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Nigeria, Dialogue Based on the Theology of Hospitality

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NIGERIA, DIALOGUE BASED ON THE THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY

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1.0. Introduction

One of the major challenges confronting multireligious communities is the absence of an adequate template for engagement. In view of this, a number of models have been proposed. This paper focuses on the concept of “Hospitality” as a suitable model of engaging difference within the religious space. This paper posits that the practice of hospitality among members of diverse religious beliefs will curb age-old animosities. It will in addition engender growth through improved openness for the respect of each other’s otherness and deepen one’s own particular faith commitments.

To achieve its goal, this paper sets out to reawaken mutual hospitable awareness among Muslims and Christians (particularly in Nigeria) through an understanding of the place of hospitality within their respective faith traditions and cultures as diverse peoples of African origin where the virtue has significant preeminence.

However, before delving into the whole gamut of the discussion, it will be good if we can first of all understand the context of the study.

1.1. Understanding the Nigerian Context

Nigeria, situated at the western coast of Africa with a total landmass of about 910, 770 sq. Km (351,650 sq. miles) with a population of approximately 213 million inhabitants (as at 2021), accounts for about 47% of West Africa's total population and it has one of the most significant populations of youths in the world. It is by far the most populated country in Africa and currently the 7th most populous country in the world after China, India, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan and Brazil.¹ And given its average annual birth rate of

¹ World Bank Report 2021 www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria (Accessed on 15/08/2021)

2.6%, it has been projected that by the year 2050, Nigeria's population will be about 400 million which will make it then the third most populous nation after China and India. Meanwhile, given its manifold diversities, Nigeria is considered to be a highly heterogeneous society.² While Islam, Christianity, and the diverse indigenous religions, simply categorized as African Traditional Religions (ATRs) constitute its major faiths, the Yoruba, in the South West, the Hausa-Fulani in the core North and the Igbos in the South East form its three largest ethnic groups.³ Noting on this complex diversity, John Paden is of the opinion that Nigeria's regional and internal importance is derived not just from its sheer size or even its natural resources, but specifically from its unique demographic composition; it has the sixth largest concentration of Muslims in the world after Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and Iran.⁴ He adds that Nigeria is by far the largest country in the world with an approximate demographic balance between Muslims and Christians.⁵ Because of this, Archbishop Henri Teissier described Nigeria as "the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world."⁶

1.2. Challenges Related to Religious Violence in Nigeria

Sadly, within the past few decades, particularly beginning from the late 1970s, the Nigerian state has been grappling with numerous challenges woven around its complex religious and cultural diversities, specifically in its northern parts, otherwise known as "Northern Nigeria". These include; intermittent tensions/hostility across the religious divide and recurrent outbreaks of violent clashes between Muslims and Christians in different parts of Nigeria's northern parts.⁷

² For more details on this, see Otite Onigu, *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria: With Comparative Materials* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990)

³ For more on this, see Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 3-5; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1958), 15

⁴ See John N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria. Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008), 3

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Quoted in John Olurufemi Onaiyekan, "Being the Church in an Islamo-Christian Society: Emerging Patterns of Christian/Muslim Relations in Africa – A Nigerian Perspective," in G. Alberigo and A. Mushete (eds.), *Towards an African Synod*, (Concilium, 1992), 48

⁷ Cf. Marinus C. Iwuchukwu *Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Post-Colonial Northern Nigeria. The Challenges of Inclusive Cultural and Religious Pluralism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ix

Beginning from 1982, when the first-ever inter-religious violence broke out in Fagge, a suburb of the ancient commercial city of Kano, where Christians were attacked by a mob of Muslims for insisting on rebuilding their decrepit church building, to the present Boko Haram Islamic insurgency ravaging particularly its north-eastern parts, religious violence has become almost like a recurring decimal within the Northern Nigerian polity.⁸ Matthew A. Ojo observes that between December 1980 and February 2006 alone, about fifty-eight notable instances of religious-cum-ethnic violence were reported in the media; with most of them having occurred in Northern Nigeria.⁹ These include the *Maitatsine* riots of the early 1980s, Kano in 1982, the Kafanchan Riots of 1987, the 1991 and 2000 Tafawa-Balewa Riots, Potiskum in 1994, the Kano riot in 1991 and in 1995, Katsina in 1991, Zangon-Kataf in 1992, the Miss World/Sharia Riots of the 2000s, and the Jos riots of 1994, 2001, 2008 and 2010. Others include the 2004 Yelwan-Shendam Mayhem, the reprisal attacks in Kano and Maiduguri in 1998, and the 2006 Danish Cartoons Attacks also in Maiduguri.¹⁰ Consequently, Charles Abiodun posits that in view of the frequency of religious violence in its northern parts, "Nigeria is important in any discussion of violence emanating from religious radicalization as the country has recorded more conflicts over religion than all other African countries put together."¹¹

