

AFRICAN HOSPITALITY IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper argues that African hospitality helped advance Christianity in Africa, especially in Nigeria. The type of hospitality enjoyed by the early missionaries like free lands, houses, eating together with guests, and sacrificing your life for your visitor's safety in those days are no longer the type of hospitality that is seen today in our society. There is a need for Africans to return to their initial hospitable nature that attracted foreigners to their land. What informed the choice of this paper is that the type of hospitality enjoyed by visitors to African lands has changed and is no longer the same. Using historical and phenomenological methods of research and thematic method of data analysis to analyze the data, the findings are that poverty, the threatening effect of the European lifestyle of individualism, the egocentric nature of people in the society today and the lack of communalism in the lifestyle of Africans cause the problem of lack of hospitality in Africa today. The paper therefore recommends that Africans should guard this cultural heritage (i.e. hospitality) that their forefathers bequeathed to them.

Introduction

Hospitality as a concept began long before recorded history. It is a word that is generic in nature to the extent that its effects can be conspicuously seen in the life of man in the following dimensions: religion, psychology, economy, anthropology, and physical. Thus, it covers all facets of human endeavor. Its synonyms are love, compassion, and welcoming. It is a word that is noticeably present in every local and international (foreign) language in the world, and its transverses from one continent to another.

Because of the diverse nature of hospitality, we will limit our discussions on the topic: "African Hospitality in the Advancement of Christianity in Nigeria". The implication of this is that the paper investigated how African (natural) hospitality helped advance Christianity in its soil. Even before the eventual importation and plantation of Christianity in Africa, especially in Nigeria, by the early European missionaries, African hospitality was already in existence. The fruits of this were judiciously utilized by the early European missionaries. However,

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the hospitality that forms the subject of argument of our discussion is typically African, and in context. This type of hospitality clearly portrays the symbiotic relationships that existed between the host (Africans) and the guest (strangers – the early European Christian missionaries).

Africans generally are good in welcoming strangers and are very hospitable to them. They usually go the extra mile or make a lot of self-denial to make their guests feel at home and to be comfortable with them by showering them gifts and entertaining them. This cultural make-up or way of life of the Africans is in consonance or in affirmation with the views of Olikenyi (2001): “that hospitality is the minimum an African expects from his kith and tin” (p. 104).

The beauty of African hospitality can be seen in the context where a positive host makes a noble sacrifice, even sacrificing his or her life to protect the interests of his or her visitors (guests). This was seen in the case of Adekunle Fajuyi (a top military officer), the military governor of the Western Region who invited Aguiyi-Ironsi, then Nigeria’s Supreme Commander and Head of State, to spend the night in his residence when the latter visited Ibadan as part of the peace tour and was accompanied on the trip by his twelve-year-old son, Thomas.

Then at night, the Government House in Ibadan, where the military head of state was quartered, was heavily surrounded by soldiers from northern extraction. When the soldiers or mutineers entered the Government House, they demanded the arrest of Aguiyi-Ironsi, which Fajuyi refused. Rather, he reminded the soldiers that Aguiyi-Ironsi was his guest, and because of that, he would not betray him. He maintained that it was his duty to protect his life. Due to his refusal to comply with the directives of the mutineers, both Ironsi and Fajuyi were killed the same day on 25th July, 1966 (<http://www.theafricanreprot.com/182958/aguiyi-ironsi-themurder-that-birhed-nigeria-northern-hegamony>). The aim of the writer in presenting the above example is to showcase that every act of hospitality goes with an act of sacrifice, which makes the donor of the host receive external rewards or tidings that go with such benevolence.

These narratives can be found in the views or exact words of Healey *et al.* (1996) who avers:

That hospitality is an important cultural and social value in African society. Hospitality is a way of life that is intimately bound to personal relationships within the community. Africans have a spirit of welcoming strangers or visitors, which is rooted in their culture. African traditions of hospitality are strong, but they vary according to local customs (pp. 170-171).

The above postulations of Healey and Sylertz prompted the authors in this paper to view hospitality as a fundamental variable that played significant roles in the initial plantation of Christianity in Nigeria.

It is common knowledge that early missionaries came to Nigeria as foreigners or strangers, and because of this, they found it difficult to adapt to our country. Therefore, they relied on African hospitality. In another chronological historical event that is always green in our minds, Jordan (1946) informs us that the early missionaries used the act of hospitality and love to conquer the hostilities that the African natives manifested toward them, as was seen in the series of nefarious acts of being hostile that the African natives displayed to the early white missionaries at Ogboli (Jordan, p. 29). The discovery of this goldmine—hospitality—helped tremendously in combating the initial difficulties and problems that they encountered in Nigeria, namely the problems of language barriers, transportation, food, acceptability, and the like. The application of hospitality helped the participants to overcome the challenges that they encountered in their host communities.

The fulcrum of our statement on the problem stems from the fact that African hospitality, as a phenomenon, is gradually fading away. This is because the people’s zeal and readiness to engage in the traditional way of communalism and commensality are gradually phasing out due to the intrusion of modernity.

Methodology

The primary research tools were historical and phenomenological methodologies. Second, it adopted secondary tools from primary sources to engage some scholars in fieldwork consisting of class discussions and interviews. The paper adopted face-to-face interviews and used the thematic method of data analysis envisaged by Colazi (1978) cited in Nche (2020), as well as secondary sources by making use of internet sources and the likes to strengthen the beauty and quality of the paper.

Tinkering Terminologies

According to Koenig (1987), as cited by Olikenyi (2001), etymologically the word “hospitality” is an English version of the Latin word *hospitium/hospitalitas* which stems from *hospes* meaning both host and guest” (p. 83). According to Gilby (1979), hospitality covers both (host and guest) in a mutual relationship (ibid).

