process, religious and profane, essential to the validity of the covenant itself. In other words, all of Jewish history is celebrated anamnatically in the Passover celebrations. Africa's role in this history cannot be silenced without trivializing the importance of divine hospitality. However, it is surprising to find that what has endured as the interpretation of the sojourn in Egypt is the negative representation of Egypt (Africa) as a land of enslavement.

The Sinaitic Covenant is the referent point for understanding the content of Israelites' faith in God in a way that it is also linked essentially to how their relationship is to be interpreted and actualized in relation to themselves, other humans, and all of creation (20: 1 – 26). In other words, the entire children of Israel are to see God not as an abstract reality known only in the mind but as one who is present in the content of their historical experiences. Simply said, this covenant is anamnatic in its totality (34: 1 – 26). It is memory that pulls one into a multi-relational connectedness that marks one as Jewish in faith and identity.

In Christian Scriptures, Egypt (Africa) comes to prominence again as a place of refuge for the infant Jesus and his parents (MATTHEW 2:13 – 15). The debate continues amongst biblical scholars on the historicity of the flight into Egypt by the holy family. Some have argued that the author Matthew, while writing to his Jewish audience, was deliberately showing a link between the biblical Moses and Jesus as well as the fulfilment of the prophesy contained in Hosea (HARRIS 1985, 272 – 285).

The link to Hosea is clear from how Matthew quotes the prophet to show why the holy family has to return back to Judea from Egypt (HOSEA 11:1; MATTHEW 2:15). For the above scholars, the historicity of the narrative is not the point, rather; the focus of the passage is the message it conveys. Matthew's intention is aimed at providing legitimacy and a link between Jesus and Moses, the symbol of the Torah in Jewish religious history (FUNK 1998, 129 – 270). While appreciating the scholarly debate on the historicity of the event narrated in Matthew's gospel, the focus in this article is to appreciate the importance of the motif of Egypt (Africa) as a place of refuge for those in danger. As well as its role in the salvific plan of God symbolized by the prophetic witness of Hosea, the call and covenant of God with Israel as God's "first born son," and the covenant of God with all of humanity in and through the ministry and person of Jesus Christ within the context of the Christian Testament

Threatened by the evil plans of King Herod to kill the baby Jesus, Joseph, the husband of Mary is instructed to take Jesus and his

mother Mary to Egypt until that time when it is safe to return back to Judea. The name of the child is symbolic. Jesus (Jehoshua in Hebrew) means Yahweh saves. Interestingly, since creation is the place for divine activities and encounters with God's creation, it is no wonder then to see Egypt as the place where Yahweh begins the prefiguration of the destiny of the child Jesus. God, in order to bring about the salvation of humanity, takes upon God's self the very nature and experiences of fallen humanity in everything except sin (PHILIPPIANS 2: 6 – 11). Fallen humanity is in need of salvation. The name of Jesus as an affirmation of God's saving action plays out in the life of Jesus himself. Sentenced to death by King Herod, God brings about the fruition of his name by being taken to Egypt where he is saved from the plans of King Herod. The fact that God becomes human and experiences our fragility and desire to be saved from destructive forces, means that God has chosen to become fully like us so that we can become like God – children of God. Egypt is the place for this existential and experiential divine epiphany. What God destines for all of humanity, God prefigures in the incarnate Christ who seeks refuge in Egypt. The Paschal Mystery can only be authentically and fully appreciated in light of its epiphanies to the world. Africa has a prominent place in this theological reading. The entire world reveals moments of encounter with God. Egypt Africa ought to pride itself in this particular reading because it plays a prominent role in shaping the salvific plan of God for all of the created order. Egypt is Africa's link to Christianity. While Bethlehem is the place of Christ's epiphany to Israel, God's chosen people, in Egypt, Christ becomes an epiphany to the entire human race not only as a king, prophet, and god as was he to the magi in Bethlehem but as one who trusts in the protective hand of God in our world. In Egypt, Christ becomes an epiphany to the gentiles. In the post-apostolic era of Christianity, Africa played a prominent role in shaping its theology. Africa was the place for the intellectual and mystical realities shaping the Christian faith. The great Christian eremitic and cenobitic monastic traditions of Anthony of Egypt and Pachomius the Great trace their roots back to Africa. By the fourth century, in Egypt, "the monastic movement flourished as nowhere else. Monasteries and nunneries grew up outside practically every town and village of any size" (FRIEND 1982, 193).

