

African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal Christ's hospitality?

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African hospitality can be defined as that extension of generosity, giving freely without strings attached. This explanation agrees with Echema (1995:35) who says that, "it is an unconditional readiness to share" (give and take). It is, thus, the willingness to give, to help, to assist, to love and to carry one another's burden without necessarily putting profit or rewards as the driving force. Olikenyi (2001:102) explains that, African hospitality, which he contends, is a vital aspect of existence in Africa in general, is one of the few facets of Ancient African culture that is still intact and strongly practiced today by most Africans in spite of all the forces of recent external influence or even internal pressure. He quotes Uzuoku (1998:158) who develops this view further when he says,

Despite the destabilization of traditional life by colonialism, foreign world views, technology and modern living...African hospitality has held rather well to the extent that it could be described as a way of being an African.

African hospitality is simply African cultural and moral values, which are not theoretical, but a way of life (Moila 2002a:1). This shows that the concept of hospitality is too wide that like African religion, it permeates all spheres of African life (see Mbiti 1969:1f). While defining African hospitality as the brotherhood or sisterhood "between the members of the same family group and/or of the same clan," Moila (2002a:2) goes on to say that,

Each member of the same family group is bound to offer food and shelter to any member of his or her group who needs it. However, it is also an African custom to offer hospitality even to strangers. Hospitality is perceived and practiced by Africans as open-handed, instinctive and the most natural thing in the world.

By saying that hospitality as practiced by Africans is "instinctive and the most natural thing in the world," Moila is alluding to the fact that African

hospitality is more unique from other versions that are practiced in many other parts of the world, especially in Europe and North America, as we shall see in our ongoing discussion in this paper. On the whole, this paper is very important in that hospitality in Africa is not an academic theory that is simply exercised by ‘arm-chair’ practitioners but a practical way of life on how people live their lives on a day-to-day basis, as the study seeks to show. Moila (2002:1) explains the practicality of African hospitality as seen during his early upbringing and by so doing, he gives us a general picture of what African hospitality is all about and how it is lived and practised right from our villages. He says,

African hospitality is one of those African cultural and moral values, which my parents absorbed into their Christian lifestyle. Not only my parents, but also all Christians on the farm where I grew up did this.... The farm was divided into Christian and non-Christian villages. However, these two villages did not prevent interaction between people. At all times, actions of hospitality transcended those physical divisions. For instance, on Christmas day or any other festive day, children from both villages would go from one house to another to sing and to be given bread or cakes and drinks. As such, Christmas day was used by families of both villages to display generosity and hospitality to all children on the farm.

This paper is therefore important when we consider, Moila’s experiences, which, no doubt, represents the upbringing of the entire African children to adulthood. Its importance is clearly seen when we consider the fact that we are writing on African hospitality as African Christians. As believers in the Gospel of Christ, the interaction between Christ’s ideal hospitality and the African hospitality serves the original aim of working towards this paper.

Another point worth of note is the fact that African hospitality will be described, defined and be interpreted. On this basis, it is concluded that “African hospitality is a powerful tool for gluing the community together as well as the community with ancestors and God” (Moila 2002a: 1). Finally, the significance of this paper is seen in Oduyoye’s (2001:94) words when she says that hospitality is “inherent in being African, as well as in adhering to a religion that derives from the Bible.” It is “given a religious meaning, and linked with the ancestors, Christ and God.” As we study African hospitality, its ancient practices, its present challenges, its compatibility or incompatibility with the Gospel of Christ, we need to underline Archbishop Tutu’s words that,

Africans believe in something that is difficult to render in English. We call it *ubuntu, botho*. It means the essence of being human. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humaneness, gentleness, and hospitality, putting yourself on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognizes that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together (Tutu 1989:69).

It is therefore of paramount importance to study about our history through focussing on the Ancient African hospitality as we examine its compatibility with Christ's ideal hospitality in the modern day Africa.

Socio-Religious Manifestations of African Hospitality

Professor Moila (2002a: 3-5) best illustrates the three ways in which African hospitality manifests itself:

Religious Life

Firstly, African hospitality in the religious domain includes relating well with the ancestors. That's why, in the Ancient African hospitality, and to an extent, in the modern day, it is customary "when drinking beer, to pour out the last few drops in the calabash for the ancestors". Similarly, it is believed that, when a pot of beer cracks, it is said to be good for the ancestors are eating (Mönnig 1978:61). Moila (2001:3) contends that the Pedi woman will always dish out food for the ancestors when she is cooking. This is common even among the Kikuyu, the Giriama, the Digo, the Chonyi, the Kamba and the Taita communities of Kenya, only that the East African communities have had a characteristic of pouring anything, including water, tea, or food on the ground before they consume it as a way of seeking blessings from the ancestors before they consume it¹ thereby appeasing them. It is equivalent to prayers offered in the modern African Christianity every time before we take meals. This symbolises a harmonious relationship between the living and the living-dead. Who are the ancestors? It is the deceased people who become ancestors and still remain part of the community. They are also referred to as the living-dead. Traditionally, as Healey and Sybertz (1969:211) say, the living dead were remembered in the oral tradition for five generations. Their being remembered or not, depended on how much good they had done on earth, especially hospitality

¹ These findings have come out of my social interactions with the above people for years.

to others. For as Dickson (1984:198) points out: “In African thought those who become ancestors must have lived exemplary lives; it is not everyone who dies who becomes an ancestor, so that the cult of the dead is not to be equated with that of the ancestors”.

The question of ancestorship and hospitality is very crucial in Africa. For example, the Fang of Gabon believe that an ancestor passes by in the person of a stranger and, therefore, a stranger should be given a very kind and warm treatment (Olikenyi 2001:105). Similarly, the Balsa treat strangers, orphaned, handicapped people, beggars and lepers very well because of their belief that their ancestors visit them in these forms (Olikenyi 2001:105). Generally, in most African communities, it is believed that unexpected guests are the embodiment of ancestors; hence, they are given the ancestors’ food (Moila 2002a:3). In such hospitality, it means communing with ancestors through such impromptu services to guests hence, maintaining a relationship through the practise of hospitality.

Social life

Secondly, African hospitality manifests itself through social life, which is also fully permeated by religion. In so doing, it serves for the sustenance of holistic community (Moila 2002a:3). For that reason, activities such as dancing and singing are “perceived as hospitable activities in that they bind the community together” (Moila 2002:3). Africans dance to celebrate every “imaginable situation – joy, grief, love, hate, to bring prosperity, to avert calamity. In addition, singing and joyful conversation enable African people to minimise tensions within enclosed community” (Thorpe 1991:116). Idowu (1973:84) observes that,

Songs constitute a rich heritage for the whole of Africa. For Africans are always singing and in their singing and poetry, they express themselves. In this way, all their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears about the future, find an outlet. Singing is always a vehicle conveying certain sentiments or truths. When songs are connected with rituals they convey the faith of worshippers from the heart-faith in the Deity, belief in and about divinities, assurance and hopes about the present and with regard to the hereafter.