From the above etymological descriptions, hospitality is understood in the paper as the symbiotic relationship that exists between the host and the “guest” in the sense that the host receives the guest who is a total stranger in his abode (or in his community), in the form of entertainment, cooking, and sharing of sumptuous meals, drinking of rich wine (i.e. commensality) and the likes. Again, hospitality is described as spontaneously welcoming and accepting strangers or visitors unconditionally, as they are not discriminated against. Moreover, the guests who are presumably taken as ancestors are always ready to shower blessings and favors on those who received them. They are usually strangers, widows, or orphans, and beggars. Thus, “hospitality is a venture that possesses this parallel nature of reciprocal tendencies that are clearly seen (in the context) between the host and the guest. These two concepts can be used interchangeably” (Olikenyi, 2001, p. 84). Most importantly, it is within the domain of these two concepts that the meaning of the word “hospitality” is realized.

1) Factors of hospitality in the African context

The following factors serve as ingredients that give meaning or understanding to the concept of hospitality in Africa. These essential factors have contributed greatly to the flourishing nature of hospitality in Africa. They are the epicenter of its (i.e. African hospitality) existence. They are:

- (i) Community, solidarity and communal living;
- (ii) Sense of the sacred;
- (iii) Commensality.

(i) Community, solidarity, and communal living

Nwafor (2016) maintains that “communalism penetrates all the aspects of African ontology. It forms the foundation of African beings, sustains them, and still gives them recourse to cultural subsistence” (p. 3). Hence, multiple scholars designate it as that which gives African people their identity that they showcase to their hosts. According to Ramose (1999), communalism is assumed in these words “a person is a person through other person” (p. 41). In the same vein, Okolo (1993) asserts that the character is meaningfully portrayed to the extent that it acknowledges and accepts the *Cognates Ergo sum* “I’m related to others, therefore, I exist” (p.10). This view of Okolo is corroborated by the popular statement of Mbiti (1969), which gives credence to the communal nature of the African people that says “I’m because we are, since we are, therefore I am (p.10). The opinion of Okolo supports the often-quoted assertion of Mbiti (1969), “I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am” (p. 216).

The foregoing does not mean that individuals are not distinct by belonging to a community; they become useful as members of a community (Nwafor, 2011). Supporting this view, Ejizu (1988) posits that within a community, the freewill of everyone is appreciated and recognized because they make special contributions to the community.

The implication of this, according to Dine (2007), is that people uphold the need for community and individuality. The type of community, which not only discourages isolationism and individualism but also psychologically imposes the need for person-to-person involvement of individuals, explains the significance of the Igbo concept of *Ikwun’ibe* (people of one’s next-of-kin). An Igbo individual (or an African) separated from the Igbo community is like a fish taken out of water, which loses its normal flavor and dies. The Igbo aptly express the individual’s need for community in proverbs as follows:

- i. *Otu osisi anaghieme ohia*: One tree does not make a forest.
- ii. *Egwu onwa bu ure, o nweghi onye onwa anaghi agba na ezi ya*: – Gathering in the village square during moonlight could otherwise be enjoyed by everyone in his family.
- iii. *Idi otutu bu ugwu eze*: A king ruling a thickly populated community has added strength and honor. To stress the force and influence of the community, even the Eze (king) is controlled by his/her community, thus buttressing the significance of Oha Nwe Eze, i.e. the community owns the king. Igwe bu ike (community is strength) demonstrates Igbo consciousness in terms of community life (p. 29).

(ii) Africans have a deep sense of the sacred

This implies that Africans are deeply religious. In the view of Ekwunife's (2015) as corroborated by Nwafor (2016), African traditional adherents believe that the holy are not in opposition to the mundane or worldly realities but work together with it for a better society. The core African traditionalists view the entire world (seen and unseen) as holy. This idea of holiness as it regards the establishment of the concept of seen and unseen entities leads to the entry of the unseen to the realm of the seen entities, which was made attainable through the special and supreme power of a being called God. In elaborating on this view, Nwafor stated that all entities, especially the unseen, consist of created and uncreated entities. Chukwu or Chineke is the Supreme Being, while deities like Alusi are created beings. These ascend to the status of being holy when they are in complete concern with God. The community members are seen as holy when they properly relate to the community.

The consequences of the above discussion depict or testify that Africans are ontologically religious, as confirmed by Mbiti (1969), who suggests that Africans go with their religion to every destination. Africans take their religion to the farm where they cultivate crops or gather their harvests. When educated, he carried his religion into his place of work and even to the examination hall. When he succeeds in politics, he catapults his religion into the senate. Developing more on this, Ikenga Metuh (1987) widens our horizons on the names given to the supreme beings in some African countries and local communities, as showcased in the following table:

Table 1:

S/No	Images	Names	Peoples
1.	The most powerful and the greatest	Chukwu	Igbo
		Unkulu-Nkulu	Zulu
		Mawu	Ewe
		Nengole	Lower Congo
		Osnobowa	Edo
2.	Perfect, satisfying, omnipresent, all-knowing	Onyame	Akan
		Olodumare	Yoruba
		Osebuluwa	Igbo
		Elimanlima	Akongo
		Kaunga	Ovambo
		Mutalabala	Tonga
3.	The unknown	Endandala	Akongo
		Amama-Amasi-Amasi	Igbo
4	The Great Providence	Chukwu	Igbo
		Leza	Tumbuka
		Mulunu	Kamanga

Metuh notes that African beliefs about the supreme God as expressed in myths, names, and proverbs, as analyzed above, show him as a living and personal being and, a provident creator who directs each individual person and the entire universe toward a definite goal (pp. 103-104).

iii) Commensality

Commensality as a concept has received various descriptions from recognized scholars in their fields of specialization, such as anthropology, sociology, theology, and philosophy. However, for the sake of clarity of thought, we limit our scope of definition of this concept to the concise definition given to us by Anigbo (1987), which he borrowed from the Oxford English Dictionary, and which he gives beautiful and scholarly hermeneutic interpretations.

