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Theology of African hospitality: An engagement with indigenous research methods

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The article is based on the premise that a theology of African hospitality emerges from the intersection of biblical themes such as eschatology, humanity, redemption, kenosis, Christology, salvation and future hope, with African indigenous concepts such as communality, migration and humanity (*Ubuntu*). It seeks to explore the extent to which it utilises African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS). Does it employ indigenous research methods (IRMs) as its modus operandi without explicitly stating so? The article goes beyond the aphorism that 'a person is a person due to others' (homo est homo ex aliis) and holistically embraces cosmological concerns. Utilising a theo-analytical design, it draws analyses from key contributors to the theology of African hospitality, such as Olikenyi, Sakupapa, Mbiti, Nyamiti and other leading scholars in the field. Additionally, it surveys the works of Khupe, Adelaja, Chilisa and Mkabela, among others, to understand the nature of IRMs. As a Christian theology approached from an African perspective, the article will engage some indigenous resources and epistemologies from a theological framework so as to understand its authenticity.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: As part of commemorating 50 years of Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR) (1975–2025), this article enriches the *Verbum et Ecclesia* journal by engaging a theology of African hospitality with indigenous research methods (IRMs). Its scholarly engagements enriches the interdisciplinary agenda in the modern studies.

Keywords: African hospitality; African theology; indigenous knowledge systems; indigenous methods; theology; Trinity.

Introduction

Theology of African hospitality is a by-product of the interfacing among biblical themes such as ecclesiology, God, creation, covenant, promises, humanity, redemption, kenosis, Christology, salvation, sin, eschatology, and the kingdom of God with African indigenous concepts such as equitable sharing of food, shelter and resources, believe in inherent dignity, reciprocal interactions, strengthening of social bonds, deep sense of communality, believe in ancestral connection of migrants and strangers, humanity (*Ubuntu*), relationality and cosmological interconnectedness. The latter proceeds from the conviction that all things are interrelated in a web of interactions and influence one another in diverse ways. This further translates to admitting that nothing exists in isolation; rather, all life domains are part and parcel of the whole (Moila 2002:6). In light of this, the African indigenous worldview finds its authenticity in securing cosmological harmony, whose dialogue with the biblical concern for the 'other' builds an African theology of hospitality. A theology of African hospitality can also be viewed as a broad-based dialogical enterprise that emerges from the interface between African indigenously lived philosophies of survival and co-existence (Ubuntu) and the Christian doctrines (Olikenyi 2001). In turn, these indigenous lived philosophies are deep-rooted beliefs and practices in the unity and interdependence of all things within the African worldview. In his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti (1969) views the African indigenous worldview as that which simultaneously embrace philosophical and religious aspects. It is a coherent and complex system which is centred on the interconnectedness of all things, and emphasises on the richness and depth of African spirituality. In light of this, the ontological significance of a person is affirmed in the midst of others. In the process of becoming, a collective harmony becomes the primary task (Sarpong 2002). In vouching for a theology of African hospitality, the article appreciates the modern challenges to the concept of indigenous hospitality, which include: westernisation, capitalism, and acts of *ubulwane* or *unyama* [beastly inhospitable acts as in the case of negative ethnicity, xenophobia, genocide, violence, domestic violence, racist undertones, anti-foreigners movements, promotion of mediocrity among our institutions and so on]. Certainly, the concerns in the theology of African hospitality include: challenges in scaling traditional practices to meet modern demands, the impact of urbanisation

and globalisation on traditional community structures and a potential lack of formal training in hospitality skills (Mbiti 1969; Sarpong 2002).

In seeking to establish how an African theology of hospitality engages with indigenous methods, this article will consider a three-pronged approach. This approach includes African hospitality, biblical themes that demonstrate God's hospitality to the cosmos, and indigenous research methods (IRMs) that aim to decolonise knowledge. Does a theology of African hospitality employ IRMs as its modus operandi without necessarily proclaiming it? In the case of biblical themes and doctrines, some critical areas will be surveyed. Such may include: ecclesiology (study of the Church), soteriology (salvation), bibliology (Scripture), pneumatology (study of the Holy Spirit), hamartiology (study of sin), anthropology (study of the people of God or simply study of humanity) and eschatology (study of the last things and/or the future hope) (Barrett 1971; Tolmie 2011). Others include: angelology (study of God's Angels), Trinity and proper theology (systematic account of Godhead and creation), among others (Tolmie 2011). When a critical and scientific engagement between the biblical themes and the doctrines that demonstrate God's hospitality to the cosmos and the African heritage is brought forth, it amounts to a contextualised Christianity whose hybridity amounts to a theology of African hospitality (ed. Ngewa 1998).