From a number of studies and researches, the following have been identified as constituting some of the possible reasons for the prevalence of religious violence in Nigeria; negative historical legacy, upsurge in religious intolerance, fundamentalism, and extremism, the inability to manage diversity, failure of the state in matters of security/criminal justice, the exploitation of religion by politicians, government

⁸ Cf. G.J. Gwamma, *An Appraisal of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria. A Christian Perspective*. Religion Study and Practice in Nigeria (Lagos: Free-Enterprise Publishers, 2004), 78.

⁹ Matthew A. Ojo, "Competition and Conflict: Pentecostals' and Charismatics' Engagement with Islam in Nigeria" In: John Azumah and Lamin Sanneh (eds.), *The African Christian and Islam* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham, 2013), 148

¹⁰ For more information on this, see Jan H. Boer, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood. 1980-2002* (Belleville, Ontario, Canada: Essence Publishing, 2003), 34-96; Sunday Bobai Agang, *The Impact of Ethnic, Political, and Religious Violence on Northern Nigeria, and a Theological Reflection on its Healing* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2011), 1-13;

¹¹ Charles Abiodun Alao, *Islamic radicalisation and violence in Nigeria*" In: James Gow, Funmi Olonisakin & Ernst Dijkhoorn (eds.), *Militancy and Violence in West Africa. Religion, politics and radicalisation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 43.

patronage, religious preferentialism, and marginalization, poverty and the poor state of the economy, external influence, the erosion of the core values of religion, culpable ignorance of the basic religious beliefs, aggressive disparaging proselyting and negative biases against the religious other.

From the foregoing, it is clear that for positive interfaith engagements between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria and in other regions with similar challenges to take place, there is the need for a form of dialogical interaction to help in entrenching a situation of religious harmony within their shared space.

1.3. Dialogue and Hospitality: A Key for Muslim-Christian Dialogue of Life

For a sustainable interreligious praxis between Islam and Christianity, especially at the ordinary level, the dialogue of life is strongly recommended as a worthwhile starting point. Kindly note that embracing the path of interfaith dialogue as essential for building trust and religious harmony across the religious divide is critical to building harmonious relationships within any society. In light of this, the dialogue of life, because of its emphasis on daily mutual praxis for all, is being advanced as that medium that offers the needed opportunity for Muslims and Christians to live out their scripture-based altruism, through a familiar tradition of hospitality.

Retrieving and encouraging the tradition of hospitality among the adherents of diverse belief systems through the dialogue of life can be preparatory for the intended transformation. In essence, the Vatican document, Dialogue and Mission (henceforth **DM**) affirms that: “dialogue (of life) is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person’s identity, his modes of expression, and his values.”¹² By extension, the dialogue of life “is a dialogical relation to promote amicable relation with people from divergent faith traditions. It begins when one encounters, lives and

¹² Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Dialogue and Mission, #29.

interacts with the others and participates in daily life activities together.”¹³ It focuses on the informal practices of ordinary people across religious divides and not on some discussion on theological issues that might lead to misunderstandings. Pope John Paul II articulates its baseline relevance when he shows that “the dialogue between ordinary believers, harmonious and constructive sharing in the situations of daily contacts is truly a basic form of dialogue, and the one which lays the foundation for more specialized encounters.”¹⁴ Leading by example, John Paul II, during his long pontificate (1978-2005), displayed the ability to strengthen interreligious relationships with gestures and personal contacts, without restricting themselves to a discussion of doctrines¹⁵ thereby confirming that the dialogue of life intrinsically “implies concern, respect and hospitality toward one another.”¹⁶