According to him, the Oxford English Dictionary defines commensality as the habit of eating at the same table or continued feeding together at one table. At this point, he made a brilliant hermeneutic interpretation of the key words inherent in his definition of commensality.

(i) The culture of dining together is vital in this description because it dismisses unplanned gatherings where food will be shared. The act of eating together (commensality) is heavy in the sense that it gives a specific organization with laid-down guidelines on how food is shared. It checkmates careless irregularities: for instance, struggling for food will not be seen when the spirit of commensality is applied.

(ii) “Same table” on the other hand refers to a cultural area, especially in the westernized world, where one can sit at a table to consume food. In other cultures, people may eat together from a large earthen bowl or basket, as in some parts of Africa or Asia. Nevertheless, even for those people, the central significance of the table, or a ritually demarcated level piece of ground or another surface still holds. This is because sitting together at a table may imply all sorts of social relationships, including mutual tolerance, acceptance, status equality, and, probably, togetherness. This is especially so because a table that is level can have a unifying and equalizing effect for the participants of the meal.

(iii) Constant eating together has two implications. First, two individuals comprise the process of eating together (commensality). This is why a single person cannot showcase the commensality process. Second, the uncompleted sentence used constant eating together and resurrected some analogical terminologies used in the description. It depicts that such was even planted and accepted before it took off. Thus, this habitual act (commensality) shows eating together notwithstanding the vicissitudes of the period.

The fact that people eat at the same eatery, at the appropriate time, and commune on the same table is a fact not to be neglected because it is vital. The orderliness, the coming on time, the pale of contact (refectory), all point to the fact that they are people with similar social status. In support of this view, Achunike (personal communication – class discussion) in a simplified language sees commensality as *nriko*, that is, communion, to eat together, to share together food offered to the gods, to solidify the peace accord.

To explicate the significant role or place of food in the commensal act, Anigbo (1987) opines that food has a special place in the act of commensality, that without it, commensality does not exist. Accepted that food is an essential part of it, the ordinary act of eating it is different from the very nature of commensality. Commensality serves as one of the fundamental items that contribute greatly to the practicality and the possibility of African hospitality, as Gathgo (2008) suggests: a tribe of Kikuyi of Kenya has a saying that *Muria Wiki abuaga wiki* – (he who eats alone faces death alone). Supporting the above, Mbiti (2008) informs us that another tribe in Kenya, the Kamba, also has the same wise saying, which has the etymological meaning with the Kikuyu used to show the value of both joy as we experience when eating food. This concept is applied when we experience sorrow, especially during the death of our beloved ones. He made this point very clear that when one is alive and does not relate with one another, it is selfish; when such a person dies, there will be no anxiety while burying such an individual (Gothogo, 2008).

The proposition of the above-mentioned scholars is that the beauty of commensality is well expressed within the context of the community or within the Umunna or kindred environment or enclosure because the true nature of

commensality cannot be captured when a single individual is eating alone in a restaurant. It can only be understood when an individual is eating in the company of his or her siblings and a particular food and drink is shared with them.

Thus, because of the glorified or high place position of commensality that led to the exposition of African hospitality that is naturally sincere and spontaneous, Olikenyi (2001) describes African hospitality as we have already indicated above—a means of establishing and sustaining human cordial relationships in the community. It is based on the principle of reciprocity—an unconditional readiness to share (give and take) both material and non-material things such as foodstuffs, clothes, visits, ideas, condolences, and so on. For Africans, reciprocity is an indispensable factor in any friendly relationship. In other words, for an affable relationship to be established, the element of unconditional readiness to share must be present; it must be continued to be practiced by all the parties involved; otherwise, the relationship breaks down (p. 106).

This view principally points out that commensality as a concept deals strongly with the act of sharing food, drinks, communion, and koinonia among brothers and sisters or those who have common bonds or social relationships. That is “nrikorita umunne” “look at how pleasant it is that brothers and sisters eat or dine together.” That is the heartbeat, the engine, or the center of African hospitality.

This supports the views of some pastoral theologians or those who are agents (or vanguards) of the gospel of Christ, as exemplified by Idogwu Meletus (personal communication), that the principles of commensality can be applied in solving some complex pastoral problems in a community, as was witnessed in the following context or scenario. There was a problem in St. Patrick’s Catholic Parish, Ibenda, in Obollo-Eke, Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State. The community invited a certain man of God (by name Pastor Anayo – who was popularly known as Macha-Macha—a person who knows everything) to help cleanse the community of evil men and women. In the process, some people were highlighted and paraded in the community as witches, wizards, and murderers. The Catholic Church condemned this act, as it amounts to taking laws into their hands, and as a result, innocent people could be victimized. As a result, the community and the church parted ways. The community revoked and took back the land it had previously given to the church for evangelization, specifically for the building of the parish church and the parish rectory.

