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## **Pre-Christian Inter-Personal Values Practised by Africans as a Means of Befriending Others: Cultural-Religious Contexts**

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*Abstract:* This article is an attempt to bring into light the African religious cultural values used to befriend others in the society. The historical account of missionaries about Africa shows that before Christianity the indigenous were pagans in a strict sense. That means the idea of a supreme and personal God did not exist in the African continent. However, various researches have proved the contrary. It is undeniable truths that even prior to Christianity Africans were profoundly religious. They had traditional religion which exerted big influence upon manners of living. Kofi Busia in his book *Africa in Search for Democracy* noted that “Africans’ cultural heritage is intensely and pervasively religious and that in traditional African communities; it was not possible to distinguish between religious and non-religious areas of life.”<sup>1</sup>

This religion is rooted in the ethos and belief system of people; and developed experientially as a response for their questions concerning the world and daily life situations. It dominates human life and

set up a specific tone in his relationship with nature and his fellow people through values observed. The work aims at seeing the convergences of these values to Christianity and how they created congeniality in the society.

*Keywords:* African theology, culture, cultural values, hospitality, greeting rituals, solidarity.

## Introduction

The historical account of missionaries about Africa shows that before Christianity the indigenous were pagans in a strict sense. That means the idea of a supreme and personal God did not exist in the African continent. However, various researches have proved the contrary. It is undeniable truth that even prior to Christianity Africans were profoundly religious. They had traditional religions which exerted big influence upon manners of living. Kofi Busia in his book *Africa in Search for Democracy* noted that “Africans’ cultural heritage is intensely and pervasively religious and that in traditional African communities; it was not possible to distinguish between religious and non-religious areas of life.”<sup>2</sup>

This religion developed experientially as a response for their questions concerning the world and daily life situations. Religion provided them with important answers and authentic interpretation of the physical world. Distinct from Christian religion, African Tribal Religions (ATR) developed out of *experiential encounter* with the vastness, complexity and orderliness of the universe. One of the elements found in the five proofs of existence of God by St. Thomas Aquinas. Nothing could impart the possibility of a Supreme Being more on the minds of African ancestors than the large sea, the rising and setting sun, the rains, the high blue sky and the big high mountains. It was a natural religion rooted in the ethos and belief system of a people. It dominates human life and set up a specific tone in his relationship with nature and his fellow man. These twenty pages intend to analyse some of the values practiced by Africans as a means of befriending others. Although they exercised them not on the basis of Christianity, but they later proved to be the essential values of Christianity.

# 1. Semantic Description of Terms

## *a. Culture*

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life which differs from tribe to tribe or nation to nation. It is the characteristic of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.<sup>3</sup> All are interwoven to form their very life. It is therefore very difficult to draw a clear-cut line of demarcation between where their ethical life ends and where their religious life begins.

A culture is a social system that shares a set of common values, in which such values permit social expectations and collective understandings of the good, beautiful, constructive, etc. Culture shapes the way we see the world. Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.<sup>4</sup>

## *b. Religion*

Indian theologian Nigel Kumar defines religion as a human activity in response to God's activity in the context of God's reconciliation of humanity to himself. Religion is a combination of a religious view of the world and religious actions in the world all directed in honour of God.<sup>5</sup>

No single definition can be ascribed to the word religion due to its diversity. Many people considered religion as an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practice and worship that centre on one supreme God or the deity value that provide groups of men with solution to the question of ultimate meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Religion is also considered to be "collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Religion is not only a necessary but a very significant part of our lives. Most people would find it very difficult to live without religion or spirituality. Most religions shared wholly or partially some characteristics which include: belief in God or deity, a doctrine of salvation, a code of conduct or ethics, the usage of sacred stories, rituals or religious acts and ceremonies.

We cannot exclude the word religion from culture since religion is defined as a collection of cultural systems.