Furthermore, a number of scholars have enriched the concept with their erudite perspectives. For instance, Leonard Swidler is of the view that the dialogue of life at its most basic level sustains friendship, especially during crisis at the official or political level.¹⁷ In this regard, interreligious hospitality known and encouraged by diverse religious groups and cultures could be a starting point, but not an end point. Such an ethical practice can ensure that trust and neighborliness happen in the local contexts where religious peoples interact daily. In a nutshell, it can be said that this practical but preparatory ground for overall dialogue defines what dialogue of life stands for. In support, Abdul-Hamid, opines that: “[t]he theory of the dialogue of life states that life itself offers opportunities for people of different faiths, ethnicities and backgrounds to interact as they go about their daily activities.”¹⁸ At the end, the everydayness of

¹³ Suraya Sintang, Azizan Baharuddin & Khadijah Mohd Khambali@Hambali, *Dialogue of Life and Its Significance in Inter-Religious Relation in Malaysia*, *International Journal of Islamic Thought* Vol. 2 (Dec. 2012): 69.

¹⁴ John Paul II, “Address to participants in the Annual Meeting between the Secretariat for NonChristians and the World Council of Churches (WCC) sub-unit on Dialogue,” *Bulletin*, Vol. 62 (1986): 146.

¹⁵ Leonard Swidler, “The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille, (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Leonard Swidler, “The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille, (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 18.

¹⁸ Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue In Ghana,”

interactions among religious people aid in building up trust and offers better appreciation of each other.

1.3.1. Towards A Theology of Hospitality

To start with, the term “hospitality” is a concept that is currently gaining grounds within theological circles on how best to engage the religious other.¹⁹ It is considered to be one of the richest biblical terms which, when its deepest values are adequately understood and harnessed can go a large way in deepening and broadening people’s attitude and relationships with their fellow human beings.²⁰

No doubt, the Vatican II Council was greatly instrumental in the shift of horizons in the relationship between Christianity and the other belief systems. Based on its vision and intend, one could conclude that the Council provides a basis for developing a theology of hospitality. This is given the fact that the Council urged Christians to engage in more cordial relationships with the adherents of the other faith traditions. According to Richard Friedli, the call of Vatican II Council is for the Church to dialogue and ‘work together’ with people of other faiths.²¹ This is also a summons to hospitality. Thus, if dialogue is to be understood as “the conversation that goes on between people in a context of deep and open commitment... a sign that our relationship with others has ripened to mutual consultation,”²² then it can be argued that the theological framework on which to base such a relationship must continue to be renewed, particularly in plural societies challenged by interfaith tensions, mutual hostilities and open conflicts. Based on this, one could rightly assume that a theology of hospitality supports the intentions of the

¹⁹ See Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 231-237, for a discussion and examples; Burkhard Liebsch, *Für eine Kultur der Gastlichkeit* (Freiburg and München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2008).

²⁰ Henri Nouwen in the chapter “Creating Space for Strangers” in *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York et al: Image Publishers, Doubleday: 1986), 66

²¹ Richard Friedli, “Dialogue between the Religions – Its Cultural Anthropological Problems” in *Faith in the Midst of Faiths: Reflections on Dialogue in Community* ed. S.J. Samartha (Geneva: WCC, 1977), 29.

²² Lamin O. Sanneh, “Dialogue and Community: The Unresolved Questions”, in *Faith in the Midst of Faiths*, 101.

Council in engaging the relationship in the light of the difficulties between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria particularly in its northern parts.

1.3.2. Towards an Understanding of the Concept of Hospitality

An understanding of the concept can be enriched with a developmental exploration of its etymological terms. The term is said to be a derivative of the Latin noun *Hospitium*²³ or its adjective *Hospitalis* which is in turn derived from the Latin noun *Hospes* meaning both 'guest' or 'host.'²³ This implies that the term based on its etymology "covers both (host and guest) in a mutual relationship..."²⁴ That is, a situation that brings together the guest and the host in a close situation.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the English words "hospital," "host," "hostel" and "hospitality" all come from these same root word, "hospes."²⁵ This has great significance as each of these words stand for places of care and succour. The Dictionary of Etymology defines it as "the friendly treatment of guests or strangers."²⁶ Implying that the term is generally concerned with "the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill."²⁷ Here, the host creates a space where the non-members of a group (the guest, stranger, the foreigner, the unknown) can temporarily feel at home.²⁸ It is akin to creating a home for the guest who is far from home. In other words, a safe haven and a temporary place of succour for the guest or the stranger. With this warm and friendly welcome, a bond is inevitably created between the guest and the host, so that the guest would want to return the hospitality sometime in the future.²⁹ However, it should be noted that for hospitality to be more constructive, it has to be

²³ John Koenig, "Hospitality", Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Ed; Vol 6, 2005, 4138; Burkhard Liebsch, Für eine Kultur der Gastlichkeit (Freiburg and München: Verlag Karl Alber,2008),143

²⁴ T. Gilby, „Hospitality" in P.K. Meagher et al. (eds.), Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Religion (Washington D. C.: Corpus Publications, 1979), 1716-1717.