In this article, first of all, a methodological and conceptual clarification will be made in our endeavour to clarify some ambiguities in the course of addressing the issues under consideration. Following this, some specific dimensions of African hospitality will be highlighted. A comparative analysis of indigenous knowledge systems and African hospitality will then follow. The article will finally address some Christian doctrines in the African context of hospitality that will bring this engagement to a critical level.

Research methodology and design

While appreciating a theo-analytical engagement as the operational design of this research article, the methodology for uncovering the extent to which a theology of African hospitality utilises African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) and the IRMs necessitates a thorough study and analysis of key contributions from scholars such as Olikenyi (2001), Sakupapa (2019), Mbiti (1969), Gathogo (2008a, 2008b), Nyamiti (1984, 1996) and others in this field. This leads us to ask: Do the IRMs feature prominently in the discourses surrounding the theology of African hospitality? We aim to analytically explore how IRMs engage with a theology of African hospitality. Specifically, how have they utilised IRMs such as oral narratives, individual reflections, paying visits, drama, song and dance, informal and formal observances, the use of creative arts, sharing circles and collaboration (where we become part of the community)? Additionally, how has this theology centred indigenous knowledge in its overall discourses, challenging Western-centric perspectives? (Khupe 2014, 2017). Are the theologies of African hospitality a creative progression from other African theologies, such as the African theology that emerged in the 1960s, African women's theology from 1989, Theology and Development from the late 1990s, black theology of South Africa from the 1970s, Theology of Reconstruction from the early 1990s and Triumphalist-futurity theology that is developing in the 21st century? (see Gathogo 2025). How have African theologies embraced key principles from indigenous techniques, such as empowering local communities, reframing and decolonising research, amplifying indigenous voices and upholding integrity, among other considerations (Khupe 2014, 2017)? In this context, these indigenous techniques are consciously or unconsciously influencing the approach to African theologies and are critically regarded as significant partners in addressing the concerns of the theology of African hospitality.

Indigenous research methods and conceptual clarifications

As a scholarly trajectory whose roots and consumption are largely in tropical Africa, it is worthwhile to situate the theology of African hospitality within the AIKS and its IRMs, and eventually draw a conceptual clarification on the same. And besides indigenous knowledge systems, which is basically the knowledge and practice that reverberates across the succeeding generations, right from the ancient times, IRMs are centred on relationality, communality, incorporation of indigenous worldviews, ontological needs of the society (purposefulness), anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-neo-colonialism, and are geared towards raising up suppressed voices of the indigenous peoples (Adelaja 2013). Characteristically, IRMs focus on resilience and resistance. They aim to reframe research, decolonise research perspectives, empower indigenous peoples and their worldviews, and demonstrate the authenticity and value of indigenous voices. Additionally, IRMs showcase socio-political and religio-spiritual integrity, inviting the research community to recognise the beauty of the diverse experiences and cultural diversity as part of God's economy for the world (ed. Pobee 1997).

As Evans et al. (2014) have noted, IRMs trace their roots:

> [*I*]n the traditions and knowledge systems of indigenous peoples themselves, although indigenous methodologies and methods have become both systems for generating knowledge and ways of responding to the processes of colonization. (p. 179)

They go on to explain that the indigenous methods emerge from 'language, culture, and worldview' (p. 179). Hence, they are drawn from their respective societies and thus express, endorse and sanction 'traditional knowledge systems in contemporary terms' (p. 179). Indeed, IRMs are as intricate and numerous as the locals themselves. In Africa, where unpleasant experiences of religio-cultural suppressions, slavery and slave trade, colonialism, conquests, pandemics, dictatorships, corruption, ethnic tensions, racial-ethnic misunderstandings, xenophobic leanings, pockets of violence and general inhospitality, financial dictations and control by global bodies, calamities

and diverse forms of misfortunes inform the scholarly context of research, the working methodology is necessarily attuned to these familiarities (ed. Harvey 2002). Hence, related topics such as decolonising methodologies, deconstruction of patriarchy or cultural hermeneutics, among others, have necessarily informed the working methods of operation. In other words, methodologies have to incorporate the above experiences and structures in which indigenous peoples have found themselves, right from their ancestral heritage (Adelaja 2013). This is compounded by the post-colonial realities that ushered in a new Euro-African society and simultaneously consumed a hybridity of Western science and indigenous epistemologies. The latter has also ushered in new complexities and challenges that complicate methodological considerations, and eventually calls for new approaches or for repackaged 'old' approaches that resonate with indigenous knowledge systems. A case in point is patriarchy, which is both ancient and modern, and is paradoxically Western and African.