This shows that African songs are not just a concordance of notes and voices, but each song expresses a general mood and meaning of a given situation. It also shows that dance when being accompanied by song is

used to express more than just entertainment in that it becomes a manifestation of the feeling of the individual or a group thus communicating their interior sentiments, expectations and aspirations. In so doing, African hospitality is clearly expressed. Whether in the church, in political arena, in educational institutions, or in whatever area of our social life, songs and dances have not lost their value in Africa. Chima (1994:60) stresses this point when he says,

Whether songs are used in rites of passage (birth, puberty, initiation, marriage etc.) or in the various human activities (work, hunting, harvesting etc.) and whether their contents refer to birds, animals, seasons or humans, songs have human life, behaviour and relationships as their main interest.

Thus, songs and dances are powerful expressions of African hospitality; and cannot be wished away when discussing this concept of hospitality throughout our study. Another common expression of our African hospitality is through community drama. As Njino (1992:7) notes, drama is a play performed by actors based on poetry, legends, myths, past or present events, for either entertainment or teaching moral and social lessons. Thus, it is closely related to song and dance. From time immemorial, it has been used to mock evil or to mock ungodly behaviours, to caricature, to satirize and to conscientize the society on what ought to be taken seriously (see Njino 1992:8). It is also used to mock any abuse of African hospitality and to praise and to educate people on hospitality; and as we move on with the 21st century, it will be more useful in the African Church.

Song, dance and drama are accompanied by instruments like guitar (which is not originally African but a Western adaptation) “*Kayamba*” (an African musical instrument) and drum.² In general instruments, themselves as Njino (1992:10) notes, communicate particular messages. A good example is a drum. Depending on the size of the drum, it was used to send a message of death and mourning (Mutugi 2001:82). In other words, the sound it produces matters a lot. It also communicates a message of joy and celebration. It is also used as a call signal for inter-village communication. This is especially done in times of war or any other urgency (see Njino 1992:10ff). In any case, the Chiefs *barazas* (meetings) in the ancient Africa relied on drums to announce or call upon the people to assemble (Mutugi 2001:82).

² This is an observation made through participatory observation in both the Kenyan and South African context.

Interestingly, many African radios and television stations have adopted the use of the drums to announce the different programmes. Good examples include: The national television and Radios in Tanzania and Nation Television of Kenya – all in East Africa.³

In other words, as Moila (2002:4) contends, in the social sphere hospitality plays the role of the life affirming and life sustaining. For indeed an individual is never alone. The Agikuyu of Kenya have a saying (proverb) that, “he who eats alone dies alone” (Wanjohi 1997:21). The Kamba of Kenya also have the same saying as Mbiti (2002:83) tells us. Mbiti contends that the proverb is used to highlight the value of sharing both joy (food) and sorrow (death). He further says that if there is no fellowship, there is no sharing of food during one’s life, this follows that there will be no sharing of grief and bereavement at one’s funeral. In this regard, hospitality means more than sharing of experiences by members of a group. Moila (2002a:4) goes further and asserts that hospitality eradicates loneliness. Thorpe (1991:120) affirms this when he comments about the Zulu culture, “individuals cannot exist alone. They are because they belong”. Moila (2002:4) goes on to argue that any disruption of the well being of a community calls for the members of a societal group to sit down together and share a common meal. After borrowing heavily from the many African societies such as Asu of Tanzania, the Nupe of Nigeria, the Efe (Pygmy) of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Fulani of West Africa, Mbiti aptly summarises the meaning of the ideal hospitality in Africa,

It can be made more palatable to avoid the state in which ‘a person who eats alone dies alone’. If we eat together, we can also happily die together—whether according to African Religion, Christianity, or other religious traditions. There is in each person something exceedingly valuable, wonderful, and indestructible....

In the social domain, African hospitality has a lot to do with material support on auspicious occasions such as betrothals, marriages, initiations, fundraising for medical bills, mourning for the dead, burials, education of children and social gatherings. In such situations, villagers pour in without waiting for invitation cards or any formal invitation.⁴ This is all to do with

³ These examples can be noted through listening to the Radio and Television Stations.

⁴ This paragraph is partly informed by research before 2001 when I was working for my book on “African hospitality”. It is also informed by Prof. Moila’s researches (2002a:4).

the communality of African society where one person's happiness is happiness for all and one person's sorrow is sorrow for all.

Economic life

Another area where African hospitality is manifested is in the economic life. This involves communal willingness to assist each other. From the ancient times, Africans have displayed their hospitality by co-operating in works such as agricultural work, the building and repair of houses, land cultivation and clearance of bushy areas, hunting, and fishing among other areas.⁵ With regard to the Kikuyu of Kenya, Kenyatta (1938:42ff) goes on to show how African hospitality depends heavily on industry. By industry, it means a quality of being hard-working to promote the economic well being of the community – while at the same time discouraging laziness as the destruction of the community. Kenyatta goes on to analyse the type of industries among the Kikuyu of Kenya, most of which were conducted communally as a gesture of hospitality. They include ironwork, hut building, pottery, basket making, skin tanning, musical instruments, and agricultural activities.⁶ The concept of hard working, therefore, assumes that it is when you are hard working that you will have something to be hospitable with such as food, shelter, clothing and other materials.

In Africa, one cannot be mean with his or her services. For a hospitable person is one who is generous in providing food and shelter for the needy and services for whoever needs help. With regard to the Luo of Western Kenya, Obengo (1997:53) explains that a hospitable and generous person is termed as “*jangwono*”, which means “a gracious person”. This agrees with the Kikuyu community who refer to a hospitable person as “*mutugi*” which has two meanings: “a gracious person” or/and “a hospitable person.” This shows how the word “hospitable” is to the Africans. For to be associated with grace, it means it is a divine name. For God is also described as “gracious” among the Africans. To be hospitable therefore is to participate in God's gracious acts of doing well to others, including working to assist in improving the economic or social well being of the individual and the society in general.

⁵ These ideas can be found in Kenyatta (1938:42ff), Moila (2002:4) and Obengo (1997:53).

⁶ For details see Jomo Kenyatta 1938. *Facing Mount Kenya* p.42ff

As Obengo (1997:57) says, of the Luo people of Kenya, a sharply contrasting term to hospitality is “*ja wooro*” which describes both the greedy and the stingy. Among the *Kikuyu*, the vice opposed to generosity and hospitality, which is referred to as *ithunu* – is almost absolute. Mean or stingy people stand condemned as social outcasts and are believed to be cursed people (Wanjohi, 1997:114). In the ancient times, they were highly stigmatised; and were classed with robbers, murderers, prostitutes, witches, sorcerers, corrupt, defrauders and greedy people of the world who are short sighted and lacking in vision (Mutugi 2001:44). A Kikuyu proverb that says, “A mean person refuses to serve food to one who has eaten,” is used to caution against meanness or being stingy in socio-economic life. It is reminiscent of Christ’s words that, “He who saves his life loses it and whosoever loses it finds it” (Mark 8:34-35).