When Idogwu Meletus became the first parish priest of the parish, he decided to meet the elders and plead with them to leave the land for the church. He went with one of his trusted members of the parish council and with good sizeable kola nuts, snuff, kegs of palm wine, cartons of alcohol, and some bottles of hard drink. When he arrived, they were surprised to find him in their midst, even without their invitation. Despite the priest’s intrusion into their meeting, they still welcomed him and started looking for a special seat for him to sit down. At this point, the priest told them that he would sit on a concrete pavement called Agbidi with them on his white sauterne. The refusal of the priest, Idogwu, to sit on a special chair different from the improvised seat that the rest of the elders were sitting on made all the elders happy. He also ate kola nuts, and drank palm wine with them, with the same traditional cup (i.e. oto) that they were using for the consumption of palm wine.

As the meeting came to an end, the priest pleaded for the elders to give him the opportunity to speak with them. With his show of love, conviviality, and eating and drinking with them, he requested the elders to return the retrieved land to the church. It was granted. This is how commensality in Nigeria plays a significant role in the advancement of Christianity, and in the fostering of peace in different local communities.

The link between hospitality and commensality

In his personal perspective (i.e. personal communication), Udeagha suggested or outlined three ways or dimensions that showcase the intricacies or interconnectivities that give meaningful exposition to the concepts of hospitality and commensality. They are expressed as follows:

- (a) Acceptance
- (b) Trust
- (c) Discovery

(i) **Acceptance:** He asserts that acceptance is fundamental, that is, the basis of the linking tendencies that exist between hospitality and commensality. This she buttressed by elucidating that common sense teaches us that you can only sit down to eat and drink with those you accept, which features prominently in our different family meetings, social and religious gatherings—like egba omabe, onwa assa (i.e. festival periods) and other community's spiritual-cum-social get together that usually ends, in konini, that is, deeply involved in eating and drinking (and other forms of entertainment).

We are aware that we are gifts from God to one another, especially when the individual in question is a total stranger or a visitor, and we do not intend to castigate or humiliate their personalities. Note that this expression of acceptance is usually expressed or made concrete by the host toward the guest (and if possible, vice versa). To expound more on this, Uzukwu (1988), cited by Olikenyi, said that African hospitality demands first that the host concretely shows the guest that he is accepted by presenting tangible symbolic elements to him; second, that the relationship be re-affirmed by both parties partaking of the presented element (p. 58). The above assertions of Uzukwu confirm that the Igbo's unquenchable desire for acceptance when they visit their neighbors is always indicated or concretized by the symbolic presentation of kola nuts. The presentation of this to a guest by the host is a sign or signifies that the guest is accepted and welcomed into the household.

Reflecting further on this, Ekwunife (1990), as cited by Olikenyi, added that the presentation of kola nuts is usually accompanied by wine (mmanya). Other secondary elements to be presented include water (mmiri), white chalk (nzu), and a rich gravy of pepper or alligator pepper. The water with which the host and the guest wash their hands performs a cleansing function, while the white chalk with which both draw lines on the floor symbolizes purity of heart (p. 115).

As this may be, the practical nature or relevance of acceptance as the key that points the door to other categories (namely trust and discovery) can be seen in the charitable and hospitable dispositions of those living in riverine areas like Nzam. Achunike (in personal communication), as once a pastor in this riverine area (especially at Nzam), informs us that the people are always zealous to welcome or accept visitors in a happy mood to the extent that every passerby brings a bottle of wine (or whatever he/she has at his/her disposal) to welcome the visitor in their midst. Before you know it, there will be a big gathering of people who will come to reception. Then, the person you visit will not mind killing one of his goats and going into his barn to collect yams that he/she will use to cook pounded yams for his/her guest (or visitor). He will ensure that the visitor is properly fed. And when going, finally, they will give the guest yams, chickens, and the likes, as a sign of their love and acceptance of the visitor who visited them.

(ii) **Trust:** No sane human being will be ready to eat and drink with an evil man or a person that will poison him/her; or will welcome a hardened criminal that was declared wanted by the law enforcement agents like the police, the army, and the likes in his/her household.

These allusions give credence to the fact that trust plays a significant role in showcasing the link that exists between hospitality and commensality. There is an adage that says "trust is the bedrock of every relationship".

This points to the fact that for the creation of the arena, place, or circumstances of cultivation (or cross-pollination) of ideas, tenets, and beliefs of hospitality and commensality, it is expected that the unmitigated spirit of trust is to be upheld between the parties that are involved. Thus, they are to be free with such others without any form of suspicion. Thus, it helps foster relationships. And this will lead to friendship, oneness, a spontaneous spirit of being hospitable to visitors, happiness, being one's brother's keeper, a spirit of communalism egalitarian in nature, and so on. Thus, all these positivity should be nurtured and blossom to maturity.

(iii) Discovery

It is a fact that if you want to maintain a good relationship, you are not going to remove the items of eating and drinking. And it is in the process of eating and drinking with a colleague, a friend, your boss, a subordinate, (even an enemy, in the case of Judas Iscariot during the last supper) on the refectory table that the true position of the person is disclosed.

The import of discovery can be succinctly captured in the graphical narrative by Deinzer (1996), as cited by Olikenyi (2001). We also call to mind specially the story of Jesus' encounter with two of his disciples from Emmaus (cf-Lk. 13-35). As two disciples, on their way to Emmaus, were talking about Jesus, especially with regard to the news that some women had found his tomb empty, a stranger joined them. As they arrived at Emmaus, the stranger wanted to go on, but the two disciples pressed on him to stay with them – i.e., to be their guest. "Now while he was with them at a table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. Furthermore, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him..." (Lk, 24:30-31); the stranger was 'Jesus himself'. The important message of this story is that through the act of showing hospitality to the stranger, God reveals Himself. Through this revelation, the disciples were able to experience the liberating, divine truth—a special blessing indeed (p. 91).