Technological breakthroughs have equally brought in new challenges as social media threatens the moral fabric of the otherwise indigenous society. To some, social media has polluted the African youths in the 21st century, as its negative impact has been attributed to the heavy reliance on Western cultural content, which is seen to be too liberal and permissive (Chilisa 2012). Lamentations on the negative impacts of the social media have been overtly experienced in African worldviews, the attitudes, language and in the entire societal codes – refer to: religion, art, rituals, symbols, dress and mannerisms (Adelaja 2013; Bhanye, Shayamunda & Tavirai 2023). Being limited to Christianity, relevant concerns and the African indigenous realities, methodology in the theology of African hospitality is certainly limited to the former, unlike in the study of the AIKS, whose scope is not confined to Christianity, Islam or the indigenous religion. The fact that the theology of African hospitality cannot escape some techniques seen in the IRMs, however, helps us understand their interrelatedness.

African hospitality and holistic existentialism

With the African worldview encompassing human well-being as well as the spiritual realm, the interconnectedness of all things goes beyond the physical world. It includes the ancestral-spiritual realms, a phenomenon that views the world from a holistic existentialism (Mbiti 1969). With humanity dancing in the same rhythm with the spiritual realm and the natural world, concepts such as Ubuntu (humane) and its terminological parallels, such as communitarianism (stressing the well-being of the community) and humanism (insisting on human dignity) emerge. Nevertheless, African hospitality, like African religion, permeates all spheres of life so fully that authentic living becomes synonymous with it, as shared ethical principles are only meaningful when we relate humanity with the rest of the cosmos (Mbiti 1969; Moila 2002; Olikenyi 2001). In this understanding, indigenous hospitality is something to do with cosmological stewardship (which compares with Ps 124:1), fostering a sense of belonging and interconnectedness, and embraces the industry that promotes socio-economic well-being among other relational concepts (Olikenyi 2001).

African hospitality and contemporary developments

In the so-called 'modern' world, African hospitality is characterised by a blend of indigenous values and contemporary developments. It stresses both sustainable development trends and cultural authenticity. As inter-country travels and interactions (as scholars, business partners, religious gatherings and conferences and so on) increase, an emphasis on cultural relativism, cultural universalism and an appeal to meaningful wellness treatment in key areas (airports, border points and the desire to make the visitor feel the at-home-ness at all places) becomes the vogue. African hospitality is also experienced in some socio-political philosophies of survival, particularly in their emphasis on communality, interdependence, relationality and in the quest for uplifting the welfare of 'others'. Such may refer to *Ujamaa* [family-mindedness], *Harambee* [pulling together for communal self-help activities] and among others, and in the individually initiated philosophies that are geared towards cosmological harmony (Boele Van Hensbroek 1998). In the nature of things, African hospitality goes beyond mere anthropomorphism, as ethnoveterinary medicine and animal husbandry, ecological concern, oceanographic issues, pulmonological (breathing and air systems) matters, material and non-material elements, palaeontological [*zamani*] needs, chronocentrism [*sasa*] and eschatological (future hope) focus, and other cosmological concerns are equally taken in (ed. Harvey 2002; Mbiti 1969). As a religio-cultural duty, African indigenous hospitality remains an all-rounded phenomenon that is cosmologically appealing. Although hospitality to a fellow human being comes out like the primary appeal, as 'I am because you are' (Mbiti 1969:108), the ideal thing is to embrace cosmological interdependence rather than the mere emphasis on human well-being. The temptation to focus on hospitality to the stranger or the neighbour has, however, remained its main critique across the centuries (Kenyatta 1938), as some strangers have abused it afterwards (refer to colonialism, slavery and terrorism). Further, some locals have constantly abused it by displaying unreasonable hospitality to their blood relatives and conversely denying it to others who are genuinely in need (refer to racism, tribalism and xenophobia). Guarding against such an antithesis of African hospitality, by putting in mitigating mechanisms, will certainly safeguard against inhospitality. Equally, inhospitality to the needy and favouring ones' kins is viewed as a vice in the biblical traditions (Amos 2:7, Rom 15:7).

African hospitality and science and technology

In the 21st century, however, the breakthroughs of science and technology have ushered in a new form of African hospitality, through professional networking, and utilising

the social media networks such as: X (previously Twitter), Messenger, Telegram, Threads, ShareChat, Xiaohongshu (RedNote), Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, Reddit, Ghost, ResearchGate, Behance, Discord, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat and WeChat (Acheaw 2016; Sharabati 2018), among other platforms that build online communities. Besides social media platforms that promote modern forms of African hospitality and link it up with the rest of the globe, there are indigenous aspects that remain intact despite these trends. These include an emphasis on family and community, personalised guest experiences that reflect local traditions – such as storytelling and cultural rituals of immersion and acceptance – and reconciliative elements. In particular, reconciliative elements treat humility as a virtue rather than a weakness, and take responsibility for actions. Reconciliative elements also highlights empathising with the other party, sometimes by appealing to the past [*zamani*] for current solutions [*sasa*] (Mbiti 1969), shift expectations, seek to rebuild trust, acknowledge harm where the situation demands, express remorse and build consensus rather than dichotomise between the majority versus minority (Moila 2002).