However, African hospitality is dispensed in moderation and in prudence. This is demonstrated by the following proverbs: “Too much generosity depletes the cows of the one visited in the morning” (Wanjohi 1987:61). This Kikuyu proverb cautions on reckless hospitality, otherwise called in the Bible – prodigality. Another proverb that cautions on foolish dispensation of hospitality is the Ganda proverb that says, “Visitor is a visitor for several days, and then put the person to work” (Healey and Sybertz 1996:173). It agrees with the Swahili proverb, which says that, “A visitor is a guest for two days, on the third day, put him or her to work (by giving him or her a hoe)” (Healey and Sybertz 1996:172). These proverbs imply that a person is not a visitor forever. At one stage he or she will be accepted as one of us, who now needs to work like the rest of us in our forms to promote the economic well being of the host and the entire community. This proverb was used in Tanzania by President Julius Nyerere, during the *Ujamaa* policies to discourage laziness among the idlers of Tanzania, and Africa at large, who consumes the sweat of others, like parasites, in the name of going for holidays and other excuses (see Healey and Sybertz 1996: 173ff). Other proverbs that clarify that African Hospitality has to be in moderation and in prudence are, “Having too many friends empties ones pockets” (Kikuyu), and “The family oil is not to be used on strangers” (Kikuyu) (See Wanjohi, 1997:27)

Thus, while acknowledging the need for hospitality they urge that prudence to be the guide in its practice. It also shows that hospitality is more than welcoming people; for it also means avoiding being misused or being

exploited, as the above proverbs have shown. While acknowledging that prudence as the guide in the dispensation of hospitality, many African proverbs tend to caution on the danger of the hosts themselves impatience with the visitors. This is especially so in our modern economy when people are too busy in this task oriented Africa, as the section on modern challenges will show. In addressing this, the Chewa have a proverb that says, "treat the visitor well because she/he is like a morning dew which disappears very quickly with the morning sun."⁷ It is mainly used when hosts get tired of the visitors and begin to mistreat them.

Oduyoye (2001:94-5) quotes Rose-Zoe Obianga who contends that Africans welcomed Europeans and adopted Europeans values only to find that the element of reciprocity was missing. As she further says, Africans resisted this misuse of their hospitality and continue to do so when the outside values are deemed incompatible with African norms.⁸ Oduyoye (2001:95) cites the case of Nyerere of Tanzania who linked hospitality with work and economic productivity: "treat your guests as guests for two days, and on the third day, give them hoes." That is, put them to work doing whatever you do to sustain your hospitality. Thus, hospitality demands that we teach not only life skills but also specifically economic skills in order to prevent dependency and parasitism" (Oduyoye, 2001:95). All in all, hospitality and generosity as Moila (2002a: 5) says, are inseparable virtues of a good person in most African traditions.

Hospitality and Interdependence

As we have already seen, African hospitality is grounded on the fact that no one is an island of himself or herself rather each and every one is part of the whole. Mbiti's summary of African philosophy as we have already seen, that is, "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" (Mbiti 1969:106) best sums up the grounds in which Africans hospitality is built. This is the emphasis on interdependence, which agrees with Pauline theology on the need to recognise other people's gifts and talents in order to edify the church and the society in general (see Ephesians 4:10-12, 1 Corinthian 12).

⁷ Interview with Prof. Isabel Phiri on 13th September 2003.

⁸ The ongoing debate in the Anglican Church on whether to accept homosexual clergy can illustrate this point in that the African churches have vehemently refused to accept the consecration of homosexual Bishops in both Europe and North America as they contend it is against African norms and Biblical traditions.

Many African proverbs will express this communalistic approach to life: “One log does not make a bridge (Kikuyu)” (Mutugi 2001:21). It means, on himself or herself alone, an individual cannot do something substantial. One needs others for advice, teaching, rebuke, correcting and training above other things (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). Since bridges help the people to cross over the river, and do businesses such as trading and general interactions, one log (read one person) cannot, without teaming up with the rest, ensure the continuity of the members of the community for by relying on him or her, the people may starve or be separated for lack of a good bridge to make them pass over and meet. Thus, one cannot advice himself or herself; nor rebuke his or her own wrongs; nor correct or train himself or herself; nor can he or she see his or her back; for a log needs other logs to combine and make a firm bridge to ensure safety as we cross over the valleys of life together.

Another proverb that explains the value of interdependence is, “Wealth comes by working together” (Kikuyu) (Mutugi 2001:21). It means that for a society to prosper, co-operation and mutual support is the key to success. This co-operation is to start from a house/family, clan, and tribe to the whole nation. It agrees with Christ’s caution that a house divided cannot stand (Matthew 12:25). To acquire wealth and thereby improve the nation’s economic well-being calls for a genuine hard work in a co-operative atmosphere.

The clearest expression of African hospitality in terms of interdependence is found in a Kikuyu proverb that says that, “All things are interdependent.” The original translation should have been, “no one can dare live without support from another person as success can not be assured.” It means that in the society of men and women, every one’s contribution is important and necessary. It agrees with St. Paul when he says,

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith... and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:10-14).

An exegesis on this will show that St. Paul contends that for the house of Christ to be completely built, it has to be erected by unity in diversity. That is, the different gifts will have to come in play, some as evangelists, others

as prophets, others as pastors, others as teachers, others as administrators, others as singers and in every other way. For the church to be the way it was meant to be, all talents need to be seen as assets that will need to be given room to nourish the church and therefore edify it as St. Paul advised (1 Corinthians 12-14).

Another proverb, which explains the value of interdependence in African hospitality is, "The hornless animal leans on the one that has them" (Mutugi 2001:21). This Kikuyu proverb can be compared with what the New Testament implies by fellowship among the believers in Christ. The hornless animal can refer to somebody who is a doctor but he or she is not trained as a teacher and therefore cannot teach his children and therefore, even though his/her profession is noble, he or she needs the services of a teacher and vice-versa. The theme of interdependence is so crucial in African cultural hospitality such that even in oral narratives animals have been personified thereby showing its value in African hospitality. In addition, the story below over a bird and animals will seek to demonstrate how human beings cannot afford the luxury of isolating themselves from one another; as it is costly, risky and unwise.