Sequel to the development of the virtues of hospitality and commensality (that is within its circumference), any biblical personages like Abraham and Lot welcomed strangers whom they later discovered were the angels of the Lord. Even some Saints like saints Faustina Kowalska, St. Francis of Assis, St. Theresa of Calcutta, and St. Martins of Tours, shared their food, drinks, and articles of clothing with poor stricken beggars, which later on transformed into the person of Jesus Christ. As this may be, let it be known that it is when we gathered for some celebrations, be it social, religious, political, or the like, you can discover the true character of your neighbor without any biases.

2. African Hospitality: A multi-purpose catalyst that contributed positively to the advancement of Christianity in Nigeria

African hospitality played a vital role in Christianity's plantation in her land (in Africa). This was achieved in the following pragmatic ways:

(i) The giving of lands free of charge by our traditional rulers to the early missionaries was a sign of acceptance (and welcome) to the early missionaries who came to Nigeria. The pen heart and warm reception of our traditional rulers toward the early missionaries and their acceptability concretized by the charitable acts of giving out their lands for the building of their churches, schools, leprosies, hospitals and the likes and assuring of their upkeep and security serves as morale boosters that motivated the early missionaries to come to Africa, especially in Nigeria, to preach the gospel of Christ. These historical documented narratives are what transpired in their sincere desire to look for land as a stake in their missionary exploits.

Townsend convinced the members of the French section of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers, consisting of Joseph Lutz and Horne (who are Catholic priests) and Hermas and Jean Grotto (Reverend Brothers), that

Onitsha they arrived on the 5th December 1885 could be a fertile soil to begin their missionaries as opposed to Igbebe in Lokoja, which was their original destination (Chigere, 2013, p. 162 cited by Ezokeke, 2018, p. 34). They changed their original missionaries' plan of making Igbebe in Lokoja their operational base or headquarters, and preferred to stay at Onitsha because the warm welcome instilled confidence that made them trust this suggestion (Ezokeke, 2018, p. 34).

Then, on how land was given to these Catholic pioneer missionaries, Obi (1985) informs us that Townsend took them to see the King of Onitsha, who was then Obi Anazonwu. They saw the king and made known to him their intention. The king received them very well and promised to give them a portion of their land of their choosing. The following day, he took them round to determine and choose a portion of the land of their choice. They happily chose a piece of land. Later, it was discovered that the piece of land they had chosen had been given earlier to Samuel Crowther (an Anglican Bishop). To bring a solution to the sensitive problem at hand, King Obi Anazonwu directed Lutz to meet Crowther to deliberate on the land in question. The meeting was very cordial and fruitful, and the bishop willingly surrendered the piece of land to Lutz with the following words, "I acquired the land for the cause of God, take it," (*Annales Apostoliques*", No 7, September 1901, p. 18).

Having given this portion of land to the Holy Ghost fathers on January 6, 1886, being the feast of Epiphany, an agreement was drafted and signed; the king handed over the piece of land in perpetuity to the Holy Ghost Fathers, giving them full rights to exercise the Catholic religion and faith on the said piece of land without any hindrance or interference. The principal clause of the document reads "I, Obi Anazonwu, King and Chief of Onitsha, do out of free will grant unto the Roman Catholic mission of the Holy Ghost Fathers, the ground chosen by them in perpetuity free of all tribute and dues" (Holy Ghost Fathers Journal January 1-6, 1886, quoted by Obi, 1985). With the acquisition of land located at a very strategic position, Lutz described the terrain in these words, "situated on an elevation and on the bank of the Niger, it is made up of two small hills separated from one another by a valley that is always filled with water during rainy season" (Joseph Lutz, Letter to the superior in Paris, cited by Obi, 1985). Commenting more on the nature of the topography and acquisition of the land, the structural edifices (i.e. buildings) put in place, Obi (1984) stated that the above passage describes the site of the present Basilica of the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Onitsha, in Igboland and its surroundings, namely; the Holy Trinity field, the Shanahan Hall down to the brink of the River Niger and the bridge across the Nkisi (p.80).

This charitable act of giving lands freely to the early missionaries without collecting a dime from them turns out to be a blessing in disguise to the missionary adventures or exploits of the early missionaries, which Obi (1985) affirms that having established a base, the missionaries settled down for real work. With the Holy Trinity Mission, Onitsha as center, the spiritual work and journey of the Catholic Church in Igbo land began, and the missionaries at once started to carry the gospel to all the towns and villages around Onitsha and to penetrate the hinterlands. Energetically, with great zeal and passion, Lutz and his team threw themselves into the task of winning the great part of Igbo land for Christ. Thus, by 1889, towns like Obosi, Ossomari, Nsugbe, Umuoji, Atani, Odoekpe, Nteje, and Nkwelle had received several visits from missionaries (p. 24).

(ii) The role played by the religious international voluntary organizations like Caritas, the Red Cross Society, and the World Council of Churches (WCC) during the Nigerian/Biafra Civil War (1968-1970) was a good factor.

Biafra's birth on July 6, 1967, and its death on January 12, 1970, have been consigned to the annals of history. It was a civil war (fought in Nigeria) that attracted the attention of the international community and other or some

religious international charitable organizations that came voluntarily to save the lives of millions of children who are now adults in Nigeria. This added momentum in the advancement of Christianity in Nigeria.