### ***c. Inter-personality***

Generally inter-personality means relating to or involving relations between people. It is the way people interact in the society. In the context of this paper it refers to the ways in which Africans associate themselves to each other and in the society. African cultural worldview is such that no one lives by himself or herself; every person belongs to one another in the community.<sup>7</sup> A good human relationship based on inter-personal communication has always been emphasized in the African Community. Biko observed:—

Ours has always been a man-centred society. Westerners in many occasions have been surprised at the capacity we have for talking to each other not for the sake of arriving at a particular conclusion but merely to enjoy the communication for its own sake. But the discussions must respect individuals' sentiments; hence conversations that may cause misgivings are avoided. Intimacy is a term not exclusive for particular friends but applying to a whole group of people who find themselves together whether through work or residential requirements<sup>8</sup>

### ***d. Values***

The word “value” comes from a Latin word ‘*valere*’ means be strong, be well; be of value, and be of worth. Values are principles, standards or qualities that an individual or group of people hold in high regard. These values guide the way we live our lives and the decisions we make. A value may be defined as something that we hold dear, those things/qualities which we consider to be of worth.<sup>9</sup> It also refers to an ethical precept on which we base our behavior. Values are shaped by the culture in which we live and by our experiences. However, there are values that are held high by most cultures. These include fairness and justice, compassion and charity, duties and rights, survival of human species and human well-being.

Values can be related to the norms of culture but they are more worldwide and abstract than norms. Norms provide rules for be-

havior in specific situations, while values identify what should be judged as good or evil. While norms are standards, patterns, rules and guides of expected behavior, values are abstract concepts of what is important and worthwhile. Flying the national flag on a holiday is a norm, but it reflects the value of patriotism. Wearing dark costume and appearing solemn are normative behaviors to manifest respect at a funeral. Different cultures reflect values differently and to different levels of emphasis.

Values are set of personal or social principles, standards, concepts, beliefs and ideas that can be used to make everyday decisions. Hospers easily distinguishes three senses of ‘value’ namely as “a liking or preference, that which promotes a goal (end) independently of one’s liking or preference” and ‘that which has value or worth in itself without reference to any end.’<sup>10</sup>

## **2. The Principal Cultural Values within Which Africans Befriend Others**

Human cultural values in the world differ significantly despite some similarities they may share. Some of the reasons which lie behind this is the geographical setting and racial differences. This automatically leads us to talk about European cultural values, Asian cultural values, African cultural values etc. Different scholars proved that most people’s cultural values take their essence from manifold elements; such as ethics, religion, politics, economics, esthetics, etc. You can agree with me that one’s personality constitutes part of his/her culture. Cultural values can be defined as commonly held standards of what is acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, workable or unworkable in a community or society.<sup>11</sup> It is implicitly in the definition that cultural values are meant for the common good of a society.

Africans’ cultural values have been discredited by many (especially missionaries) as completely flabby and uncivilized one. So, more to the point of evangelization, uprooting Africans’ culture and imposition of European ones had been a second project of missionaries. This negative attitude affected and deprived Africans of their identity. Up to now majority of Africans are not at home with their cultures. There is always a struggle to become like Europeans. But is it an actual fact that African culture is useless and uncivilized?

The late president of Tanzania Julius Kambarage Nyerere once remarked “Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that what we did have was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride.<sup>12</sup> Our point here is to unveil the truth that, besides the defects found in African culture, (which may also be in other cultures) there are also positive values in African society which had great impacts to Christian religion.

African values are found in various categories such as Moral values, Religious values, Economic values, Political values, Aesthetic value and Social values. Nevertheless, social values seem to be fundamentally the cardinal. African values are humanistic in the sense that they take human person prior, central and end-point in techno-development valuations and engagements.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore we would focus precisely on how these values played a considerable role on befriending others. African values were based on the so called policy of “live-and let –live” that presupposed inter-personal and intercommunity relationship realized in the interaction between individuals of the same community and different communities. Values which nurtured this life setting were the following: hospitality, solidarity/mutual assistance, respect, exchange of greetings, reconciliation and forgiveness. Let us analyse each individually.

### ***a. Hospitality***

For Africans ‘To be’ is to be related. The term humanity in Africa is not just an anthropological term; it is also a moral term when it comes to considering the relations between members of the human species. If we are human, we are (must be) brothers, in a comprehensive sense of the word ‘brother.’ So any human person has the right to be recognised by everyone and the society at large. The phrase ‘All men are equal’ is used to instill in Africans’ mind the spirit of brotherhood and friendship in their daily life.