In Mwea plains of Kirinyaga District in Kenya, where I come from, there is a small spotted bird, which is often seen where cows are grazing. The locals have given this bird different names. Some call it *Ndeithi* – meaning the one who shepherds. Others call it *Nyange* – meaning the brown or "the white one who moves here and there." It can also mean the beautiful one. Others call it *Ndieri*, which is a meaningless word when translated in the local language – the Kikuyu. These many names show the many roles that she plays plus her importance in educating humanity on the theme of interdependence. Interestingly, this bird follows the grazing cattle as if it were the Shepherd and the reason for doing this is that as the cattle moves in the grazing land, grasshoppers and other nutritious insects are disturbed and exposed. This in turn gives the bird the opportunity to feast on them easily. In this analogy, we realise that both the cattle and the bird need one another in that the bird helps to remove the ticks that cling to the body of the cow to suck its blood, with the danger of infecting the animal with East Coast Fever and other diseases; while at the same time, the bird depends on the cow, who exposes insects from their hiding places thereby giving it a chance to feast on them.

This symbiotic behaviour clearly expresses the ideal African hospitality where we see one another as possible assets at all times. It agrees with St. Paul who echoes Christ when he says that the body is a unit of many parts which need one another at all times. For “the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body ...If the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be ...” 1 Corinthians 12:12-26).Arguing on the value of interdependence, the retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu says,

In our African language we say, ‘a person is a person through other persons’. I would not know how to be a human being at all except (that) I learned this from other human beings. We are made for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence. We are meant to complement each other. All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we break that fundamental Law of our being. Not even the most powerful nation can be completely self-sufficient (Tutu 1989:71)

African hospitality is thus characterised by the emphasis on interdependence. It is in agreement with Pauline theology, which is echoed from Christology, especially on the assertion that we are one body, one people of God – despite the many different gifts, and talents that are bestowed upon each and every one of us by God – our maker. This calls us to share whatever talents and gifts we have for the sake of God and the general prosperity of our society as away of encouraging one another. For as Hebrew 10:25 says, we ought to encourage one another for the Day of the Lord is coming.

The uniqueness of African Hospitality

The overall study of this subject shows that African hospitality is unique from the hospitality in the rest of the world especially in comparison with that of North America and Europe. Its uniqueness is seen in the fact that it has less pretence and has a natural approach. This is what Healey and Sybertz (1996:168) mean by their assertion that it is “deep and sincere.” By nature, Africans are reputedly hospitable. This contributes to its uniqueness. As one of my interviewees, Eliab Mwendwa,⁹ says,

⁹ My interviews with Eliab Mwendwa on the 8th of November 1998

Such hospitality is not in England where I visited. In fact, you can stay with somebody for a whole month who has never greeted you, and whom you do not know his or her name. If he (or she) tells you 'lets go for a cup of tea in a hotel', for instance, do not be surprised if he (or she) tells you to pay for yourself.

Mwendwa goes on to say that, "Eating is by appointments. You do not just join the supper or lunch when you find others eating as it is in Africa. If you are late for meals, just relax, you will eat another time." The uniqueness of African hospitality can be argued on the basis that, unless you are invited for a meal or dinner by a westerner, you do not expect a treat.¹⁰ In the ancient Kikuyu hospitality, it was more unique than it is today in that, a hungry person, a passer-by or a stranded stranger could go to the garden, in a strange land, and if he (or she) was genuinely hungry, he (or she) would get into somebody's garden and consequently eat as much ripe bananas, sugar cane or any ripe fruit but was not supposed to carry it with him (or her) outside the spot.¹¹ The danger of this ancient hospitality is that it could encourage parasitism whereby when a person does not want to work, he moves to a strange corner where he is not known and enjoys their hospitality like any other genuinely stranded stranger.

However, it is imperative, at this stage, to underscore the fact that such attitudes are changing slowly by slowly in our modern day Africa. This can be attributed to the fact that supply in proportion to the people in our modern world is lesser. Surely, one cannot afford to cook such food that used to be cooked for the entire extended family and beyond! The population has grown bigger; the subdivision of land has left many with small pieces of land, which cannot adequately supply the family with enough food.¹² Still, the change of attitude, that is weakening our hospitality can also be attributed to the mushrooming of commercial places like hotels, restaurants, bars and bonding and lodgings which have replaced the many social gatherings for leisure such as beer drinking sessions that used to be there.

A German missionary, Rev. Johannes Beyerhaus (1994-99) was constantly surprised and overwhelmed by the unique hospitality that he received in

¹⁰ My interviews with Rev. John Mararo on the 6th of November 1998.

¹¹ Interview with Julius Gatimu Kaburu on the 9th of November 1998.

¹² This information is gathered as a result of my participant observation in my Kenyan context and especially the central province. It is also as a result of my interviews with Julius Kaburu Gatimu.

Kenya while serving as a lecturer/missionary at St. Andrews' College of Theology and Development, Kabare-Kenya. As a lecturer, he one day went to *Kiathi* Anglican Church to supervise his theological students who were attached there, on one Sunday. According to him, his visit was unexpected but the local Christians insisted that he and the students should have lunch with him. Consequently, they got the food, which was cooked for a particular family while the hosting family went without lunch on that day. Now, what struck him considering that he was from a European cultural setting, is that these people did not display such unique hospitality grudgingly "as this would usually be the case in central Europe," but joyfully.¹³ Beyerhaus further noted that whenever he attended weddings, funerals and other social events, people tended to give him the best chairs, the best places and the best food. He was overwhelmed by the fact that whenever he attended a function, even where he was less known, he was often invited to sit in front even though he did not have a function in the service (be it church service or mere social activity). This would mean, a person vacating the seat so that he could get a place to sit. This, he observed, is very different from Germany or the rest of Europe where every thing is fixed, settled and organised in advance. Guests in Europe, usually, do not make people change their sitting arrangements.¹⁴

According to both Beyerhaus and Rev. John Abdy, unless, guests are invited, or are very close to the hosts, they are often seen as a disturbance of ones schedule in the European context. It is, therefore, often seen as rather impolite just to pop in without prior notice. This is often even in the case when children visit one another.¹⁵ Beyerhaus, whom I had a comprehensive interview with explained that the concept of including strangers in ones hospitality is not very well developed in Central and Northern Europe – even in the churches, the strangers often do not feel very welcome. However, there are notable exceptions. It would be especially rude in German culture to pay an unexpected visit during lunch time. This contrasts sharply with the African situation where people do not mind to visit one another at all times, hence the welcome, as earlier observed in this study. Conversely, visits, in Germany and unlike in Africa, do not usually take much time since "time is money" unless a visitor is a very close friend or relative. This again contrasts with the rural Africa where hosts are never in a hurry

¹³ Interview with Rev. Johannes Beyerhaus, 24th December 1998.

¹⁴ Interviews with Rev. Johannes Beyerhaus, 24th December 1998.

¹⁵ Rev. John Abdy is an English clergy whom I interviewed on the 16th October 1998.

to wave their guests off. Hospitality here shows itself strongly in the time taken for visitors just as we saw in the case of greetings, where hurried greetings are seen as an insult or downplaying the other person.