Indigenous knowledge systems and African hospitality

With African hospitality being viewed as a broad-based enterprise, like African religion, that permeates all pillars of culture (refer to kinship, politics, economics, moral-ethics, aesthetics and religion itself), its dalliance with AIKS becomes a critical concern in research. Does AIKS hold any value for African hospitality and the theology of African hospitality, which asserts that socio-religious life and all aspects of our existence in the cosmos must be lived hospitably? What does it mean to engage scholarship through the lens of hospitality? How relevant are indigenous techniques and knowledge to the theology of African hospitality? When we consider the abuse and misuse of hospitality in biblical traditions – where the Jew-Gentile divide represents inhospitality, among other issues – and in the African experiences of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, globalisation, religious intolerance and the unfair naming of cities, rivers, countries and lakes in post-Berlin Conference Africa (1884 onwards), it becomes essential to explore the interconnectedness between the theology of African hospitality, indigenous knowledge systems and the IRMs (Gathogo & Nthukah 2019). Their compatibility, incompatibility and the methodological commonalities become critically important in stirring up this debate that has not yet started. Indeed, this underlines the value of this engagement, despite our appreciation that all these concerns cannot be addressed exhaustively in this treatise.

In the light of this, African indigenous knowledge systems can be viewed as the cognition and activities that locals have formulated across the generations. It includes beliefs, activities, skills, axiology (aesthetics and ethics), epistemology (knowledge and truth), ontology, cosmology (physical and metaphysical view of the universe), teleology, political philosophy (the state and government), logic (argumentation and reason) and metaphysics (reality and being), and all forms of noesis (Mbiti 1969; Mkabela 2005). Although post-apartheid South Africa has put up measures to 'protect and promote AIKS (Khupe & Keane 2017:25), as a measure of decolonising Western bias in knowledge acquisition, most African countries have not done so. They have retained imperial concepts and trends, as in the case of: assimilation, indirect rule, indoctrination, acculturation and inferiority of non-Western resources, devaluation of indigenous language and culture, and racial-ethnic prejudices that negatively inform people's judgements. Imperialistic tendencies manifest themselves in hostility, aggressiveness, jingoism, antagonism, assaultiveness and unfriendliness towards AIKS (Chilisa 2012). Although there are pockets of 'increased interest in research into indigenous knowledge and science in Southern Africa', which has led to the production of several publications, 'numerous conferences, seminars, learning materials, and postgraduate courses' (Khupe & Keane 2017:25), research that is aligned to AIKS remains insufficiently used. Is this a pointer to the fact that the walls of apartheid, colonialism and imperialism are still with us in Africa despite the various breakthroughs in democracy, freedom, education and technology?

Decolonising knowledge via indigenous research methods

Certainly, past elements of inhospitality or their perception can be addressed via decolonisation techniques, which feature prominently in the IRMs (Chilisa 2012). And indeed, decolonisation of inhospitality in tropical Africa (the South, for instance) cannot be achieved by mere drop of names: from Pietersburg (a western name) to Polokwane (an African name), from Pretoria to Tshwane, from Port Elizabeth to Gqeberha, from Morgan's Bay to Gxarha, from Grahamstown to Makhanda, Queenstown to Komani, from Uitenhage to Kariega or from King Williamstown to Qonce, among others (Gathogo 2013). In East Africa as well, the renaming of the so-called colonial names from Lake Edward to Mwitanzige or Rutanzige, and from Lake Victoria to Nam Lolwe (Dholuo), or from Nnalubaale (Luganda) or Nyanza (Kinyarwanda), will not do full 'justice' to the 'decolonisation project', as complex matters, that touch on various life domains, may require a hybridity of methodology among the theologies of hospitality, indigenous research techniques, prevailing knowledge systems and other relevant forms of theo-academic dialogue (Okoth 2006:81). Similarly, decolonisation of research methods will not be fulfilled by mere change of names for African countries, as in the case of: Upper Volta to Burkina Faso which was effected on 02 August 1984, Northern Rhodesia to Zambia which took place on 24 October 1964, Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe which was achieved on 18 April 1980, Bechuanaland to Botswana which was realised on 30 September 1966, Nyasaland to Malawi which was realised on 06 July 1964, Gold Coast to Ghana which came to pass on 06 March 1957 or even the possibility of renaming Kenya after the original name of her largest Mountain (Kirinyaga) (Gathogo & Nthukah 2019:51). Kenya, for