The Akan people in Ghana summarize the idea of hospitality with the proverb “honam mu nninhanoa” that means humanity has no boundary. Literary is that:

In human flesh there is no edge of cultivation—no boundary. The maxim can be interpreted as meaning that ‘all humankind is one species’, thus, that ‘Humanity has no boundary.’ When the farmer cultivates his land, he does it up to a limit, an edge where he has to stop; otherwise he would trespass on another farmer’s land. There is, thus, a limit to the area of cultivation of land. But the maxim invites us to realise, it is not so in the cultivation of the friendship and fellowship of human beings; the boundaries of that form of cultivation are limitless. For, humanity is of one kind; all humankind is one species, with shared basic values, feelings, hopes, and desires.<sup>14</sup>

Though Africans are divided into different tribes, they consider humanity as universal value that constitutes one human family which surpasses the ethnic boundary. Hospitality or generosity is therefore extended to all people regardless of race, culture or religion. Mbiti shed more light on this by saying “It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality even to a stranger. Therefore, when people travel they may stop anywhere for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead. They should not be molested unless of course they abuse the hospitality they have received”<sup>15</sup>

This generosity is exercised in every aspect of life. For instance, in Africa one does not need to inform a person whom s/he is planning to visit that one will eat or not. It is in the Africans’ tradition that a visitor should never leave without eating something from his/her hosts. Due to this tradition, an African woman will always make sure she prepares enough food for the family and little surplus for whoever may come. Women who cook food without a surplus can sometimes be considered as greedy or selfish.

African culture forbids one to ask a visitor whether s/he wants something to eat. It is considered bad manners. When a visitor arrives after a warm welcome, is served with any edible thing then the decision to eat or not is left upon him. Refusal is the rare case. If s/he took something before his/her coming s/he takes a small amount as a sign of appreciation. Asking a visitor if s/he likes something is translated as not having the will to give and the answer one is expecting to get if such a question is asked is always negative. In

this context therefore, an African is sure of food and accommodation among his/her fellow Africans.

Sharing is encouraged no matter how little the food is; keeping a prey for one's own family when the catch is big enough for the extended family was considered as violation of customs and it has to be vehemently reproached. Afolayan Funso compares greedy people with a lion saying "to be generous in heart is to be human, to take food only for oneself reduces one to be the level of the animals, just like lions take food only for themselves. Only the light-hearted and those whose bellies are like bags without openings think only of their appetite and of meeting their own needs at all cost."<sup>16</sup>

The late President Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere once said "One of the achievements of our African society was the universal hospitality on which members of the community and others could rely."<sup>17</sup> Several writers, including European travellers to Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, have also remarked upon these virtues as practiced in African social and moral life. Briton who spent about three decades in Central Africa from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century made the following observation, "Hospitality is one of the most sacred and an ancient custom of Bantu land, and is found *everywhere*. A native will give his best house and his evening meal to a guest, without the slightest thought that he is doing anything *extraordinary*."<sup>18</sup> It is even believed that mistreating or refraining from generosity to a stranger can lead to misfortunes or a curse on that family.

Encouragement of hospitality in people's lives is expressed by the maxim "human being is more beautiful than gold."<sup>19</sup> That the goodness/value of man cannot be compared by anything else; and that he is a being which has to be enjoyed in spite of any defects one may have. According to Ifeanyi Menkiti, a beautiful object is enjoyed for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else. Therefore, human being is to be enjoyed for his or her own sake; and to enjoy a human being for his/her own sake means you should appreciate his value as a human being and demonstrate that appreciation by showing compassion and hospitality. It means to be open to the interests and welfare of others and to feel it a moral duty to offer help where it is needed; it also means to recognise the other person as a fellow individual whose worth as a human being is equal to yours and with whom you undoubtedly share basic values, ideals, and sentiments.<sup>20</sup>



However, African hospitality is dispensed in moderation and in prudence. This is demonstrated by the Akan proverb that cautions on foolish dispensation of hospitality saying ‘Visitor is a visitor for several days, and then put the person to work.’<sup>21</sup> 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)’<sup>22</sup>. 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 various forms to promote the economic well-being of the hosting family, the entire community and justly earn his livelihood.