The reason as to why there is a very sharp difference between Western hospitality and African hospitality is subject to a prolonged debate, which this study is not interested in going into. But the main reason might be rooted in a fundamentally different approach of life; for whereas Africa is a relationship oriented culture where good fences do not make good neighbours, the Western culture tends to be achievement oriented hence the individualism as opposed to the African concept of communalism.¹⁶ In Germany, fences are put around every house and children have to respect the property of other people. This includes not going into other people's gardens, which would be a great offence in the German culture. Beyerhaus explains further that, there is a law in some States in the United States of America, which allows the owner of a garden to shoot an intruder even though he may have no intention of getting into the house itself.¹⁷ For stepping on another people's ground is an offence enough to warrant killing! Obviously, this is totally different in Africa, as our previous discussion has shown. The German presence of fences, which bar the visitor from entering a compound, is a strong symbol in itself.¹⁸ Indeed my interview with both Rev. John Abdy (a British national) reveal that people in Southern Europe, that is Italy, Greece and Spain, have a much stronger concept of hospitality than people of Central and Northern Europe. In the Southern Europe however, this concept of hospitality has of late been partly spoilt through the influence of tourism; that is, people discovering that they can make money with hospitality.

Our researches further reveal that weddings and funerals are private affairs in Europe unlike in Africa where they are more or less communal. In Europe, one cannot go to a wedding unless he has been invited, though occasionally a drink and a small snack may be provided for everyone who has attended the church service, but the main part takes place indoors and is strictly for invited people only – usually between 35-120 persons.¹⁹ Similarly, in the

¹⁶ This debate on communalism versus individualism is well summed by John Mbiti's and Rene Descartes' philosophies as we observed earlier.

¹⁷ Interview with Rev. Johannes Beyerhaus.

¹⁸ Obviously, this is different in cities

¹⁹ Information gathered after the interviews with Rev. Abdy and Rev. Beyerhaus.

funeral service, everybody can attend, like in African context, but again, only invited guests would share the meal, which follows after the funeral service. Beyerhaus however, admits that in small German villages where the sense of community is still strong, this may be slightly different.

In concluding this subsection on the uniqueness of African hospitality, it is essential to appreciate that in Europe, unlike in the communalistic Africa, to be invited is much more heart-warming than to be visited. On the contrary, in Africa, people feel honoured when they are being visited; for as earlier observed, visitors in Europe are seen, often, as a burden and bother to one's schedule. Being so close in touch to a visitor to an extent of sharing, as say one bed with a visitor (both Beyerhaus and Abdy contends) would make a European to shudder.²⁰ Further, in Europe, there must be a very special reason why a person has to stay overnight in somebody else's house. However, special guest rooms, for some special accessions are quite common. On the whole, both the Western hospitality and the African hospitality have something to learn from the ideal Christ's hospitality, which is too sacrificial. And since none of us is perfect before God, we should therefore avoid being judgemental on whose hospitality is more Christ like or less Christ-like. Rather, we should simply let Christ perfect us. In any case, as St. Paul tells us (Romans 3:23), all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This therefore means, to overcome our fallenness, seeking to learn from Christ will be the solution. Otherwise, we can rightly argue that rather than African hospitality being seen as unique when we compare it with the hospitality in the rest of the world, it is Christ's hospitality that is clearly and ideally unique and worth imitation by all nations of the earth. For as Abraham, the so-called the Father of our modern faith; and the first biblical character to display hospitality (though some may argue that Abel was) to strangers - who turned out to be Angels (Hebrews 13:1-3, Genesis 18) of God was told by God, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3). In imitating Abraham and Christ – our Lord and Saviour, our hospitality will be truly unique and Christ's like, pleasant and worth envying by other nations of the world.

²⁰ The information has come after the interviews with the two Senior European clergymen/scholars.

Some Expressions of African Hospitality in the Modern Church

In this section, we intend to show how the Gospel of Christ has been inculturated through incorporating the concept of African hospitality especially in the church liturgy. In this journey of inculturation, we are agreeing with the Tanzanian theologian Joseph Kamugisha (Healey and Sybertz 1996:15) who states that the heart of inculturation is John 1:14: "The word became flesh and lived among us." Christ continued to live among the African people as the chief Diviner-healer, our liberator, our guest, our proto-ancestor and our victor over death among other images. In the church leadership and liturgy as well, Christ must be manifested through inculturation.

In the church leadership, the East African Christian Revival movement (E.A.R.M) are unique in the exchange of peace. This takes place in an informal, relaxed and unhurried atmosphere. In this, different types of handshakes and greetings are used, including hugging one another.²¹ It is like what St. Paul tells Thessalonians, "Greet all the believers with a brotherly kiss" (1 Thessalonians 5:26).

Though they may not be conscious of it, the East African Revival movement, which started in Rwanda in 1927 and spread through Uganda into Kenya by 1937 (Mugambi 1995:126), is essentially African. In its leadership structures and general organisation it has creatively derived its models from the African heritage. For example, their fellowships are non-hierarchical. Clerics and laity are equal. There is no one who is senior to others. This agrees with Christ's caution that "whoever wants to be the greatest must be a servant of all" (Mark 10:44). Secondly, all ideas or issues brought forward are taken into consideration before a final decision is made; and in so doing, they try as much as possible to avoid suspicion or any form of misunderstandings. They avoid this problem of suspicion by being very open to one another—"walking in the light always" and appreciating each and every ones contributions. This has some similarities with the African court, which appreciated the views of every participant and weighed the different opinions from everyone regardless of his social standing (Mugambi 1995:132). It is also in the line with the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all

²¹ Information gathered through participant observation as a member of the East African Revival

believers.²² This doctrine holds that every believer is a priest because he/she can intercede for others, pray for others (James 5:13, Matthew 7:7), can baptise during the time of emergencies among other issues.

Thirdly, a decision is reached through consensus for there is no formal voting. If for example, the members bitterly or irreconcilably fail to agree on an issue, the emphasis is, “go and pray”, so that when they meet again the Holy Spirit would have spoken to each and every one to enable the consensus building amongst them.²³ Thus, postponing until a consensus emerges is purely an African way of decision-making. In avoiding divisions among themselves, they take Christ’s precaution when he said that “a house divided cannot stand” (Matthew 12:25). Fourthly, the members of the East African Revival Movement have maintained an oral leadership despite the fact that their current leadership is composed of educated people most of who are primary school teachers. This emphasis on the orality is carried over from the African heritage. This is also the way the Gospel of Christ was first presented – orally. However, if the movement has to survive, it must preserve theology in written form. It is the example that was set by people like of St. Paul and Saint Luke, among others, when they recounted the ministry of Christ thereby communicating with generations after generation to the present time.