example, her name (Kirinyaga, anglicised Kenya) appeared in a written form on 03 December 1849, a year after the German Lutheran Cleric, working with the British body, the Church Missionary Society (the Revd Dr. Ludwig Krapf), saw the Mountain (Kirinyaga) in 1848. By then Revd Krapf was in the present day Kitui County, a distance of about 150 km away from Mount Kirinyaga (Kenya). The precolonial and pre-missionary name for the present-day Kenya (Kirinyaga) was translatable to 'elevated and Godly' (Gathogo & Nthukah 2019:51; Okoth 2006:81). By changing Kirinyaga (God's dwelling place) to Kenya, although orally given as a by-product of pronunciation error, as Krapf could not pronounce correctly, it can be viewed as an inhospitable contest, pitting the God of Christendom and *Ngai* or *Mulungu* (the local African names for God). Such epistemological recollections may have to build on the techniques in the IRMs.

Although Africans 'are notorious hospitable' since time immemorial, as the concept cannot be isolated from any life domain (Gathogo 2008b:39), there is a sense in which we have to employ decolonising methods, as we reconstruct African histories and theologies, irrespective of the diverse circumstances and times. With decolonisation being a key technique in the IRMs (Khupe & Keane 2017:25), a theology of African hospitality cannot afford to dodge this methodology owing to some distorted literature that tends to inform African studies (see, for instance, Edward Burnett Tylor's book, *Primitive Culture* 1871, whose inhospitably led to viewing the African heritage as Animism). Decolonising research methods in postcolonial Africa has to go beyond the mastery of Shakespearean diatribes (Shakespeare 1597), however classical, and embrace the contribution of AIKS and IRMs in their dialogues with other initiatives. And indeed, the failure to utilise indigenous knowledge research adequately, across the academic divides in tropical Africa, is a matter of concern; hence the need to understand the extent to which the theologies of African hospitality are in dialogue (or not in dialogue) with the former.

Some Christian doctrines and an African context

Just as the whole cosmos demonstrates God's hospitality, the Christian theology (cf. Gn 19:1–38, Lv 19:34, Ex 23:9, Ps 24:1, Rm 12:13, Heb 13:2, Pt 1 4:9), the African worldview likewise demonstrates the same perspective (Gathogo 2001, 2008a, 2008b; Mbiti 1969; Olikenyi 2001). Further, African hospitality 'permeates into all sectors of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it' (Gathogo 2008a:275). African proverbs likewise express the relational nature of African hospitality, as cosmological interdependence is given prominence. In particular, a Bukusu (of western Kenya) says thus, '*Entuyu ekhulu enuna mung'ana*'. Literally, it says that 'An old Rabbit breastfeeds from its young ones' (Barasa & Opande 2017:161). It means that life is only livable within the framework of reciprocity, interdependence and relationality. When a person dispenses hospitality to others, it serves all, including the person who does it. Similarly, giving hospitality to one's children gives room for a reciprocal gesture upon their maturity. Overall, the community remains the ultimate winner. As noted earlier, the dialogue between Christological hospitality and/or kenotic hospitality with African hospitality proceeds to a theology of African hospitality and/or a theology of African Christian hospitality. Logically, thus, engaging the indigenous knowledge system and their IRMs, African hospitality and the biblical traditions on the same, will certainly guarantee an authentic theology that is paradoxically African and Christian.

Indeed, both the scripture and the indigenous society view hospitality as the foremost virtue that aids our co-existence and affirms our humanness (*Ubuntu*), just as civilisation and culture in general do. It stands out as the climax of our cultural standing as members of the human community. It is the social anthropologists who tell us that animals have no cultures, unlike human beings. Indeed, it is Gertrud Kruger (1916:128) who once noted thus: 'Because animals have no culture, they are therefore condemned, if there is a change of environmental conditions, either to die out or to change their physical structure continuously'. Further, as noted in Jafari (1995):

> [*A*]nimals have no culture or civilization. [*Humanity*], on the other hand, has the intelligence and various talents to develop [*oneself*] and create different cultures and civilizations [*and/or forms of hospitality*]. (p. 1)

Hence, the beasts of the forest can easily practise *Ubuluwane/Unyama* [inhospitality] towards one another: kill undeservedly and unreasonably, block others' progressions in life, fail to plan on security for all, bully the less fortunate, disorganise the vulnerable, and do without concrete future plans, ignore norms, customs, professionalism, diversity and common decency, irresponsibly promote the 'survival of the fittest' mantra as the (mis)rule of the jungle life, grab all opportunities for selfish and survival reasons and indeed do all sorts of harm to one another, without any iota of shame (Evans-Pritchard 1951). Nevertheless, the reference to *Ubulwane* [beastliness] does not intend to raise questions from scientists working on the empathy of primates among other animals; rather, the reference is made with specific focus on the hostile animals that are evidently inhospitable towards other animals.