A few malicious people who pretend to be visitors with bad intention have resulted the diminishing of Africans’ generosity. Besides that, it is crucial to highlight the fact that such attitudes are changing very slowly in our modern day Africa due to the fact that supply in proportion to the people in our modern world is less. Surely, one cannot afford to cook so much food that used to be cooked for the entire extended family and beyond. Growth of population has resulted into scarcity of land which do not produce enough food for the family. Additionally, the change of attitude that is weakening our hospitality can also be attributed to the mushrooming of commercial places like hotels, restaurants, bars and lodgings which have replaced the many social gatherings for refreshment purposes such as local beer drinking sessions that used to be there.<sup>23</sup>

## ***b. Greetings***

In African setting, the exchange of greetings symbolizes one’s acknowledgement to the dignity and value of the other person. It is inconceivable for two people to meet on the way or anywhere else without greeting each other. Saying hellow to whoever you come across is an impression of a well formed person (though this may not be absolute).

Although this practice binds every member in the society, “when two people meet, the younger one usually starts off the greeting session giving the other the same title that he or she would give to his/her parent or elder of the same group”.<sup>24</sup> Greeting is accompanied with some gestures such as shaking hands and half genuflecting, stopping if one was walking; standing if one was sitting; or kneeling depending on the culture and tradition of that particular tribe. Elder

people greet those in authority by taking off their hat while shaking their hands regardless of their age.

At times exchange of greetings serves as starting point of dialogue and conversation. It is an art cherished in African relations. In African scenery questions like: did you sleep well? How are your children? Or how is your family form part of greetings and are asked in *bonafide*. Extension of greeting to that extent lies on the fact that Africans freely discuss and express their problems. You may wonder where do they get time to extend greetings in that way. This is possible because majority of Africans go to their place of work on foot (can be to school, farm areas, market etc). If those who meet are taking the same direction they can discuss a lot of things before they depart one another. It is highly important to note that Africans believe that he who discusses his affairs with others hardly runs into difficulties or makes mistakes in the execution of his plans.

Africans, particularly Tanzanians, believe that to greet a person is to wish him/her well, it shows that you value him/her and it is a sign of recognising him as a person and not as an object. Passing somebody silently is a sign of hatred, enmity or disrespect. Certainly, there should be something incongruous or abnormal. If one passes silently s/he can immediately be asked “what have I done to you that you pass me like a stone”? It is a fundamental question which solicits a concrete response from the interlocutor or counterpart.

### ***c. Solidarity and Communality***

Akan people have a proverb which goes: “It is the human being that counts; I call upon gold, it answers not; I call upon cloth, it answers not; it is the human being that counts.”<sup>25</sup> This adage insists the uniqueness of human being among the created beings. No matter how rich one is, solidarity and mutual assistance takes precedence in the sphere of social life. We may have everything but still we need each other in life. Life is more than richness and what counts in our lives is good relationships.

Relationship between individuals recognizes their worth as human beings and not only what they possess or what can they do for each other. Nevertheless, these can come as secondary considerations, in terms of reciprocity and in terms of inter-personal relationship. People help one another without demanding immediate

or an exact equivalent remuneration.<sup>26</sup> Everyone is mindful that each person has something to contribute to his welfare, some time and somehow. Another Hausa proverb illustrates this point clearly. It says: “Friendship with the ferryman right from the dry season means that when the rains come, you will be the first to cross”. This proverb emphasizes constancy in friendship. In it, the worth of the ferryman, as a human being is not determined solely by what he can offer during the rains, hence he must be befriended right from the dry season when his occupation is not in strict demand.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, the claim that ‘it is human being that counts’ does not imply that African social ethics disregard the importance of earthly goods. The point is that, these goods should not detach us from others or community. Earthly goods have value only in relation to human beings. Think of a man who has big companies and no one goes for employment even for high payment. Think also of a sick rich man; can his wealth take him to hospital? No matter how many cars he has, it is only his fellow human being who can drive him to hospital since the car itself cannot. We can give so many other examples but the point stressed here is that mutual relationship, solidarity and affection towards other people has to be promoted by each one in the community.