In the ordinary church services mainly on Sunday, most of the churches in both Kenya and South Africa that I have visited constantly demonstrate African hospitality within their liturgies. They include:

(A) Welcoming and greeting the people, especially visitors with a warm handshake, as they arrive. In some cases, the parish or the church elders join the priest in welcoming visitors who arrive to the particular church, say, for the first time. This is in line with Christ’s hospitality on doing well to others just “as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31). I remember in 1990 when I joined Mr. Jeremiah Nyaga with whom I taught in the same school (Githure Secondary School), at the Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A) Gatumbi-Kenya, for a Saturday service when I received an overwhelming hospitality that I would always live to remember. Though I belonged to the

²² We gather this from the New Testament studies and the Systematic Theology, which deals with Christian doctrines.

²³ This information is gathered through participant observation.

Anglican Church, as is the case today, I was excited and overjoyed by the way we were received just before we got into the church compound. Almost every church elder was giving me a handshake that was accompanied by “welcome”, “Feel at home”, “This is the church of Christ, This is your Church”. It was a humbling experience that resonates with Christ’s ideal hospitality.

(B) Another special opportunity that demonstrates hospitality is the introduction of visitors at the beginning of the liturgy or during the announcement times. Depending on the particular church, some African sayings and expressions are used relevantly. They include, “You are welcome with both hands held out in friendship” or “We recognise the presence of visitors-welcome again” or “When you go back, take our greetings with open hands”. Sometimes, there is rhythmic clapping to welcome the special guest.²⁴

(C) In some churches, the visitors are invited to speak from the front; and before and after finishing their short speeches, as that is what is expected, there can be rhythmic clapping to welcome the special guests and even a special song of welcome. While this is very common in East Africa, it is not common among the South African churches, as my participatory observation in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal province has shown. However, there are exceptional cases: In Scottsville Presbyterian Church, the visitors are not only recognised, given forms to fill on prayer requests, membership and to state their needs; in addition, there are always ushers every Sunday who wait for visitors so as to assist them in every way possible. The areas of help can be: showing where the toilets are; to provide a form of security.²⁵ Above all, every one is welcomed, after the service, for a cup of tea or coffee is freely given. This is highly an ambitious project that needs to be encouraged! On top of that there are very organised choirs who often sing in African melodies despite the fact that the church is multiracial. As for the pastor, he constantly delegates duties such that the mood of sharing is upheld, and in his Sermons he tries to be as contextual as possible to reflect the various needs of the worshipping congregation. This is the example that was set by Christ when he delivered contextual Sermons that were relevantly illustrated. Examples include, the use of the parable of the sower

²⁴ This is very common in both the Catholic and the mainline churches in Kenya such as Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Reformed and the Presbyterian.

²⁵ This is gathered out of participant observation-whenever I attend the particular church.

to reflect the farming community (Mark 4:1-20), the Sermon on the lamp on a stand (Mark 4:1-25) to challenge the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day, the parable of the mustered seed (Mark 4:30-34) to reflect on the doctrine of the Kingdom which was highly misunderstood by the religiosity of the day.

In evaluating this sub-section on expressions of African hospitality in the modern church, we need to underline the fact that there are a lot of needs to be done if the Gospel in Africa will be authentic. We also need to appreciate that the African church has the potential to convert itself into the African church of Christ by letting Christ to direct her inculturation. By imitating Christ, the Africa church, in the twenty first century, will remain contextual hence relevant to the modern generation. The section therefore has opened our mind to the reality that there is a lot to be done in our bid to inculturate the Gospel of Christ in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Abuse of African hospitality through the ages

In this sub-section, we intend to show how both the internal forces and external forces have in history, abused African hospitality. These forces include slavery and slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism and corruption amongst the African leadership after 1960s when most African countries attained their constitutional independence.

In the early 20th century, the ordinary Japanese felt threatened by the impact of Western countries on the Eastern countries. Joseph Kitagawa (1990:120) quotes a popular song of the Diplomacy that articulates the concern,

In the West there is England,
 In the North, Russia
 My countrymen, be careful!
 Outwardly they make treaties,
 But you cannot tell
 What is at the bottom of their hearts
 There is a Law of Nations, it is true,
 But when the true moment comes, remember
 The strong eat up the weak.

In the African context, a similar situation is expressed by George W. Carpenter (1960:1) when he says, "The missionary came first. Then followed the trader. Last came soldiers with guns to kill, conquer, divide, and rule. Missionaries were the means by which White people lulled African to sleep while they took away their land and freedom..." Even though we cannot blame the early missionaries in total for the colonisation of Africa, as most of them must have been genuine disseminators of the truth of the Gospel, it is no wonder, however that the proponents of colonialism must have exploited the situation. However, carpenter's view, above, graphically captures the situation as pertains the coming of Europeans and the colonial expansion.

Following the Berlin conference of 1884/85, Africa was partitioned by several European powers whether the prospective subjects liked it or not. In fact, a look at the map of Africa shows the boundaries of African countries as they were drawn at this conference. Indeed, no African was present or consulted when these boundaries were drawn. However, minor revisions as with the case of Eritrea/Ethiopia border remain to this day. As Mugambi (1995: xii) says, the names of the countries have changed considerably, for Africans have renamed their countries (as with the case of Rhodesia which is now Zimbabwe), towns, cities, rivers, and lakes after they became republics. This renaming is important for it affirms the power of the human being to name his or her environment. Certainly, the naming of Africa by Europeans was not only an abuse of African hospitality but also it more specifically showed that Africa had become an extension of Europe.

Kenyatta equates this partitioning/colonialism with the proverbial Kikuyu elephant that asked the innocent owner of the house (The African) to allow it to put its trunk inside his hut for it was raining. However, the man's hospitality was abused when the elephant insisted on putting the whole body within the small hut. This ended up in breaking the whole hut. In Kenyatta's well-considered view, that is what the colonial settlers did with the land of the Agikuyu people and Africa at large.²⁶ This cunningness is seen in the fact that the first few Europeans who, as Kenyatta says, passed near the Kikuyu country looked harmless. They passed through along the borderline of the country between the Kikuyu and the Maasai and between the Wakamba and the Kikuyu. He goes on to explain that in their natural generosity and hospitality, the Kikuyu welcomed these "wanderers" and

²⁶ See Kenyatta 1938. *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Heinemann)

felt pity for them. As such, the Europeans were allowed to pitch their tents and to have a temporary right of occupation of the land in the same category as those of the Kikuyu *Múhoi* (borrower or beggar) or *Múthoni* (in Law) who are given only cultivation or building rights; but cannot own the land as it belongs to the locals. Accordingly, these Europeans were treated in this way in the belief that one day they would get tired of wandering and finally return to their own country.²⁷

Thus, after the scramble for Africa that culminated in the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, which partitioned Africa, Britain, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Germany divided Africa into segments according to their liking, thereby creating spheres of influence (Mugambi 1995:81). Consequently, Africa was brought into its current shape, with 54 countries with different foreign languages i.e. some as francophone (French speaking countries), others as Anglophone (English speakers), and others as German, Spain and Portugal speakers, all the more confusing Africa. There was no deliberate attempt to make Africa speak the same language the way the East African speaks Swahili or the way the islands that make the United Kingdom speak one language – English. Africa was divided in terms of different languages and was easily ruled! Thus Africa, in a short while, more than ever before, began to speak in tongues without an interpreter!