Barely less than a decade into the ministry of the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula, he and his first followers were faced with the impending retribution from members of his tribe for daring to preach a monotheistic faith. Trusting in the hospitality from the *Negus* (king) of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), he sent his first followers there thus marking the first *hijrah* – flight or emigration (GLASSE

2013, 25 – 26). Islam marks the significance of *hijrah* by dating Allah's *kairos* (time of divine encounter) prophetic epiphany in and through Allah's final prophet's own *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina as a ritual that symbolizes authentic submission to Allah; one that celebrates the spiritual quest for certitude and religious uprightness for all Muslims.

*Hijrah* brings to fruition the salvific plan Allah has destined to achieve through the prophetic witness of Muhammad himself. It is the prophet's own *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina that seals the maturity of Islam as a valid and authentic way to show submission to Allah by all who embrace the religion. In this event the place of Africa is not left out. The *hijrah* of the first followers of Prophet Muhammad is not just an accidental event but is one that stands as a symbol and revelation of the path Islam is to take to become fully a religion that stands side by side with the other two Abrahamic religions. The fleeing from persecution and all that prevents one from fully answering the call to discipleship is a flight all Muslims must constantly make when faced with similar circumstances, whether material or spiritual. Africa stands at the crossroad in this hermeneutic insight from Islam.

In Islam, Medina stands as a place of freedom. It is a place where Islam attains a political status as the religion of the land. As noted by Maria Massi Dakake, Medina becomes the place of submission in the early stages of Islam for all who became Muslims. They are required to make the *hijrah* to Medina until Mecca becomes the primary place for it (2011, Web. N. P). It is in Medina that Islam distinguishes itself as a religion in its own right, separate from Judaism and Christianity. Again, as noted by Dakake, in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad receives the vision to turn away from Jerusalem and face Mecca as the direction for worship of Allah. By doing this, Islam becomes not a sect in Judaism but a religion in its own right.

In Medina, truth will always prevail. In this place, one begins to see the interconnectedness of all of God's created order. In Medina, all Muslims come to the realization that they are to always keep the pathways leading to Africa open because it is to Africa they must come back to find nourishment again and again as they journey to Medina. In this reading, Africa becomes a land of generosity, hospitality, friendship, and solidarity in God and in one another. To forget Africa is to forget what makes all Muslims truly Muslim: a people of peace; love; hospitality; generosity; compassion; friendship, and hope. It is thus not surprising to find in Islamic jurisprudence the centrality of the role of Africa shaping a sense of religious tolerance. The significance of Africa in Islam is "eternally preserved in a hadith. 'Leave the Ethiopians alone as long as they leave you alone'" (ERLICH 2013, Web. N. P). To demonstrate his gratitude to the Negus of Ethiopia for the generosity



shown toward his followers and the new religion, Muhammad calls Ethiopia “a land of sincerity in religion.” When he heard of the death of the Negus, it is said that Muhammad “performed the Muslim funeral prayer for him” (GLASSE, 26).

*Hijrah* is the foundational event for Muslims to understand their faith in relation to God, to themselves, to non-Muslims, and to all of creation. It is both the summation and pointer to the Five Pillars of Islam to which all Muslims are called to embrace if they truly desire to submit to Allah. *Hijrah* embodies *shahada* (faith in Allah). It is the referent point to demonstrate one’s faith in Allah, a God that invites and guides one to discover that God is good, loving, and just. This is summarized in the words all Muslims must utter each day: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet (or messenger) of God” (NEUSNER 2009, 147).