A person is defined in a way s/he relates in the society. According to Polycarp Ikuenobe the term person in African tradition has dual standards of recognition: normative recognition and descriptive or metaphysical. Normatively, a person is defined or described based on the recognition s/he has acquired from the society due to his/her conformity to the social and moral norms. Metaphysical recognition is based on what constitutes a person. It is recognition based on the ontological analyses of the person; his/her make-up, the nature. It is normative standards that define a person in Africa and one has to prove so practically. Yet, one cannot be described as a person normatively without the metaphysical features.<sup>28</sup>

The arrangement of human relation is that of being one’s brother’s keeper or caring for each other’s welfare. A way of life emphatically centred upon human interest and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by consideration and compassion for human beings.<sup>29</sup> Life is a shared reality hence togetherness and cooperation are praised. Gerald Tanye affirms this saying:

Solidarity is expressed in work, helping one another to build or repair their houses, in funeral celebrations, in farming and education of children as a corporate responsibility and general involvement in one's another's life. The value of solidarity is expressed concretely through sharing at the heart of daily life where everyone feels to be truly at home<sup>30</sup>

Onwubiko pointed that the African idea of security and its value depend on personal identification with and within the community. An authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community.

#### ***d. Forgiveness and Reconciliation***

It is within Africans' mind that people are unique with their own likes and dislikes, even temperaments differ from one person to another. Hence, misunderstandings and conflicts may arise at any time between individuals, in family or society. The spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation is always insisted to construct and maintain peace and good relationships in the community. For instance, people were warned about the tendency of berating others for their failings with this maxim *a cow falls despite its four legs*.<sup>31</sup>

A cow is not expected to fall easily precisely because it has four legs, these help it to have balance and be stable, but the possibility to slip and fall is there. If that is the case with stable creatures what about two-legged creatures? The message here is that, we do not expect to have infallible people in society. No matter how virtuous a person is, to err is human. Therefore we need to bear other people's failures and be ready to forgive regardless of how many times they failed.

Africans consider forgiveness and reconciliation as moral obligation in order to maintain solidarity and community ties which bring peace and harmony in the society. Regardless of other elements, blessings and success in one's life in Africa is associated with the good relations one has towards the community members. In the book *Truth and Reconciliation* we read that forgiveness does not mean to forget but an emphatic recognition of the moral vulnerability of human beings. This is by being ready to make a

change from the way we remember our traumas and the way those traumas and hatred have defined our relationships with others.<sup>32</sup>

To bring back true peace and inner healing to the ruptured relationship, reconciliation is significant where the two conflicting parties must expose the root causes of the problem one after another. “For if the causes of suffering are not addressed, suffering is likely to continue and the wheel of violence keeps turning.”<sup>33</sup> After hearing from both sides the mediator with her wisdom reconciles the two.

In most of African societies the party found guilty, after apologizing publicly, has to pay something as a fine (is usually an edible thing) which is eaten by those who gathered for that purpose (elders) or part of it can be given to the victim or offended family. Regardless of the seriousness of the case, forgiveness and reconciliation is obligatory and there is no way the offended person can refuse. In some tribes there is a particular leaf the offender uses when asking forgiveness to show a heartfelt apology. The motive behind the reconciliation is the fact that it is an imperative duty to build a united community and eradicate roots of division, isolation and build friendship between a person and a person or between neighbour communities.

### **3. The Convergences of African Values to Christianity**

Despite the transgressions found in African culture, a number of values practiced in the society exerted great force in evangelizing process. The Christian values such as respect to elders, hospitality, welcoming foreigners, forgiveness, reconciliation, solidarity and mutual assistance were not new in African land. Unknowingly the Africans lived the gospel message within their culture. To some extent this reflected the evangelizing work.