While colonialism brought many diverse ethnic groups together, communities found themselves split at the centre after unfair, unrealistic and artificial boundaries were agreed upon. An illustration, the Maasai found themselves in Kenya and Tanzania, the Luo found themselves in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan; the Somalis found themselves in Kenya, British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland and French Somaliland; the Chewa found themselves in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia; the Nguni found themselves in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe and the list is long (see Nthamburi 1991:39). To add an insult to an injury, the colonial powers did not only subjugate communities by using excessive force, they imposed their culture upon the people that were under their control. Now, in their wars of “pacification”, many innocent people were wantonly massacred. Thus as Nthamburi (1991:46) points out, a British colonel boasted that he had killed 300 people in Embu, Kenya in 1935. The Nandi’s even suffered a worse calamity because they seemed to be more “stubborn” than the rest.

²⁷ See Jomo Kenyatta 1938. *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Heinemann)

Such gross abuse of African hospitality was experienced as the whole world watched.²⁸

The worst form of abuse of African hospitality and perhaps the greatest tragedy to befall an African race besides HIV/AIDS is the slavery and the slave trade. This came before colonization but its memories are ever regrettable and painful in African history. Like in the case of colonialism, the Arabs and the Europeans in unholy alliance first, cunningly, befriended the Africans. Later, they enticed them to this trade. While it was witnessed in other parts of the world, it differed in the scale and the brutality that accompanied it in Africa, which was the worst, hit²⁹. Ships shuttled between Africa on the one hand, and Europe, America and the West Indies on the other, carrying human cargo for over two hundred years. They were carried in inhuman conditions such that they barely survived the trip. Some died from starvation, some from the beatings while others were thrown to the sharks in the seas and oceans if they were found to be too ill to deliver economically (Mutugi 2001:37) As a result, we have many Africans outside Africa- in the West Indies, the Caribbean Islands, Asia, Europe and America most of whom do not know African culture. For after the Industrial revolution in the eighteenth century where the machines were more important than the human labour, the workers of the sugar plantations in America and Caribbean Islands³⁰ were of no use as they lacked the skill to work in the industries!

After colonialism, the African nations found themselves vulnerable to the outside influences. The Industrialised countries of the North began to manipulate the economies of the third world countries (Nthamburi 1991:40). An illustration on this: In every corner of Africa where one goes, whether in Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Nairobi, Blantyre, Lilongwe, Lusaka, Harare, Accra, one will always find Coca-cola, General Motors, Nestles, Firestone, Caltex and many others. These multinational corporations have “spread their tentacles everywhere with the object of sucking the life-blood from the already poor countries” (Nthamburi 1991:40). Most of these

²⁸ There are many other sad effects of colonialism, for example, the infamous Soweto massacre of South Africa where children were indiscriminately killed for protesting against inferior education. Also, the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela for 27 years is fresh in our memory.

²⁹ See J.NK Mugambi 1989. *African Christian Theology: An introduction*

³⁰ See T. Adeyemo 1997. *Is Africa Cursed?* (Nairobi: C.L.M.C) and T.E. Antony 1992. *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior To Whites?* (New Jersey: Renaissance Productions)

multinationals have a monopoly of their products and a protected market; thereby investing in areas where they maximise their profits and ensure that they will be able “to repatriate their profits”; though claiming to provide employment (Nthamburi 1991:40) despite paying meagre wages and not salaries to the locals.³¹ It is interesting that this type of exploitation is done in the full knowledge of the indigenous elite, some of whom are given commissions, thereby allowing the plundering of their nation.³² In accepting the abuse, of African hospitality in this form, it continues to impoverish Africa all the more. In short, the natural resources of most of the fifty-four countries that constitute Africa are foreign exploited and owned resulting in the economies of these countries to be externally controlled.³³ All this amounts to neo-colonialism hence abuse of our hospitality.

The political leadership that came after 1960s has also abused African hospitality. As Nthamburi (1991:41) notes, independent African states cannot be exonerated from the contribution to the suffering of their peoples. There are many examples to illustrate this: Uganda during the time of Idi Amin was stained with blood; the civil war between Biafra and Nigeria, reportedly left at least a million people dead (Mutugi 2001:133). Rwanda’s genocide that pitted Hutus versus Tutsi tribes and civil war in Chad reportedly left many people dead; the civil war between Southern and Northern Sudan as well cannot be blamed on the foreigners abusing African hospitality per se but Africans themselves have to carry their cross as well. Coupled with dictatorial regimes that Africa has witnessed before the 1990s when multiparty politics swept across Africa, we can rightly argue that Africa has her own share of blame that she ought to rectify in line with the ideals of Christ’s hospitality.³⁴

Corruption, which simply means impairment of integrity or moral principle, inducement to wrong by bribery or other unethical and unlawful means (Okullu 1974:43), is another major abuse of African hospitality that has

³¹ This information is gathered partly through participant observation.

³² This is mainly from the Kenyan experience before December 30th, 2003 when the ruling party KANU was voted out and ushered in a new crop of leadership under Mwai Kibaki of National Rainbow Coalition

³³ See T. Obandina, “Getting the measure of African poverty”, in *Africa Today* vol. 5 No.7, July 1999 p.34.

³⁴ Dictatorial regimes have been clearly experienced in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe and other countries where freedom of expression was not granted. And political detainees have been dying in police cells.

been a dominant problem since the 1960s. Speaking from the Kenyan context Bishop Githiga (2001:58) says that corruption is centred on “giving and receiving money where money has been considered as a means to attain any material benefits.”³⁵ In traditional Africa, he further contends, it was accepted as a norm to give tokens or tips to religious specialists like kings, chiefs and medicine persons as genuine practice. This was because it was considered fair to give these officers something considering that they were under nobody’s payroll (see Mbiti 1969: 166-193). In the case of corruption, as practised in Kenya, as we have already seen, it contradicts African hospitality “that was freely extended to religious and community leaders according to one’s ability” (Githiga 2001:58). As Olusegun Obasanjo, the president of Nigeria pointed out, there are many differences between gifts and bribes,

In the African concept of appreciation and hospitality, a gift is a token; it is not demanded. The value is in the spirit of giving, not the material worth. The gift is made in the open, never in secret. Where a gift is excessive it becomes an embarrassment and is returned.³⁶

Thus Obasanjo rightly rules out any justification of corruption as a way of doing business in Africa. On the whole, corruption that has been practised by some of our African governments since the 1960s always accelerates crime, hurts investment, stalls growth in the society, bleeds the national budget and it undermines our sovereignty as a nation when leaders ignore merit and practise tribalism, nepotism and embezzle public funds.³⁷ Such theft from the nation is always theft from the weakest in the nation: the poor, the old, the disabled, the sick, the children, and the newborn, which is a sharp contrast to our African hospitality and Christ’s hospitality. All in all, corruption does not provide a net profit rather; it distorts economic development rewarding the most dishonest rather than the most competent.³⁸

In concluding this subsection on the abuse of African hospitality through the ages, we need therefore to underline the areas of abuse such as colonialism, neo-colonialism, slavery and slave trade, bad governance, and corruption as

³⁵ However, we need to appreciate that Kenyan is a reborn country after the successful democratic elections on the 30th/12/2002.