*Hijrah* embodies prayer; one that is possible and rooted in authentic knowledge of Allah. In other words, to call Allah, a God who is merciful, kind, and just is to have embraced the vocation of a learner. Even the structure of prayer has an element of *hijrah*. Muslims pray by turning to Mecca, a place that has triple significance to it; first, it is the place that provoked the first *hijrah* to Abyssinia by the first followers of the Prophet Muhammad; second, the actual and solemn flight of Muhammad himself to Medina; and third, the place that reveals God’s presence to all Muslims. It is the place where the Prophet Muhammad first received the first of many revelations. It is the referent-place that links the entire world, including Africa, to the revelation of God in all of creation. It is the place from which faith spreads to the world and to which faith shall return. This is symbolized by the *hajj* that Muslims are expected undertake once in their lifetime.

*Hijrah* embodies a command to be generous. It plays out in the form of *Zakat* (almsgiving). To give gratitude to God for wealth as a result of authentic hard work reflects in itself an embodiment of correct relations first with God, with oneself, with fellow humans, and with the created order. All these make for the possibility for work to even become a reality for Muslims. *Hijrah*, in this particular interfaith reading, involves the moment for Muslims to recognize the proper ordering of the created world by Allah.

*Hijrah* embodies *sawm* (fasting). It symbolizes the deviations from God’s will by believers and non-believers and the realization of such deviations. It goes beyond this to also reflect a strong commitment to correct what humans have done wrong. This is carried out through fasting, mental reflection, and physical discipline. *Hijrah* symbolizes gratitude to a God that continues to be present to all of creation even when creation itself is not always faithful in return.

*Hijrah* embodies a particular reading of history that is realized through a pilgrimage process of return to that particular place where revelation is first given to the world, received, rejected, and brought back again. The pilgrimage that each Muslim is encouraged to make to Mecca once in one's lifetime helps to pull all Muslims to the center of grace. In this pull by divine grace, Africa has a relevant place. It is in Africa that God's plan for Muslims is preserved, while Mecca is cleansed of its infidelity. Generosity shown toward the followers of Prophet Mohammad by the Negus of Ethiopia makes for the possibility of the preservation of the nascent religion. If the intention to destroy the prophet and his followers by the pagan rulers of Mecca had succeeded, Islamic history may have been something completely different from what it came to be in human history. In other words, Africa can be seen as Noah's Ark that preserves humanity as the earth is being cleansed of its sin. To forget to always show gratitude to God for the role Africa has played in this plan will be synonymous to an act of egoistic idolatry by a Muslim.

Mecca is not the only place for an encounter with Allah. No! Mecca embodies the totality of those historic moments of grace when Allah's people have experienced truly what it means to be a people called to submit to the merciful, kind, and just God. Mecca embodies the proclamation that Muslims in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, and the Pacific Islands utter to God and all of creation. In this simple line "I am here, O Lord, I am here!" (MOON 2015, 68). Uttered by the pilgrims to Mecca the city of cities, where Allah's grace pulls all to the center of the cosmos, the *Ka'aba*, as did the Prophet Muhammad centuries before them.

### **The Notion of Relationship in African Worldview – Toward an African Ethic of Hospitality**

The demands and expectations of globalization force societies and cultures to revisit their understandings of what it means to be human. Western societies have articulated an anthropological vision that fails to speak to the collective human condition faced by all of us in a world that is at its core interconnected. The dualistic Platonist philosophy that was reformulated by Rene Descartes in his popular philosophical proposition, "I think therefore I am," has led to an anthropology that is dualistic in its content. Western imperialistic ambitions, practice of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, colonialism, the entire capitalistic ambitions of the West today, disregard for black bodies, and other social ills are traceable back to this dualistic vision. To be human, in the collective vision of the Western world has come to be understood as whiteness. Even after more than one hundred years since the abolition of slavery,

vestiges of slavery couched in societal and individual racism and agenda driven laws that favor persons of European ancestry, still persist in the Western world. Our world continues to be faced with the dangers of such restrictive visions of what it means to be human. Diverse expressions of our humanity and cultural worldviews are being challenged by this narrow and narcissistic worldview of the West. In fact, the entire neoliberal ideology of the twentieth century that has been the driving force behind Western economies has shown itself to be life-denying. It has led to the founding of global economic agencies that cater to the interests of transnational companies that are owned by westerners. This has led to a clear imbalance in the distribution of global wealth (GOLDSTEIN 2001, 29 – 55).