To showcase the great role played by the church during the Nigerian/Biafra war, Ozigbo (1985) gives us graphical information about a series of events that happened then. He notes that during the war, the greatest success of the Catholic Church in Igbo land in general, and the Archdiocese of Onitsha in particular, was perhaps their role in the rescue relief operations during the war. The war brought with it starvation on an unprecedented scale and kwashiorkor-related diseases. On its part, the Catholic Church has tried most strenuously to be true to its being and mission by engaging in an instituted “Service to humanity”. Catholic voluntary organizations in Europe, particularly Caritas International and African concern, have provided aid to reduce the effects of hunger and difficulties during civil war. The difficulty during the war was compounded because every avenue or means of entering Biafra land was closed by the Federal troops. This led the voluntary organizations to embark on an exorbitant airlift from Sao-Tome to Uli airport in Biafra, which they did at their own expense. Anthony Byrne (a Catholic priest—A Holy Ghost Father) was the director of the program and the official representative of Caritas International.

Ozigbo stated that the Holy Ghost Fathers and Marist Brothers were foremost in their involvement in bringing reliefs to Biafra, while the local clergy (priest and nuns) were responsible for the administration of the relief materials. The Marist Novitiate at Uburu was turned into a hospital with 500 patients, mostly those suffering from kwashiorkor caused by protein deficiency. The brothers took care of the patients. They washed, fed, and clothed them, and they buried the dead. When Uburu fell to Nigerian troops in September 1968, a new center was opened at Ihioma Orlu. At Nimbo, seven feeding centers supplied cooked meals to a total of 7,000 children daily. At Akokwa, eleven feeding centers catered for 2,000 children. At Ndizuogu, 18 centers fed 14,000 children daily; Obowo had 28,000 registered children, while the Ihioma mission had the largest record of 7,000 children. It was not possible to feed the children daily. A meal with some protein in it was given to them three times a week. At Umuchu, a record of 200 cooked meals is provided every month.

The sick bays took care of the more serious cases of illness, but hundreds of sick children were flown out to Libreville, Sao-Tome, and Abidjan for better medical care (cited from Holy Ghost Fathers General Bulletin, Vol. 51, 1969, pp. 515-591). The infectious apostolic example exhibited by the Catholic Church during the war made the *American Newsweek Magazine* affirm that, “never before has the face of Catholicism appeared so attractive (Refer the 23 September, 1968 edition).

The consequences of these charitable actions, Ozigbo (1988) informs us, made the expatriate missionaries win great respect from the Igbo (and even beyond the confines of Igbo geographical locations) because of their charitable activities during the war. Due to their involvement in saving the lives of the Igbo during the war, they were expelled from Nigeria in February 1970. Then the reward for the labor and love of humanity did not, however, pass unnoticed because on 20th October, 1970, Bishop Whelan received the “Good Samaritan Award in Chicago for the relief efforts in Biafra. In his acceptance speech, he acknowledged that he was receiving the award on behalf of all who took part in the relief programs and especially the Holy Ghost Fathers and the heroic pilots of the mercy flights who lie buried at Uli among the people they gave their lives to save (cited from Holy Ghost (Dublin) Mission Outlook, Feb; 1971. Pp. 16-19).

(iii) As pathfinders, the early missionaries pioneered the cause of western education in Nigeria.

Joseph Ignatius Shanahan believed that Western education was the best way to spread the gospel. It is the best method of evangelization. He made serious and honest efforts to convince the office in charge of propagation of faith by maintaining that the funds for redeeming slaves should be employed in promoting literacy education

(Chigere, 1996). This is the reason why, in the view of Alagoa (1999), western education had been identified as probably the most important motive for the acceptance of Christian missions, thereby being the vehicle that facilitated the advancement of Christianity in Nigeria. The use of Western education as an effective manifesto by the early missionaries of various Christian denominations like Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians in luring Africans, especially the youths, to Christianity worked well. Their actions were in consonance with the view of Uruakpa (1996) that it is quite clear that these missionary bodies had common aims, and especially shared in the philosophy of education as the sharpest instrument for effective and result-oriented evangelism (p. 123).

The contributory roles of the early missionaries toward the growth and development of education were the vehicles that transported Africans and placed them on the exalted positions (Nwadiakor et al, 1999). It is an enterprise that is very indelible and programmatic in the lives of the African peoples and was an instrument that positioned prominent Nigerians like Patrick Okolo, Charles Nduaguba, Willie Onuchukwu, and Paul Anekwe to obtain the highest teaching certificates the government could offer them (Jordan, 1969). In 1930, John Anyogu became the first Igbo Catholic priest east of Niger. In 1957, he became the first Igbo Catholic Bishop (Catholic Bishop of Enugu Diocese).

The rapid growth of education (i.e. as spearheaded by the early missionaries) and its acceptance as a tool by the Holy Ghost Fathers through the establishment of schools is the fulfillment of the prophecies (of Shanahan) who said that it is through the school that we would win over the whole country as we were informed by Clarke ... (pp.38). On his prophetic declaration, he said that those who hold the school hold the country, its religion, and its future (Jordan, 1946, p. 91, cited by Okwor, 1997, p. 19).

From another optic, the pioneer nationalists were the doyens, the pathfinders, and the pacesetters in the struggle for political independence in most African countries, including Nigeria. That is, those that championed the struggle for the emancipation of the African continent from the domination of European imperialism were all products or graduates of early missionary education institutions. They include Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alvan Ikoku, Mbonu Ojike, Awolowo, Francis Akanulbiam, and M. I. Okpara and Anthony Enahoro.

African Views and Reflections on African Hospitality

Many African intellectuals have reflected deeply in their works about African hospitality, which is central to our deliberations. The first intellectual to give the first shot at African hospitality was Uzuoku (1988). He opines that hospitality is a vital aspect of existence in Africa in general. He made this observation explicitly when he wrote:

Despite the destabilization of traditional life by colonialism... African hospitality has held rather well to the extent that it could be described as a way of being an African (p. 158) (cited by Olikenyi, p. 102).