African hospitality is that extension of generosity, given freely without strings attached. It is a readiness to share gratuitously. It is, thus, the willingness to give, to help, to assist, to love and to carry one another's burden without necessarily profit or reward as the driving forces. African hospitality created the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood ‘between the members of the same family group, same clan and even strangers. Hospitality is perceived and practiced by Africans as open-handed, instinctive and the most natural thing in the world.’<sup>34</sup> This is to say 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 this study seeks to show.<sup>35</sup>

Analogously, from biblical context hospitality is intended to make human being enter into fellowship with one another and practice Christ’s commandment of love. Jesus pointed that, the very credibility of our witness to the gospel is at risk when our ministry of evangelism fails to cross boundaries; when it is limited to those who are culturally or racially similar to ourselves. The real nature of the gospel is contravened when our witness is not extended to those who are far from our ethnic or racial boundaries ( Lk. 6:32).

Hospitality is more than simply a context for evangelism; it is integral to the gospel. In fact, the whole life of Jesus was that of hospitality, as Pohl suggests: “Jesus gave his life so that persons could be welcomed into the Kingdom.”<sup>36</sup> Koenig puts it this way: “When Paul urges the Romans to ‘welcome one another . . . just as Christ has welcomed you’ (15:7), he is revealing something close to the heart of his gospel.”<sup>37</sup>

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. In ancient Kikuyu hospitality, it was more distinctive 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 was genuinely hungry, he would get into somebody’s garden and consequently eat as many ripe bananas, sugar cane or any ripe fruit but was not supposed to carry it with him (or her) outside the spot. The danger of this rule 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 very 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 less.<sup>38</sup>

On the whole, both Western hospitality and African hospitality have something to learn from the ideal of Christ’s hospitality which is too sacrificial. Since none of us is perfect before God, we should therefore avoid being judgmental on whose hospitality is more

Christ-like or less Christ-like. Rather, we should simply let Christ perfect us.

To wind up this subsection we can rightly argue that rather than African hospitality being seen as unique when we compare it to the hospitality of the rest of the world, it is Christ's hospitality that is clearly and ideally unique and worth of imitation by all nations of the earth

Solidarity and mutual assistance in African life is grounded in the fact that no one is an island in himself or herself, rather each and every one is part of the whole. Mbiti's dictum, 'I am because we are and since we are therefore I am' sums up the basis on which African hospitality and solidarity is built. The emphasis is put on interdependence, which is in accord with Pauline theology on the need to recognise other people's gifts and talents in order to edify the Church and society in general. (1 Cor. 12.)<sup>39</sup>

Scriptures requires us to practice hospitality and mutual assistance by recognising the equal worth of every person. In African culture hospitality and mutual assistance "both reflect and participate in God's invitation of welcome to all."<sup>40</sup> The African values under discussion are thus characterized 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 and this touches the African emphasis on interdependence. According to Paul, the many different gifts, and talents that are bestowed upon each and every one of us by God our maker makes us one in diversity.

The Gikuyu tribe insists interdependence using the proverb 'The hornless animal leans on the one that has them.'<sup>41</sup> The proverb can be connected with what the New Testament implies by fellowship among the believers in Christ. The hornless animal could be equated with someone who is a doctor but cannot teach his children because he does not have that training. Even though his/her profession is noble, he or she needs the services of a teacher and vice-versa.

Africans' sense of community is expressed in innumerable proverbs such as 'One log does not make a bridge' 'one finger does not kill lice, unity is strength, etc. All these proverbs emphasise that

by himself or herself, an individual cannot do something substantial. One needs others for advice, teaching, rebuke, correcting and training above other things (See 2 Tim. 3:16). One cannot give advice to himself; nor rebuke his own wrongs; nor correct or train himself; nor can he see his or her back. This calls us to share whatever talents and gifts we have for the sake of God and the general prosperity of our society as a way of encouraging one another. For 'we ought to encourage one another for the Day of the Lord is coming' (Heb. 10:25).<sup>42</sup>

The interdependence which exists among human being is like that which exists between cattle and cattle *egret* (Latin *bubulcus* means shepherd). Cattle *egret* is a type of a bird which accompany the grazing cattle and other large mammals as if it is the shepherd. The logic of doing so is that as the cattle moves in the grazing land, grasshoppers and other nutritious insects are disturbed and exposed and the bird gets the chance to feast 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, which exposes insects from their hiding places thereby giving it a chance to feast them.