²⁵ Cynthia Clampitt, "Hospitality", <http://.intelligentchristian.or/hospital.htm>; See also "Hospital" in Dictionary of Ethics and Society, 1976, 445.

²⁶ Dictionary of Etymology, ed. Robert K. Barnhart, 1988, 492.

²⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary.

²⁸ Harry Murray, Do not neglect hospitality: The Catholic worker and the homeless (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,1990), 17

²⁹ David I Smith & Barbara Carvill, The Gift of the Stranger. Faith, Hospitality, and Foreign Language Learning (Grand Rapids, Michigan & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 84.

understood more than just an occasion where a host invites, and a guest is received.³⁰ It has to be understood more as where responsibilities for each other are assumed, mutual respect is presupposed and where there are obligations and expectations of both parties. These obligations, however, are not imposed by the host or by the guest, but are part of the practice of hospitality itself.³¹

1.3.2.1. Biblical Basis for the Theology of Hospitality

Gleaning through both the Old and the New Testaments, one will come across traces of the concept and its significance. In the Old Testament (OT) specifically, numerous 'stranger', 'guest', 'host', and 'foreigner' situations are chronicled which involved both individuals and nations. Several factors were responsible for such states of affairs, including the protection of self and family from the threats of famine, war or death.³² Therefore we find the story of Abraham's escape to Canaan/Egypt to be protected by Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10f), Isaac's escape to Gerar during famine to be protected by Abimelech (Gen. 26:1f), the escape of Jacob and Elimelech and their families to Egypt and Moab respectively due to hunger (Gen. 47:1f; Ruth 1:1f), and the escape of Moses from Egypt to Midian in his flight from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:15f; Acts 7:29f).³³ It is highly instructive to note that in each of these cases, those who were considered to be outside the "elect" people of God were the apparent heroes of these stories. They were the ones who against all expectations warmly welcomed, secured and restored the "insiders" of Yahweh's covenant relationship through their hospitality. For instance, in the case of Moses, not only was he welcomed and protected by Jethro the 'priest' of Median, this unknown priest housed, fed and employed him, even giving him his daughter as wife, with whom Moses had children. In later years, this same 'priest', though not a believer in the Jewish Yahweh the God of Israel; gave Moses profound counsel on how best to lead the people

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ William Sweet, "Multiculturalism, Hospitality, and the Canadian Context," In: in Freidrich Reiterer et al (eds.), *Hospitality –A Paradigm of Interreligious and Intercultural Encounter (Gastfreundschaft als Paradigma interreligiöser und interkulturelle Begegnung (Amsterdam & New York: RODOPI, 2012)216*

³² Jose E. Ramirez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 14.

³³ Ibid.

of God.³⁴ In all of these, the encounter of the “insiders” with the “outsiders” did not lead to a compromise of the faith in Yahweh. As such it can be said that in each of the cases mentioned above, the practice of hospitality prevailed without diluting the spirituality of the persons involved.

In addition, not only were the great OT heroes guests of and foreigners to other nations, they also played host to ‘strangers’. Both Abraham and Lot hosted ‘angels’ unknowingly (Gen. 18, 19) and the law prescribed the rights of aliens/strangers in various ways (Num. 35:15; Deut. 5:14; 14:21, 29; 26:11).³⁵ In fact the Israelites were ceaselessly reminded: “Do not ill-treat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt” (Ex. 22:21, NIV). Also, they were told: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19: 33-34, NIV).

Although some OT passages confirm the choice of the Jewish nation to the exclusion of some other nations (I Sam. 15:2-3; Neh. 10:30-31), mainly based on the moral misdeeds of those nations, it has also been shown that the OT is inherently committed to the acceptance of other kinds of foreigners (Deut. 23:3-9). In addition, the OT ascertains the dignity of all humanity and shows clearly that people who were “outside” of the covenant people of God also had great insights of the truths of God.³⁶ The integration of strangers into the Jewish community was an acceptable practice which accorded them the status of the ‘chosen people’ of God. The “privilege of being chosen is nevertheless accessible to any individual,”³⁷ as epitomized in the story of Ruth the Moabitess. And although during Ruth’s period a foreigner’s absorption depended on identifying with Israel’s dogma, Kristeva opines it was to shield Israel from “barbarian excesses” and “such a concept is no longer compatible with a contemporary attitude that claims the right to a difference and the dignity of every denomination...”³⁸

³⁴ The Bible, Exodus 2: 11-22; 18.