Reflecting more on this, Olikenyi (2001) stated that African hospitality is one of the few facets of ancient culture that are still intact and strongly practiced today by most Africans in spite of all the forces of recent external influences or even internal pressure. He avers that the practice of hospitality appears almost natural to Africans, and it is very valuable to them (p. 102). This buttresses the reason why everybody agrees with Uzuoku (1988), “that the minimum that the Africans expect from his kith and kin is hospitality” (p. 102, cited by Olikenyi).

To add flesh to the above established propositions, Uchendu (1965) states that for the Igbo, for instance, hospitality is both a “cultural virtue” and “a major social obligation”, and because of its simplicity, “it is expected from everybody – rich and poor (p. 71, cited in Olikenyi, pp. 102-103).

Some African scholars like Olikenyi (personal communication) view hospitality as an encounter with someone else. Every encounter is an encounter between the host and the guest. What is interesting here is the idea of an encounter. The dynamics are that as human beings, we are potentially both host and guest. He highlighted that when two people meet (i.e. the host and the guest), an exchange of gifts takes place. The person might or did not give you anything materially, but you have benefited from the person spiritually because sitting down before you is a gift from God.

Explicating more on this, he asserts that hospitality plays pivotal or leading roles in the African traditional religion in the context that the ancestors appear to us in different forms and categories—as strangers, as widows, as orphans, and as beggars. We are bound to welcome them because doing so, we may directly or indirectly welcome a great ancestor in our household. He also said that we also play the role of being host to the ancestors by giving or throwing away food we are eating to them, pouring libation to them, and other religious allegiance to them, and thereby beckoning them to come as a “guest” and commune with us. At times, the ancestors play the roles of guests to us because when we experience difficulties, setbacks, frustrations, and hardships, we consult them, and present our existential problems to them, which they are happy to do when they hear the voice of our supplications by granting to their loyal adherents the favors and blessings they are seeking from them – the ancestors. A replica of this can be found in Jewish and Christian religions. To Israel's people, God comes to them as a “host”. At other times, He comes to them as a “guest”. This is downloaded in the entire example of ancestors.

Africa as a Place of Refuge for Migrants and to the Founders of Religions

(i) Africa as a refuge for the Israelites:

Aihiokhai (2016) asserts that at the early stages of three Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Africa played a conspicuous part in securing the key biblical figures. To understand the vital part of Africa, within the Hebrew Sacred texts, there is a good account of God's intercession in sparing the children of Jacob, who are the beneficiaries of the contract God made with Abraham on Mount Sinai. Confronted with starvation, Jacob and his children traveled to Africa (i.e Egypt), and when they were there, God expressed these words to Israel, “I am El, God of your father – Don't be afraid of going down to Egypt for I will make you into a big or an incredible country. Joseph was blessed by God in Egypt's land” (cf. Gen. 45:7-8). Africa was proven to be fertile even in the biblical days. The Israelites, upon arrival in Egypt, enjoyed this blessing (Gen. 4:29-30).

Traveling to Egypt, the scripture mentions that those who joined Jacob to Egypt were seventy persons (Gen. 46:8-27). However, with the coming of a harsh Pharaoh, Israelites who traveled out of Egypt are said to be six hundred thousand men with their families (ex. 12:37). In making a clarification, Funk (1998) said the interface to Hosea is obvious from how Matthew cites the prophet to show why the Israelites had to return to Judea from Egypt (Hosea 1:1; Matthew 2:15), (pp. 129-270, cited by Aihiokahi).

Hence, within the post-apostolic period of Christianity, Frend (1982), as cited by Aihiokhai (2016), stated that Africa played a noticeable part in forming its religious philosophy. Africa was at the center of philosophical reasoning. The great Christian eremitic and cenobitic religious communities of Anthony of Egypt and Pachomius traced their roots to Africa (Egypt). By the fourth century in Egypt, “church development thrived in almost all major cities in Africa. (p. 6).

(ii) Africa: A Place of Refugees to the Christian Religious Foundation

(ii) Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity

Harris (1985) asserted that in Christian scriptures, Egypt (Africa) is again a place of refuge for the infant Jesus and his parents (Matthew 2:13-15). The biblical scholars continue to debate the historicity of the flight into Egypt by the holy family. Some have argued that Matthew, while writing to his Jewish audience, deliberately showed a link between the biblical Moses and Jesus as well as the fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Hosea (p. 272-275; cited by Aihiokhai).

In a clarification, Funk (1998) stated that the link to Hosea is clear from how Matthew quotes the prophet to show why the holy family had to return 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, (pp. 129 – 270, cited by Ahiokai).

(ii) Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islamic Religion

When the founder of Islamic religion, Prophet Muhammed, was about to establish Islamic religion, that is, when Islam was at its incubation stage, they faced many persecutions. There were several attempts by the idolaters living in Mecca to see the extermination of the lives of the great prophet and his adherents. Moreover, because of this imposing danger, Prophet Muhammad directed that all ardent followers take refuge in Abyssinia (i.e. Ethiopia). His people were aggressive toward the Holy prophet because he was preaching a monotheistic religion, and when his followers fled to Abyssinia, they were properly welcomed and accepted by the king.

The historical event graphically pictured or articulated by Hamad (2000) as cited by Egbunu (2014) informs us that when Prophet Muhammad observed that his adherents were being killed by those who worship idols (i.e. the Jewish people) in Mecca, he directed them that they go to Abyssinia, which had a ruler (i.e. a king) who welcomed and treated everybody fairly. It is reported that this king was a Christian king (Asmah Negus), and he welcomed these Muslim fugitives very well and allowed them to stay as much as they could before going back to Median to emerge again with the Holy Prophet. Prominent among these who fled from Mecca was the prophet's own daughter – Rugayya—and her husband, Uthman Bin Affan, who was to be the third caliph. They were among those who temporarily sojourned to Abyssinia.