This symbiotic behaviour clearly expresses the ideal African solidarity 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 Cor. 12:12-26).<sup>43</sup>

The philosophy behind exchange of greetings in Africa is to acknowledge the deep sense of affinity in society. Greeting someone in Africa has the following connotation: telling somebody 'I am at peace with you', 'I do not have anything against you'; 'we are brothers', 'I wish you well being', 'all is well' etc. <sup>44</sup> This



idea is expressed in 2 Sam.18:28; a messenger arrives to David to announce the victory over Absalom. He begins with *shalom* “all is well”. Often in greetings the use of the word *shalom* is an assurance to the person spoken to of one’s good intentions that is one pledges oneself to keep peace.<sup>45</sup>

Existence of hatred between individuals in Africa is immediately discovered by absence of salute. A greeting offers and creates a sense of unity and avoids enmity. Similarly, theologically greetings symbolize token of mutual love and friendship. For instance the implication of epistolary greetings of Paul’s letter ..... goes beyond identifying writer and addressees; it is more than saying hello. The author’s salutation manifests the nature of the relationship between the author and the audience and even draws lines around the conversation being carried on by the letter in hand. Meanings are more readily and rightly determined in terms of this “rhetorical relationship” formulated by the letter’s opening words.

In 2 Cor.13:12 when Paul says “salute each other with holy kiss” he does not necessarily say Christians should kiss each other even when culture does not allow. But the passage recommends the cultivation of the spirit of love by being affectionate to one another. It means: show affection by hugging, smiling, shaking hands and being overall warm and affectionate to others. These are exterior manifestations of a strongly founded element of congeniality within families and the entire African I-Thou relationships well reflected within multi-form of social realities.

Africans observe reconciliation as a value and part of social norms. Due to the fallible human nature, an emphatic recognition of the moral vulnerability of human beings call for the virtue of forgiveness and reconciliation to refurbish conflicts that would cause a rupture of relationship as insisted by Jesus Himself in his teaching. (Eph. 4:32)

#### **4. Divergences Found within African Cultural Values**

Having established some convergences of African values with Christianity, it is worthwhile also to see a few divergences within their culture. Africans were aware of the existence of a Supreme Being to whom they attributed all power and life. However, they believe that this God is very far from them and therefore they consid-

ered their ancestors as their intermediaries. This background makes them seek help and direct their prayers to ancestors than God their Creator. Sacrifices, rituals were offered to these ancestors. Automatically this made them to be recognised as polytheists and ancestral worshippers.

Other appalling cultural traditions practiced by some of the African tribes include severe punishment for those who broke social norms like killing or sending them to exile, suppression of women, killing of twins because of the belief that they bring bad fortunes, etc. So, despite the fact that good values exist in traditional African society, Christianizing Africans was substantially necessary to bring changes in those unbecoming cultural rituals and to evoke conversion to authentic Christian life based on strong ethical values.

For Christ's Gospel to be firmly rooted in the African soil would indeed mean a reversal of many traditional values and practices long cherished by the African. It would mean also a new ethical reference point, Christ's own love ethic as his new commandment. In practice this new faith with its new morality means to the African a higher idea of God and more perfect rules of human conduct.

## **Conclusion**

As regards the reasons of the aforementioned African practices is that "the Africans find it difficult to conceive a man as a purely contemplative being; for them human qualities presuppose a world of human relations. It is only within our relationship with others that we can actualize our humanity. We believe strongly that isolation make our potentialities become inert, static and dormant. Relationship therefore is a crucial element and it needs to be cultivated by any means in every society. The above discussed values make Africans a single family; everyone feels at home wherever s/he is. This is all to do with the communality of African society where one person's happiness is happiness for all, and one person's sorrow is a sorrow for all.