As a corrective measure, Africa offers a unique perspective that bridges the gap between identity and relationality. Unlike the Cartesian insular subject that defines itself within the confines of a somewhat narcissistic self-awareness, while reducing alterity to a state of non-existence (ALWEISS 2005, 37), an African anthropological vision speaks to a movement and an openness toward the other. In other words, an African ethic of hospitality is simultaneously anthropological and relational in its total expressions. It begins with a clear vision of what it means to be human, one that involves a being that is there for the other. Stated succinctly, an African conception of identity is attained only within the domains of active hospitality, one where the individual and or community reaches out to others with a deliberate attempt to be welcoming. This is similar to what Bujo calls “*cognatus sum ergo sum* (I am related, so I am) ... Without communal relationship, one can neither find his or her identity nor learn how to think” (997, 54). By implication, an African ethic of hospitality points to connectedness from which a response is given to the question, what does it mean to be human? To be human, as noted by Uzuoku, is “to interact or interrelate” (2012, 66). Stated broadly, to be human is to have an “ontological and experiential openness to the other as it pertains to one’s connectedness to the ancestors, divinities and deities, other humans, and the created world that one fully realizes one’s humanity” (AIHIOKHAI 2016, 153).

Consequently, by linking identity to hospitality, hospitable acts or words are not just additional actions one performs. Rather, they reveal as well as provide a worldview; one that is at its core a web of encounters. In the era of globalization, nations and cultures can intentionally draft their foreign policies in ways that focus on a vision of the wellbeing of all and not on the exploitation of others as is presently the case in global politics. A neoliberal economic vision operates with the understanding that the interest of the individual holds primacy of place (GOLDSTEIN 2011, 30). An individual does not achieve its

destiny without the collective assistance from the community. An economic structure that focuses on the selfish interests of the individual will always be exploitative. An African ethic of hospitality calls out the predatory economic policies of western nations whose financial systems and institutions like the Paris Club, the World Bank, IMF and so on, have been known to impoverish further poor nations who seek to become debt-free. The fact is that the narratives for economic progress embraced by these agencies do not speak to the realities of the poor nations (INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS ASSOCIATES 2004, Web. N.P.). They speak mostly to the social, political, economic, and cultural realities of the industrialized nations. An African ethic of hospitality can speak to the flourishing of all life as nation-states embrace the demands of globalization. Profit should never be for its own sake. Rather, it ought always to be for the good of all. It ought not be solely anthropocentric. It can also be cosmocentric; one where humans take seriously their role in making sure that the wellbeing of the cosmos is maintained even as they seek to better their lives. An African ethnic of hospitality sees human life as interrelated to everything in the cosmos. It seeks to affirm the gift of life as a shared vital force of which all that exists in the cosmos actively participates in through their own state and purpose in the divine plan.

Globalization comes with its own advantages and risks. It bridges the gap that exists among cultures, continents, civilizations, and religions. Gone are the days when religions are regionally located. There are worshippers of Yoruba deities in the heart of Paris and Hindus and Buddhists in Los Angeles. Yes! We celebrate this as part of human achievement in the twenty-first century. However, there are risks behind this phenomenon. When economic interests are the driving force behind the bridging of distance among peoples and cultures, there will always be the temptation to use persons as instruments for material gain. This is the reality our world faces today. As it becomes technologically sophisticated, global poverty has increased. According to the World Bank report on global statistics collected in 2011, one out of every three persons globally lives in poverty (2016, Web. N. P). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released a document on June 15, 2015 where it clearly states that income inequality is itself a threat to global stability (DABLA-NORIS, ET AL. 2017, 5). It debunks the trickle-down economics of the Reagan Administration that most capitalists have embraced wholeheartedly because it protects their interests in a world that is being controlled by the few who have gotten rich at the expense of others (4). What can Africa offer as a corrective measure to this malaise that plagues our global community? The Church in Africa has a mandate to invite the global community to embrace the principle of

subsidiarity, not as understood today by politicians and capitalists but as *Ubuntu*. Subsidiarity is understood by many in the western world as a mandate to reduce the role of government in the lives of people. They are quick to reference Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* and quote the following from it, "It is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry" (PIUS XI 1931, Web. N.P). They forget that the Roman pontiff was reflecting on the two extremes that faced his era: individualism and authoritarian nationalism.