³⁶ See John Bray, “Business in Africa” vol. 7.No.3, June 1999 p.15

³⁷ These have been experienced in Kenya. See also G.Githiga 2001. *The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism* (Oxford: Regnum) pp.40-117.

³⁸ See G.Githiga 2001. *The church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism* pp.40-117.

just an introduction to the challenge of African hospitality in history from the earlier times. This is because; it is not possible to exhaust the possible areas of abuse within the given time and space – which is limited. Our study appreciates that the effect of the ancient intertribal wars amongst the Africans and in particular the infamous Shaka – the Zulu Wars in the 19th century will need further review as abuse or strength of African hospitality. However, we have paid special attention to the abuse that is inflicted from the outside because the internal abuse is not too damaging as with the external abuse.

Modern Challenges to the African Hospitality

Modern economic pressures, oriented society, technology, materialism and the urbanization in Africa growing individualism, religions fundamentalism, secularism, permissiveness, and science threaten African hospitality (see Healey and Sybertz 1996:196). In African cities, pressures of work and a task-oriented life-style, including the growing “time is money” reality is increasing. These pressures of time and work are winning out over the African traditions of personal relationships (Mutugi 2001:47). The increase of “don’t care attitude” is, unfortunately working down over African hospitality (ibid.). Thus in this permissive atmosphere, one may find young people who do not respect the cultural norms and even the law of the land. They tend to say, “this thing is good because it pleases me.” As a result, vices such as, marriage breakages, abortion, rise in crime rate, premarital sex, irreligiosity, irresponsible parenthood, increase in street children among others is becoming a common trend in our modern towns and cities.³⁹

My interview with Mr Julius Gatimû Kabûrû shows that with capitalism as the way of doing business in Africa, the desire for profit is too overwhelming that it is killing our hospitality.⁴⁰ Due to the growing individualism, that is “the me and my immediate family and me” concept, it is no wonder that people are putting “Beware, fierce dogs can attack you” posters even when there are no dogs that can bite somebody in the particular compound. This is a way of keeping visitors away due to the modern tendency, which keeps people away from homes so as to attend other business outside. Sometimes they do it for the purpose of security as the rate of crime has increased with the so-called “modernity” (see Healey and Sybertz 1996:197).

³⁹ This information is gathered through participant observation.

⁴⁰ Interview with Julius Gatimû Kabûrû 9th November 1998.

In rural Africa, almost everyone knows who lives in the next village.⁴¹ In other words, whether people in the rural areas are related to each other or not, every one naturally knows his/ her neighbours. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the urban areas. In the cities, people live in such a way that neighbours do not know each other well enough.⁴² They tend to lock everyone out and lock themselves instead. In some neighbourhoods people are forced to meet each other periodically for some welfare and security matters. Others get to meet only when some disaster or misfortune occurs. Fortunately enough, there are those who go out of their way to reach out to their neighbours with the claims of the gospel as the witnesses of Christ unlike in Britain where it is a taboo to speak the word of God – through preaching in public (Holloway 1989:37). In any case, if we truly believe, God will grant us the spirit of discernment, who will help us to differentiate between evil and genuine strangers whether we are in the villages or in urban areas. One cannot therefore ignore St. Paul when he rightly says, “Love does not do harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

Conclusion

This paper has sought to revisit the concept of hospitality in the African heritage. By so doing, it has attempted to show the social - religious manifestation of African hospitality. That is, it has sought to expound on how hospitality manifests itself in the religious domain whereby it is linked to the ancestors or the living dead. For acts of inhospitality embarrass the ancestors as much as they embarrass the living.

The paper has also sought to further develop the social manifestation of African hospitality, which is expressed through dancing, drama and singing, which are “perceived as hospitable activities in that they bind the community together”(Moila 2002a:3). Singing and dancing are seen as some of the social activities that tend to minimize tensions within the African community (Thorpe 1991:116). In the economic domain, the paper has sought to show how Africans from time immemorial have co-operated in works such as agricultural activities, building and repair of houses, land cultivation and clearance of bushy areas, hunting, fishing, among other areas (Kenyatta

⁴¹ This information is gathered through participatory observation in most parts of Kenya

⁴² Interview with Julius Gatimu Kaburu 9th November 1998.

1938:42; Moila 2002a: 4; Obengo 1997:53). It thereby shows that African hospitality heavily relies on industry for its sustenance thereby adopting hard work as opposed to laziness, which even the Bible condemns (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The paper has also expounded on the general features of African hospitality such as welcoming, warm handshakes, exchange of greetings, communal involvement, emphasis on respect, emphasis on honesty and sincerity in all dealings, the symbolism of food, interdependence, symbols, expressions of hospitality in African church today, abuse and the modern challenges. In addressing the abuse and challenges, the paper has sought to draw a line between the two by addressing abuse of African hospitality mainly from a historical perspective while letting the challenges to focus mainly on the day-to-day happenings.

In so doing, the paper has become a re-visitation of African hospitality because it is premised on the fact that the concept is so much part of the African personality such that it agrees with Oduyoye (2001:94) who sees hospitality as inherently African. And as a concept that like African religion permeates all spheres of life (Mbiti 1969: 1f), the better thing is to revisit it because we are writing and researching within it. We eat and drink within it. We socialise and worship within it and therefore we can better revisit the concept because it has already been with us and so, all we need is to re-focus our attention on ourselves-our lives, the lives of our fore parents and relate it with the present time when the gospel of Christ is calling the tune from every corner of Africa

In this paper, we have noted that African hospitality is compatible with Christ's hospitality. This is evidenced by the fact that there are some expressions of African hospitality that have been incorporated into the modern church, especially as seen in the many examples of East African churches. This includes the way the East African Christian Revival Movement conducts her fellowships as truly African and as truly Christian without compromising any of the two. It is also evidenced by the emphasis on virtues such as honesty, justice, truth, goodness, love, care and respect. These virtues are fully in Christ's hospitality as well as in African hospitality.

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