³⁵ Kidd, 14.

³⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 65 -66.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 25.

Moving from the OT to the New Testament, one notices the tremendous priority accorded to hospitality in the teachings and deeds of Jesus. His attitude, teachings and actions encapsulate the ideal attitude to be accorded even the most extreme 'other', namely, the enemy. Jesus taught that the enemy is to be engaged with extraordinary love in the words: "Love your enemy, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly" (Luke 6: 27-28). While the ordinary person would think that his enemies would deserve only anger, rejection, hatred and disdain, Jesus called on His followers to treat them with love. This is akin to pushing earthly logic down the drain. One can say it was a spiritual Copernican Revolution. The implication therein is that in for His followers (Christians) to demonstrate a true understanding of the love of God, they must love all human persons "irrespective of their sex, religion, race, colour, nationality, age or intelligence – with the same bold, unconditional love."³⁹ Essentially, He broadened the scope of **philoxenia** (the love of the stranger) to everyone including enemies (Matthew 5:44). His actions and engagements with the religious others were dignified and marked by deep respect.

Theologically Specified Account of Hospitality

There is a theological basis for the concept of Hospitality which can rightly be referred to as the "Theology of Hospitality." The theological basis is based on the following: Firstly, a solid motivation for hospitality lies in the idea that God reveals Himself in the stranger, the foreigner, the other. As M.M. Jansen says: "God enters the picture as a God *incognito*, to whom we offer or we do not offer hospitality. [...] And, without knowing whom we are dealing with, we discover with surprise the attitude with which we met God."⁴⁰ Thus, the stranger becomes a source of God's revelation. It should be noted that the whole idea about finding God in the "other" is an ideal with a long history of the Christian Church. For instance, the story of the three divine visitors to Abraham and Sarah as relayed in

³⁹ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance and Community* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 70-71.

⁴⁰ M. M. Jansen, *Languages to God: Signposts by Paul Ricoeur* (Amsterdam: 2002):99; R. Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters. Interpreting Otherness* (London, UK: Routledge, 2003)

Genesis 18: 1-15, the tradition of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus⁴¹ where Christ revealed himself in the unfamiliar foreigner, but only when He is invited to stay and share bread with them, when they are hospitable to Him. Thus, the “other” acquires relevancy and becomes a bearer of God’s revelation for the Church.

Secondly, in the NT, extending hospitality to strangers is not just thoughtful, generous, or a polite act that marks Christians as kind human beings. Gemma Tulud asserts that “Hospitality is a way of life that is fundamental to the Christian identity.”⁴² It bothers on the whole question of compassion which is at the core of the Christian belief system. It fulfils the command to love God with the whole of one’s heart, strength and soul and to love one’s neighbour as oneself.⁴³ That is, to be ethical is to be hospitable to strangers. Thus, it can be said that warmly receiving the stranger, the foreigner, the unknown, the unfamiliar is not an option; it is a central dimension of being not just a Christian but a human, since God has given humankind the gift of, and call to connection⁴⁴ that is the ability and the command to love one’s neighbour.

1.3.2.2. Hospitality in the Christian Tradition

The legacy of the Christian Church is a rich resource for understanding scriptural hospitality. To buttress this point, a few instances will be given. As far back as the 6th Century, St. Benedict’s Rule in the monasteries included the familiar and often-quoted phrase: “Let everyone that comes be received as Christ”.⁴⁵ This is an indication of the prominent position which hospitality occupied in every Benedictine Monastery. Benedictine hospitality went beyond the application of the expected social graces towards guests which included shallow smiles and warm receptions. For St Benedict, hospitality meant that everyone who came, the poor, the traveller, and the curious,

⁴¹ (Luke 24:13-35),

⁴² Cf. Gemma Tulud, *Pilgrims in the Wilderness: Towards an Intercultural Theology of Migration* (Leiden, Boston: 2010)

⁴³ Cf. Mark 12:28-31

⁴⁴ Olthuis, *Becoming human as gift*, 72

⁴⁵ Jane Michele McClure, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, <http://www.thedome.org/AboutUs/rule.html>, 11/7/08.