An African expression of subsidiarity as *Ubuntu* can refresh the western understanding of this principle and help foster the dynamism of care and love of the other that our world needs today. The rich can learn from this African hermeneutic tradition a new way of addressing global economic inequality. *Ubuntu* is humanness understood intrinsically as evoking kindness toward the other. It is another expression of African ethic of hospitality. It is grounded in hospitality and speaks to an African anthropological identity that states clearly a sense of self that is derived from one's active or existential connections with the other. In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "It is absolutely necessary for us to share certain values. Otherwise discourse between us would be impossible for we would be without common points of reference" (2009, 30). This is closely linked to the African experience. In the three Abrahamic religions discussed above, this humanness is fully concretized in the role Africa has played in preserving them in their nascent stages. But again, one must thus ask the fundamental question: How can Africa reflect this teaching of *Ubuntu* to our world and global church when Africa is itself held captive by unfathomed greed? Many of Africa's billionaires have enriched themselves at the expense of their people. The core values of African cultures are being challenged and negated by the greed of many of its leaders. It is left for the churches of Africa to take seriously this call for a change of course and an embrace of the great values of its people. The world praises Africa's ancestor Nelson Mandela and living legend Archbishop Desmond Tutu for teaching all of humanity how to lead a people out of the darkness of apartheid without having recourse to destructive hatred and vengeful justice. The government of South Africa gladly embraces this principle as central to its national identity and foreign policy ("BUILDING A BETTER WORLD: THE DIPLOMACY OF UBUNTU" 2011, Web. N. P). It is time for the churches of Africa to again show the world how this fundamental principle of *Ubuntu* can help build the world that we all dream of; one where everyone works collaboratively to eradicate

poverty, whether economic, psychological, spiritual, cultural, anthropological, or social.

A reality linked to globalization is religious pluralism. Through migration of people and efficient mobility of persons from one place to the other, religions have become easily accessed by people. This is a good thing we should all be proud of. Unfortunately, it has often resulted in hatred, suspicion, and violence. Currently, Christians and Muslims are killing each other in the Central African Republic, a country with a Christian majority (RATCLIFFE 2017, Web. N. P). Africa's religious consciousness places high importance on the sacredness of life. To ensure that the African mind never forgets this part of its religious and cultural heritage, the great novelist, Chinua Achebe wrote a masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, in which the sacredness of life is a recurring theme (1958). The never-ending tribalism and religious division between Muslim North and Christian South continue to shape politics in Nigeria. Nigeria's cultural diversity has become a curse rather than a blessing. For Africa to maintain its heritage as a place where life is preserved, nurtured, and protected, it must first of all work earnestly to preserve its own children. Genocide, which was previously unheard of before in Africa is somewhat becoming part of Africa's reality. The Rwandan genocide continues to call to question Africa's sincerity when it comes to appreciating life of its own people. The ongoing violence in Central African Republic motivated both by religious and political motives begs for a response.

The churches in Africa have a primary responsibility to call for religious tolerance. This call should be authentic. It cannot be done without observable commitment. Church leaders ought to be seen as persons who embrace the divine that is found in all religions. An authentic embrace of the Indigenous Religions has to be the starting point for Africa. While the global church calls for religious hospitality, there are still some local churches in Africa that advocate religious exclusivism. In some parts of the Nigerian Roman Catholic dioceses the practice of interdicting the faithful for giving their children to members of other Christian faith communities is still the norm even with the ecumenical and interfaith progress made in the past fifty years. One has to ask the obvious questions; is the Nigerian church aware that there was a Second Vatican Council? Does it appreciate the ongoing effort being made by the universal church in promoting ecumenical and interfaith relations with other Christian churches and other religions? A clear stand was made by the participants at the Second Vatican Council to move away from an exclusive vision of ecclesial identity to a more inclusive one. Out of this council came the ground-breaking conciliar document, *Nostra Aetate*; that argued for the church to take seriously its

link to Judaism and other Abrahamic religions (1965, Web. N. P). Going further, the council taught definitively, the link between other religions and Christian churches to the Roman Catholic Church in its dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*. Here, the church did not miss words when it taught that “All men [people] are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men [people] are called by the grace of God to salvation” (1964, Web. N. P).