Conversely, Christian doctrines and the African context of hospitality promote deliberate future focus, uphold local and global norms (as in the case of Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, interfaith dialogue, human welfare associations and so on), socio-marital norms and other sociable gestures (Ngwoke & Akabike 2022). The Christian doctrines in general, and the African indigenous context, will certainly view cosmological interconnectedness as the hallmark of hospitality, an ethically pivotal phenomenon that informs research methods among the duo.

Another Christian doctrine that is comparable to the African context of hospitality is eschatology (Macquarrie 1979; Thiessen 1979). It refers to the science of the last things and is

concerned with the final destiny of the human being and the soul, and the judgement. St. Paul's eschatological view was explained thus:

> For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (Th 1 4:16)

In view of this, the doctrine of the last things (eschatology) brings out two critical areas of concern that are also relevant to the African context (Macquarrie 1979). One is the heavenly promise, which refers to the ideal cosmological and paranormal home for victors, the angels, saints, souls, honoured ancestors, deities and good spirits, as opposed to evil spirits, which is a common religious belief. Death becomes the starting point of dying to sin and resurrecting with Christ at the appropriate moment (Rm 6:1–11). The second one is the idea of angels, saints and spirits. It resonates with John Mbiti's (1969) concepts of good and evil spirits, among other players in the spiritual realm of African anthropology. In the scheme of things, those who led exemplary lives during their earthly lives return as good spirits that mediate between God and humanity. The good spirit counsels the individuals and generally strives to promote societal good. Conversely, human beings who led an inhospitable life return as evil spirits that keep on causing misfortunes, calamities, quarrels, fights, division, earthquakes and other cosmological disharmony (Dickson 1984). In the nature of things, the Bulsa of north-central Ghana, like in other African nationalities, strive to attain the ideal of becoming ancestors later in the spirit world (as in the Christian eschatology) by dispensing hospitality to the less fortunate in society, strangers, the stranded ones, beggars, the orphaned, widows, lepers and those with disabilities, among others (Healey & Sybertz 1996; Olikenyi 2001).

Besides the African ancestrology where good (hospitable) and evil (inhospitable) spirits were a commonplace, the study of Christian doctrines also demonstrates their existence. They, however, do not play similar roles, as each religious tradition displays unique features in the spiritual realms. As Tolmie (2011) has perceptively noted:

> The nature of the angels that Paul has in mind is [however] disputed. Many commentators assume that Paul is referring to evil angels, thus reflecting the theme of the judgement of evil angels which is also found elsewhere in the New Testament, for example, in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Meyer (1861:135), however, believes that Paul has only good angels in mind, because the word 'angels' is used without any closer specification. However, this is not a good argument, because the term 'angels' is used in a similar way in Romans 9:38, where it is likely that Paul is referring to evil angels (cf. the discussion of Rm 9:38). Another possibility is that Paul has in mind both good and bad angels. This is accepted by Barrett (1971:136), who argues that both humans and angels will appear before God's court at the last day [Eschaton] and that this implies that both good and bad angels will be judged. (p. 3)

Another theological concept that demonstrates God's hospitality is the doctrine of the Trinity (Fiddes 2000). Beyond the hospitable gesture of the Father (creator), Son (redeemer) and the Holy Spirit (the sustainer), which refers to the three persons of the Christian Godhead, there is the notion of *perichoresis*. As a theological phrase that underlines the value of (Otto 2009):

> [*B*]eing-in-one-another or *circumincession* of the three divine Persons of the Trinity because of the single divine essence, the eternal procession of the Son from the Father and of the Spirit from the Father and (through) the Son, and the fact that the three Persons are distinguished solely by the relations of opposition between them. (p. 366)

As a Greek term, the noun originates from the verb *choreo*. The latter is utilised to demonstrate the reciprocal way in which the three persons in the Trinity relate to one another in a divine expression of ideal hospitality.