Then, remembering the hospitable roles that Africa played toward the growth and development of Islamic religion, Erlich (2013) remarks: "To forget Africa is to forget what makes all Muslims truly Muslim: a people of peace, love, hospitality, generous, compassion, friendship, and hope." It is not a thing of astonishment that Africa occupies a central place in Islamic law, especially in terms of religious tolerance. This is the reason why the significance of Africa is eternally 'stamped or preserved in a hadith'. Leave the Ethiopians alone, as long as they leave you alone? (p.8). Glasse (2013), as cited by Ahiokhai (2016), demonstrates his gratitude to the Negus (or the king) of Ethiopia for the kindness or hospitality shown to him and his adherents and the new revealed faith. Muhammad describes Abyssinia as "a land of honesty in faith". When the prophet heard of King Asmah Negus's death, he conducted a solemn Muslim prayer for the repose of his soul (p. 26).

Challenges confronting the practice of African hospitality in the present African contemporary society, juxtaposing the experiences of what is currently happening in Europe as a continent

One of the most outstanding factors that challenge, mediate, or are in complete opposition to this act of African hospitality, a trait that is indelible and instinctive in African lives, is poverty. It is noticeable everywhere, especially in Africa. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2000) defines poverty as "a situation when an individual does not possess or have basic necessities of life like food, house, clothing and they are pushed to pick hurtful opportunities for themselves" (p. 10).

Agundu (2012) supports this view by stating that poverty is a condition when a worker cannot earn at least a dollar payment for a day's work; and cannot afford and provide food and other necessities for his family members. Because of this extreme poverty, described in the Igbo language as "ogbenye onu ntu", the poorest among the poor is the highest level of poverty (p. 60). Thus, the problem of abject poverty makes it impossible for someone to be charitable to another.

Another major factor that distorts the spirit of African hospitality is the threatening effects of European lifestyles of individualism and eccentricity. This was indicated by a member of the interviews conducted by

Gathogo (2008). One of the respondents in an interview conducted by Gathogo, Eliab Mwendwa, stated, “African hospitality is not in England where he visited. In fact, you can stay for a whole month without being checked or have any visitor, or even know the name of your next-door neighbor, and even go out to eat at the restaurant on a special invitation. You cannot see a friend when they are eating at a restaurant; you join them immediately and begin to eat with them. If you do, then you know that you will pay for your own food. Unlike the usual commensal solidarity that is obtainable in Africa” (p. 51).

Bemoaning the deplorable condition of communal life in Africa, Healey et al (1996) inform us that Africans are seriously turning themselves into being “Copy cats” as they try to imitate Europeans’ individualistic ways of life (pp. 196-197).

The above abnormalities are not related to African culture. They prompted some African educated elites to begin to make a clarion call of convincing their fellow Africans to start now to appreciate the rich African cultural values, which constituents (or ingredients) are charitable, welcoming, eating together (commensality), and greetings. Thus, in Africa, it is good to cultivate and uphold the traditional custom of greeting, which varies from one ethnic group to another. To the Yoruba, they prostrate very well or make a profound bow whenever they greet an elder, while the Igbo do not prostrate at all. They always stand erect and stretch out their hands to shake hands with their visitors irrespective of the status.

As the tempest against the spirit of hospitality is still raging against it in Africa, in this paper, the paper still advocates that there is still light at the end of the tunnel; there is still hope for the preservation and subsequent transmission or inculcation of the spirit of hospitality in the lives of the younger generation (i.e. youths) in Nigeria. We still see the spirit of hospitality manifesting in all their actions and in their ways of living. The onus is now on contemporary African pastors, preachers, and evangelists to inspire this spirit of hospitality into flame. They should always try kindling the flame of this virtue of hospitality in the lives of the youth and not allow it to be extinguished. Thus, the lifestyles of pastors should be patterned or channeled toward cultivating the spirit of generosity, hospitality, and charity. This will motivate the youth to embrace the virtues (or internalize) of African hospitality.

Recommendation

- i) The paper discovered that a spirit of hospitality is always present in Africa, as shown by our African traditional rulers, who gave lands free of charge to the early missionaries in their different host communities.
- ii) Then the church or the guest is expected to reciprocate this kind gesture by building churches, hospitals, leprosies, schools, and the like as compensation for the great sacrifices made by the host communities in the early plantation of Christianity in Nigeria. The church should make its hospitality manifesto in perfect imitation of its founder, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- iii) Africans should guard this cultural heritage (i.e. hospitality) that their forefathers bequeathed to them and will not allow it to die.

Conclusion

African hospitality is a type of hospitality that has divine orientation and approval if it covers all the facts or dimensions of the core beliefs of the African people. We see its relevance in religion, social, economics, and in all spheres of socio-religious cum politico lives of Africans, both as a conglomeration of nations as well as a continent. African hospitality is really special because it is a type of hospitality that eschews individualism, selfishness and an egocentric lifestyle. Rather, it is a type of life that promotes, encourages, or enthrones love, community cum solidarity, cohabitation, sharing or koinonia, and oneness. Note that African hospitality frowns at the isolationism of oneself from the rest of the members of the community. A person obtains relevance or meaningfulness when he or she is in perfect relationship with the other members of the community. This is the reason African hospitality is always relational, both in nature and in the context of hospitality. This is the

difference between African hospitality and Western or European hospitality, which is always individualistic and egocentric both in nature and in context.

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