The churches in Africa can teach the global church how to engage a religiously pluralistic world. African theologians have a responsibility to show how this can be done. In the words of Kwame Bediako, “For the African theologian... the traditional religions, even if they constitute his past, are of the nature of an ‘ontological’ past, which means that together with the profession of the Christian faith, it gives account of the same entity – namely the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian” (1995, 258). Many in the West do theology by alienating the religious other as though the other stands always in a distant island. Even interreligious dialogue is sometimes understood as a task undertaken by one in the comfort of his Christian domain extending the olive branch to those far away. African theologians can help guide the global church and the global community to a new way of doing theology; one that recognizes the complexities of our religiosities. The West is not solely constituted by Christian religious heritage as many may want to believe. The indigenous religions of the West are being revived and making a comeback in a hemisphere that has prided itself at being shaped solely by Christianity. This false self-understanding has led to a disregard for the sacredness of non-Christian religions and a caricature of what people hold to be sacred. The consequence of this is that hatred and religious violence continue to be validated as legitimate means for relating with those who are of different religious traditions. God comes to us not in one garment or one image but in many colors, robes, parables, and epiphanies. The proper response ought to be hospitality.

I want to disagree with a colleague at the recently concluded theological colloquium held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2015 where I had presented aspects of this paper. He suggested that part of Africa’s problems might have to do with its unreserved hospitality to Europeans who turned out to be imperialists and colonialists. This perspective of my colleague is too limiting and does not do justice to the complexity of Africa’s problems. Most African nations have been independent for some decades and the narrative of leadership in most of Africa shows a

consistent pattern of disregard for lives, exploitation of national funds, nepotism, disregard for the rule of law, classism, tribalism, and so on. All these are being done by Africans against their own people. Africa ought to be reflective and own its own share of its failed destinies if it is to be able to articulate a better future for itself. Pointing hands at others is not enough. Yes, the West seeks to dominate Africa. It can only do so when African leaders choose to be used as pawns by foreign agents. Responding to my colleague's statement, I have this to say, Africa cannot become the monster it tries to overcome simply because others have fallen victims to the plague of greed. Hospitality is a human condition and as such must necessarily be the antidote to greed, exploitation, hatred, and violence against the other.

Let me touch on a phenomenon that is affecting many people in our global community. It is the phenomenon of loneliness. In 2014, George Mobiot wrote an article in *The Guardian* in which he named our era as the "Age of Loneliness" (2014, Web. N. P). Also, in a recent publication of *The Huffington Post* the data show that one in five Americans suffer from chronic loneliness (GREGOIRE 2015, Web. N. P). In the United Kingdom, the research states that one in ten persons experience chronic loneliness (MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION 2010, Web. N. P). Britain was recently voted the loneliness capital of Europe (ORR 2014, Web. N. P). There is a strange link between this epidemic of human loneliness and the violence being carried out against persons and the ecosystem by our contemporary society. Existential loneliness is the end product of the false sense of self advocated by Descartes and his followers in the Western world. It is not accidental that societies that have embraced this philosophy of individualism are the ones whose citizens are today suffering the psychological effects of self-alienation. Humans are essentially social beings and attain their full humanity in and through connectedness with others, themselves, God, and the cosmos. To dislocate oneself from this connectedness is to stop responding to the vital force that brings about harmony in being.