whether they belonged to the Christian faith or not, whatever their status or educational background, should be received with genuine acceptance. However, in view of the need to protect monastic serenity, he cautioned against “lingering with guests”.⁴⁶

In a 17th century discourse on hospitality, Caleb Dalechamp called attention to the merits and rewards of hospitality: For instance, for Abraham’s hospitality, a son was given; for Lot, life was preserved; for Jethro, a son-in-law was given; for Rahab, immortal praise and deliverance was secured, for Boaz, he was blessed with Obed, for the widow of Zarephath, there was miraculous increase; for the Shunamite, a son was given; for the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, there was illumination; for Publius of Malta, his father was healed; for Gaius, there was a commendable report; and in the parable of the last judgment, hospitality has promise even for life to come.⁴⁷ With such exhortations the Christian Church held on to the virtue of hospitality.

1.3.2.3. Hospitality in Islam

Quite a number of scholars of pre-Islamic history in the Arabian Peninsula are of the view that “Hospitality” is one of the noble virtues in the Islamic ethical and spiritual system, inherited from the Bedouin culture, whose sustenance was supported by the harsh arid environment. Hospitality in this regard is both a responsibility toward others, and a great reminder for the appreciation of human diversity. As such, the notion of Islamic hospitality is explained within the category of “host/guest” or “host/traveler” relationship, rather than that of “host/stranger.”⁴⁸

Furthermore, some of the teachings on hospitality in Islam are associated with a person’s responsibility towards his neighbour, the needy, and the general teaching on peace. Significantly, Muslims recognize the brotherhood of man as found in Qur’an (Surah al-Hujurat 49:13) which says: “O people, we created you from the same male and female,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Caleb Dalechamp, *Christian Hospitalitie: Handled Common-Place-Wise in the Chapel of Trinity College in Cambridge* (Cambridge: TH Buck, 1632), 85.

⁴⁸ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 10. 1009 Ibid., 12. 1010 Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, 127.

and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another..." By this teaching, Muslims are expected to see all human beings as brothers and sisters to/for whom they are responsible.⁴⁹ Also, Qur'an 51:19 says: "A portion of their money was set aside for the beggar and needy". This injunction was said to have been given in Mecca where Muslims lived with non-believers. Therefore, the responsibility of the Muslim was to take care of the suffering 'other' irrespective of race and religion.⁵⁰

Islam also teaches that love for the neighbour is an integral part of love for God. According to Prophet Mohammed, "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself"⁵¹. Thus, without love for one's neighbour, there is neither true faith in God nor claim to righteous living. This perception of love for God and love for the neighbour is a major commonality which Islamic leaders have identified between Christianity and Islam.

1.3.2.4. African Relationality: Hospitality from the African Perspective

The contextual usage of Africa cannot exhaustively be a representative of all peoples living in the sub-Saharan region. Rather, the term speaks to the major commonalities that every African can generally identify with as a distinct people. One of such is their attitude and positive disposition towards the unknown or the known foreigner, the stranger or the guest. It is a vital aspect of existence in Africa in general to be receptive and warm towards the guests.⁵² John Mbiti attests that hospitality permeates into all sectors of African life "so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it."⁵³ It is a way of life that is intimately bound up with personal relationships and community.⁵⁴ Its significance agrees with the meaning of African life as personalized relationship, in which a person

⁴⁹ Muhammad Al-Khamis, "The Role of Religious Leaders in Peace Building and Sustenance", in Muslim/Christian Dialogue on Peace in Jos eds. Dennis Ityavyar and Zacharys Gundu (Jos: InterGender, 2004), 100.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁵¹ Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, 67-1, Hadith no. 45.

⁵² Those who have been to the African continent or have encountered them anywhere can attest to this general spirit of hospitality. This does not in any way assume that it is only peculiar to African. Cf. Elochukwu.E. Uzukwu "Missiology Today: The African Situation" in E.E. Uzukwu (ed.), Religion and the African Culture: Inculturation –A Nigerian Perspective (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1988), 158

⁵³ John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (Nairobi: EAEP, 1969), 1.