In attempting to contextualise the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, a South African theologian, Sakupapa (2019:1), has expressed the view that 'contemporary African Trinitarian hermeneutics' within the confines of translatability concepts of God in Africa are in the offing. In his view, this contemporary African Trinitarian hermeneutics will eventually emerge as a by-product of African Christological reflection. Sakupapa (2019:2) acknowledges that the pioneer African Christian theologians, such as John Mbiti (who wrote in 1969) and Bolaji Idowu (who wrote in 1973), went beyond the 19th-century anthropologists and missionaries and successfully located 'the African belief in a Supreme Being as a point of continuity between' African indigenous religion and Christianity. These 'pioneer' African theologians (Mbiti and his ilk) remedied 'western missionary translations of God which portrayed God as foreign to Africans' (Sakupapa 2019:2). Curiously, Sakupapa (2019) failed to proclaim Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) as the first book that was authored by an insider African scholar. It authentically affirmed the reality of God and spirit realm in Africa in concrete terms. Placide Tempels' (1945) book, *Bantu philosophy* [*La Philosophie Bantoue*] came afterwards. It appears that the African scholars began the Trinitarian debate, albeit unconsciously, by first establishing the existence of God and the spirit realities in African religion, just as in other world religions. Indeed, the African scholars began the Trinitarian debate by first establishing the existence of God in African religion, just as in other world religions.

Besides engaging indigenous culture to understand God's hospitality, in the mutual reciprocity in the persons of Godhead (Trinity), Sakupapa (2019) appears to appreciate some principles in the AIKS and the IRMs. Without necessarily proclaiming it, Sakupapa (2019), embraces some key principles from the above indigenous methods. That is, he displays the value of decolonising knowledge, epistemological reconstruction, upholding integrity in research by avoiding biases and prejudices, reframing research via creative engagements, centring research on contextual needs, emphasis on honesty in data analysis, giving prominence to the local voices and the courage to liberate the suppressed voices in published works, among other elements. Certainly, linking Trinity with indigenous religion for Sakupapa (2019) and his ilk is a step towards authenticating theo-religious studies in tropical Africa.

Certainly, Sakupapa's (2019) insistence that Trinity is implied in the concept of God in African indigenous religion, and communicates God's hospitality to the cosmos, as in the likes of Mbiti (1969) and Idowu (1973), is a bold attempt at decolonising knowledge, that was misconveived by the likes of Taylor (1871) who viewed African religious consciousness as animistic and not yet evolved to a 'real' religion worth consideration. Sakupapa's (2019) decolonising technique is also felt in his giving of prominence to the indigenous voices, which Mbiti (1969) once viewed as the raw materials for the gospel. Further, in appearing to view continuity of Africa's religio-hospitality of God through to the *perichoresis* [mutual reciprocity] and *circumincession* [divine dance] of the three Persons in the Triune God, Sakupapa (2019) demonstrates 'continuity' seen in the earlier works of Kwesi Abotsia Dickson (1979), Samuel Gakuhi Kibicho (1978) and Gabriel Molehe Setiloane (1979) and later James Kombo (2007). As Sakupapa (2019) aptly notes:

> It must be noted that these theologians, most notably Mbiti and Idowu, engaged with texts by western scholars such as Edwin Smith, Malcolm McVeigh and Geoffrey Parrinder8 which offered sympathetic accounts of concepts of God.9 Smith particularly intimated on the African belief in the Supreme Being as a point of continuity between [*African Religion*] and Christianity [hereinafter continuity thesis]. (pp. 2–3)

Prior to Sakupapa's (2019) attempt at employing indigenous methods to locate the Trinity in African theology, a Tanzanian theologian, Nyamiti (1984), had strongly defended his thesis on Christ as an African ancestor. Hence, his pedagogy, rooted in the indigenous techniques, introduced Ancestor Christology that proceeds from the African indigenous belief in the supernatural status of ancestors. It contends that only at death does a person ascend to that position. In this understanding, the office of an ancestor is a highly elevated level, far above African elders [*Athamaki*] who are revered (Wachege 1992). The mediatory role makes a huge difference, hence their veneration. Their veneration and reverence stem from people's understanding that they are not only seen as sources of the living descendants but also because they remain united and/or connected to the living. Besides this, ancestors are viewed as beneficial to their people through their hospitable living that enabled them to earn their mediatory status (Nyamiti 1984). Seen from this perspective, ancestors minimise the fear and power of death, and like the act of resurrection, where people are no longer pitied, our works and faith are no longer useless, and where those 'who have fallen asleep in Christ are [*no longer*] lost' (1 Cor 15:18), ancestor-hood inspires such confidence in the African heritage (Nyamiti 1984). Sakupapa (2019:4) builds his position that 'Christ's ancestorship to humanity is rooted in the Trinity' by borrowing from Nyamiti's (1996:55–56) position that the 'Father is the Ancestor of the Son, the Son is the Descendant of the Father' and the Holy Spirit is the mutual Oblation between the two'.