While the West suffers from the epidemic of loneliness, the churches of Africa can call attention to an African understanding of relational connectedness as a mode of being human. Quoting Laurenti Magesa:

The moral thought of African Religion becomes clear through the understanding of relationships. The refusal to share is wrong. It is, in fact, an act of destruction because it does not serve to cement bonding that is required to form community... Nothing that weakens community bonds, or in any way helps to abet such weakening, can be morally wholesome. The unity of



the community – equally the living, the living-dead (or the remembered-dead) and the yet-to-be-born – a unity that is the community’s life in its fullest sense, is the paramount good. The opposite constitutes the paramount destructiveness. (MAGESA 1997, 65)

In African heritage, one can find legitimate and authentic grassroots understanding and practice of *koinonia* (communion) not only among churches but also among persons. Loneliness is a symptom of a fundamental crisis affecting human connectedness. Technology cannot replace the unique role humans play in bringing wholeness to one another. Africa can reinvigorate our world by the dynamism of relational identity that is central to its heritage. One where identity is not latent but pro-active; aimed at affirming connections that are life-giving. The foundational relational consciousness that Africans are taught to embrace comes to mind here; “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (MBITI 1990, 106). This relational worldview is beautifully expressed in a Yoruba proverb which states:

If a member of one’s household  
Is eating poisonous insects  
And we fail to warn him (to desist)  
The after-effect of his action  
Would rob neighbours of sleep. (MBON 1991,

103)

For this to be achieved, Africa ought to first become aware of itself. Its children must refocus their energies on being present to each other. The total embrace of all that is Western and a subconscious distaste of all that is African will only lead to an infection of existential loneliness currently plaguing the Western world.

In the recent encyclical *Laudato si*, Pope Francis calls out the false sense of relationship with technology that consequently harms authentic interpersonal relationships (FRANCIS 2015, Web. N. P). We live in the age of ‘pick-and-choose’ where one can exploit nature without being accountable for one’s actions. The observations made by Pope Francis are part of the deposits of wisdom of Africa’s ancestors and ancestresses. Reflecting on an African take on the ecological crisis, Magesa writes the following:

The interaction between the visible and invisible spheres of the universe and human responsibility for them is not simply random. It is controlled by a moral order instituted and sanctioned by God and channeled through the ancestors of any

given community. This order is preserved by tradition and, if followed, has the power or force to sustain the existence and operation of the universe, ensuring a bountiful life for humanity. (MAGESA 1997, 72)

This relationship is sacred. Not only does humanity find the holy in the sacred objects dedicated to the divine, all of creation is an epiphany of the divine (73). This point is beautifully stated in the Qur'an: "All the creatures on earth, and all the birds that fly with wings, are communities like you. We did not leave anything out of this book. To their Lord, all these creatures will be summoned" (Sura 6:38). The term *ummah* that is used to refer to humans submitting to Allah as a community of believers is the same one used to describe all that is non-human in the cosmos. When we are disconnected from each other it follows then that we will be disconnected from the cosmos. Our planet is sick. The assured way of bringing it back to wholeness lies in our taking the time to restore all broken relationships with ourselves, our world, others, and God. Pope Francis has called for all persons to be part of this project. Africa has a legitimate role in bringing about this reality by tapping into its rich heritage on hospitality toward the universe and all it contains: humans, animate beings, inanimate beings, and spiritual beings.

### **Conclusion**

Africa's ethic hospitality speaks to the vision of God for humanity; one that highlights and links identity to relationality. It is on this basis that Africa's role in protecting the founders and peoples of the early history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As religious tensions and wars continue to plague our world, especially when these crises are spearheaded by members of the above religions, Africa's place is again needed to call attention to what it means to be both a people and a place of divine hospitality. To shed innocent blood in the name of God is to go against the vision of who we are called to be.

The world is today looking to the global south for a new way of being human in an interconnected world. As the West increasingly becomes a society that lacks life-affirming narratives in relation to responsible and healthy treatment of the cosmos, Africa has a primary duty to speak up and call for a new world order; one that is rooted in time-tested values. For Africa to do this, it must first become aware of how its citizens are currently embracing the destructive vices of consumerism and individualism that only lead to existential loneliness. Africans can no longer laugh at their religious heritage without causing great harm to their own identities. Africans, whether Christians or non-

Christians, are a people linked to their past. Africans ought to reject all pejorative adjectives imposed on their psyche by their colonial experiences and embrace their histories and cultures as a people who have a role to play in leading humanity to a new dawn where life is always affirmed.

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