⁵⁴ Joseph G. Healey & Donald F. Sybertz, Towards an African Narrative Theology (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, Africa, 1996), 170

attains fulfillment, not in isolation, but within the whole. The foremost South African Anglican prelate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu used the metaphor of the now famous *Ubuntu* Philosophy as a starting point. The Ubuntu philosophy “which is from the Zulu ethnic group in South Africa defines what constitutes the African understanding of connectivity or communal living in the words, “Umuntu Ngumutu Ngabantu” loosely translated as “I am because we are.” This implies that the African understands his worldview from the whole. Meaning is only found in the degree in which he or she finds his or her place in relation to others. As a result, African hospitality offers a positive response toward human existence, which is artfully crafted on interpersonal and interdependent relations. In this light, hospitality defines good life, but life is meaningless without genuine expression of humanness. As at the very core of African hospitality, is the establishment and maintenance of personal relationships (individual/community) relationships. The attitudes and actions of the host vis a-vis the guests are geared towards the realization of this central value.⁵⁵ In view of this, Eugene Uzukwu states that the minimum that the African expects from his kith and kin is hospitality⁵⁶.

For Africans, the principle of mutuality, which undergirds interrelatedness, requires that anyone can practice hospitality, anywhere, and at any time. Julius M. Gathogo affirms that, “the African carries his hospitality to fields, in politics, economics etc.,”⁵⁷ based on the conviction that the stronger the connecting bond among persons, the richer life can be appreciated. The practice of African hospitality primarily aims at establishing and maintaining personal relationships, between individuals, between individuals and communities, and between communities and communities. Inhospitality attracts curses from elders. A cursed person becomes a disaster to the society, because through him the relational bond is weakened.

⁵⁵ Gregory I. Olikenyi, *African Hospitality. A Model for the Communication of the Gospel in the African Cultural Context* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2001), 129

⁵⁶ Eugene E. Uzukwu, “Missiology Today: The African Situation,” in E. E. Uzukwu ed., *Religion and African Culture: Inculturation – A Nigerian Perspective* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1988), 158.

⁵⁷ Bénézet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (reprint, Nairobi, 1998),

1.3.3. How Hospitality Can Help in Fostering Positive Interfaith Dialogue

First, the theology of hospitality is rooted in God. It has been shown in this paper that the adherents of the African indigenous religions,⁵⁸ together with Islam and Christianity, share this fundamental religious position, although with variations. For each of the traditions, God constitutes the foundation of faith. This notion of God serves as a unifying principle and a rallying point for the diversity of the traditions and makes hospitality a possibility. All three traditions accept God as Creator of mankind and all the things in the world. Man's common origin therefore becomes a pivotal basis for interreligious interactions and the accommodation of one another.

Secondly, the theology of hospitality is based on our common humanity. The Bible teaches that man, whatever is his race, persuasion or religion, was created by God in the image of God. The Christian is called to love God and to love his neighbour as himself. The neighbour here is anyone from any background who is in need of the Christian's act of compassion. The same goes for the Muslim as mentioned in the several passages of the Qur'an above. Also, in the indigenous religions, it has been shown that the African family and kinship are avenues for social cohesion and that the welcoming of guests is on the basis of their humanity. It is in such hospitality that life is made meaningful like in the African adage: 'He who brings kola brings life'.

Thirdly, the theology of hospitality involves an unbroken thread of communication between humans and God and between human themselves. Communication between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria must navigate from the cultural practice of 'greeting' one another, to the more conscious programme of inter-religious dialogue. Through dialogue, people who are 'different' are able to share their common spiritual resources and participate with one another. This helps to bring adherents of the different religions together and strengthens their relationship.

⁵⁸ See chapter five.

Lastly, the notion of hospitality can help to rebuild trust and confidence between adherents of diverse faith traditions as it makes them realize that they owe each other a sense of responsibility. This is given the fact that the theology of hospitality is built around openness to each other, the cultivation of friendship, acceptance, the commitment to love beyond borders even those set up by religious difference and the emphasis on the responsibility each owes each other first, as children of God and secondly, as fellow human beings.

1.4. Conclusion

It is needless to state that religion is both a source of conflict and a resource for peace but that attention is being devoted in recent times to the deployment of religion as an instrument for peace. Therefore, it is my view that the greatest treasure that religion can contribute to the transformation of conflict in Nigeria is theological. And based on Christian theology of an ethic of hospitality, I recommended the need to pursue a theology of hospitality for Nigeria. The Church in Nigeria, must seek to understand, teach and practice it in its relationship with Muslims. It is hoped that such a theology of hospitality will make Nigeria more liveable, more peaceful and more reconciled. Some strategies to achieve these are the task of the next chapter.

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