Prior to Nyamiti, Setiloane (1989) had redefined Badimo (ancestors) by insisting that they are merely our deceased parents. He goes on to explain that the spirits of the youths, precisely children, go to their forefathers and do not become *Badimo* (ancestors). This makes the death of a youthful person to be mourned with a lot of bitterness, as people find it unfair for God to have taken the young (Moila 2002). This complicates the matter as it implies that non-parents cannot attain the level of a *Badimo* (ancestors). In considering Christ, who was barely a youth, how can his African ancestry be ascertained? His two natures (human and divine), which he shares with the other two persons in the Trinity (Thiessen 1979), however, address this concern. Besides this, Kombo (2007), who employed ethno-philosophy, which he called *ntu*, in order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity in a manner that is comparable to the Greek schools of thought, had Bediako (2000:159) critiquing some of his formulations as 'an African equivalent of Western dogmatic formulations'. Kombo (2007:245), however, develops his concept of God as the Great *Muntu* (person), and the oneness of *Ntu* with the activities of the Son and the Holy Spirit in a very original way, which, in my view, combines the indigenous and the western research methods. In view of this, scholars' linking of the African ancestors to the second person in the Trinity implies that the theologies of African hospitality and IRMs are both culturally sensitive. Certainly, the decolonising of knowledge aspect in both the indigenous methods and a theology of African hospitality is evident across the diverse areas that have been considered in this treatise.

Kenotic theology and African hospitality

In view of this, a theology of African hospitality emerges from the above African realities and in its engagement with biblical themes and concepts (creation, ecclesiology, soteriology and Christology) as God's hospitality is aptly captured. Indeed, kenotic theology captures God's hospitality most clearly. Philippians 2:7 says, he 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men' (ERV). In exegeting the hospitality of God via incarnation, St. Augustine's hermeneutics stresses this as an act of humility and obedience through to death (Elia 2020). The self-emptying act serves as an example for believers to follow in their lives. Symbolically, St Augustine identifies the body of Christ with the body of the enslaved, 'and in so doing, weave the order of slaveholding into the texture of Christian thought' (Elia 2020:19). In his article on 'The concept of κένωσις [kenosis] in Philippians 2:6–7 and its contextual application in Africa', Ottuh (2020) attempts to link Christological hospitality with, African hospitality by first acknowledging that the African indigenous society deified exemplary characters among them. Such could be family or societal leaders who become so successful that they become the beacons that map out direction for the rest of society. Such people are venerated in society. After their earthly lives, they are still venerated through certain rituals, 'especially in sacrifices and pouring of libations' and this is where 'ancestral veneration also comes in' (Ottuh 2020:3). He cautions that the position of an ancestor is not automatic, as the individual must merit it via hospitable deeds; hence the succeeding generations are ideo-morally compelled to emulate the person in his or her new status. A reading of the scriptures, particularly the hospitality of God, is easily understood and/

or accepted in the African context because of its ability to dialogue with the lived realities of the same. Indeed, both kenotic theology and African hospitality connote God's hospitality. Although kenotic theology may appear to refer to God's salvific hospitality to humanity, African hospitality may appear to appeal to God's holistic hospitality to the cosmos. Overall, an engagement of biblical themes and concepts such as creation, soteriology and Christology, among others, with African concepts of hospitality ushers in an authentic post-colonial theology of African hospitality which is contextual and addresses contemporary challenges that this article has noted above. With IRMs engaging a theology of African hospitality, a clear progression of decolonisation in African epistemology becomes the vogue.

Conclusion

From the outset, the article sought to understand the extent to which a theology of African hospitality (a by-product of the dialogue between African hospitality and biblical teachings of the same) utilises IRMs, such as the quest for decolonising knowledge, individual reflections, formal and informal observance, use of creative arts, collaboration and so on. While this objective could not be given in concrete terms, as this is an ongoing process that invites our deeper introspection, it has demonstrated the value of this interdisciplinary enterprise as the three components (African concepts of hospitality, biblical themes and concepts of God's hospitality and African IRMs) strive to build an authentic and contextual theology for Africa.

As a Christian theology developed in Africa, the limitations of a theology of African hospitality have been noted in this treatise. This is in contrast to IRMs, which are not tied to creeds and religious dogmas, among other considerations. In its findings, it has ably established that an engagement of African indigenous research methods (AIRMs) and biblical themes and doctrines have a great potential in developing and/or strengthening a contextual theology that graphically captures the African realities of the 21st century. Overall, a theology of African hospitality, which remains underdeveloped in the scholarly world, is indeed decolonial. It deconstructs earlier assertions that indigenous resources are epistemologically impotent and incompatible with the Christian Testament. Furthermore, both IRMs and AIRMs serve as decolonising strategies in post-colonial Africa, and their dialogue with a theology of African hospitality holds genuine potential for positively transforming the continent.

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