## Notes

1. Kofi A. Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*, Praeger, New York, USA, 1967, p. 1. Commenting on the intensity of religious attitude in African society, Leonard G. describing Igbos life says “they are, in the strict and natural sense of the word, a truly and a deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, as it has been said of the Hindus, that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bath religiously, dress religiously. In a few words, the religion of these natives as I have all along endeavoured to point out is their existence in their religion.” A.G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*, Frank Cass, London, 1968, p.429.
2. *Ibid*.
3. Hugh Barber, *Crazy Revolution: Living Outrageously in Faith for the one who gave everything*, Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington Indiana, 2012, p. 35
4. Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, Rowman Altamira, California- USA, 2004, p. 5.
5. Nigel A. Kumar, *What is Religion? A Theological Answer*, SA-IACS Press, Bangalore- India, 2014, p.293.
6. Odejobi Cecilia Omobola, <http://ijsse.com/sites/default/files/issues/2014/v4-i3-2014/Paper-4.pdf> accessed on 9th July.
7. George A. Phiri, *Social-Cultural Anthropology: Communication with the African Society*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene Oregon, USA, 2009
8. Biko in Yosefu Waghid, *African philosophy of Education: On being human*, Routledge, Taylor, London, 2012, p. 27
9. See [https://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au/MCS/CHCAOD402A/chcaod402a\\_csw/knowledge/values/values.htm](https://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au/MCS/CHCAOD402A/chcaod402a_csw/knowledge/values/values.htm)
10. William Frankena, “Value and Valuation,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 8, New York: MacMillan, 1967, pp. 583-584.
11. Gayle Cotton, *Say Anything to Anyone, Anywhere: 5 Keys To Successful Cross-Cultural communication*, John Wiley & Sons Publishers, USA, 2013, p.45.

12. Macaulay A. Kanu, *The indispensability of the basic social values in African Traditional: A Philosophical appraisal*, p.150 in <file:///C:/Users/teresa/Downloads/57930-101933-1-PB.pdf> accessed on 9th July,2015.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ifeanyi A, Menkiti, “*Person and Community in African traditional thought*” *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 3rd edition, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1984 p. 176
15. John S. Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion*, East Africa Educational Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya, 1991, p.176. (Hereafter referred to as Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religions*). Fr. Joseph Israel comment about this saying a visitor in Africa is not seen as an interruption; people are happy to see visitors and they welcome them wholeheartedly because hospitality is a cultural and social value which is promulgated by each community. Cf. Joseph Israel, *The Church as a Family: A Theological Pastoral Study With Reference to the African Synod*, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Rome, 1998, p. 52. Also Pope John Paul II in his pastoral address in Congo said “Nor can I pass over in silence the deep impression made on me by the vitality of that continent, which preserves intact a good many fundamental moral values, such as those of hospitality, the family, the community sense, life as a precious gift, which is always given a generous and happy welcome.” John Paul II, in Tanye, *The Church as Family*, p. 30. Africans believe visitors bring blessing to their hosts and are considered as divine agents. Sybertz observed “....when a visitor comes to someone’s home, family quarrels stop, the sick cheer up, peace is restored and the home is restored to new strength. Visitors are therefore social healers. They are family doctors in sense.” Sybertz D. & Healey J., *Toward an African Narrative Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis, New York, USA, 1996, p. 174.
16. Afolayan, *Culture and Customs of S. Africa*, Pp. 221-222.
17. Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, Oxford University Press, Dar es-salaam- Tanzania, 1968, p. 5.

18. A. Briton, *In the Heart of Bantuland: A record of twenty-nine years in Central Africa among the Bantu Peoples*, Dugald Campbell, London, 1922, p. 45.
19. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Sankofa Publishing Company, Accra, Ghana, 1996, p. 25.
20. Menkiti, *Person and the Community*, p. 189.
21. Healey and Sybertz 1996:173
22. Ibid. p.172
23. Julius Mutugi Gathogo, *African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ's Hospitality?* in [http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/120/Cman\\_120\\_1\\_Gathogo.pdf](http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/120/Cman_120_1_Gathogo.pdf) accessed on 21 July, 2015. (Hereafter referred to as Mutugi Gathogo)
24. Sambuli, *The heartbeat*, p. 95.
25. Philip Higgs, *African Voices in Education*, Juta and Company Ltd, Cape town, South Africa, 2000, p. 183.
26. See [http://www.emeka.at/african\\_cultural\\_vaules.pdf](http://www.emeka.at/african_cultural_vaules.pdf) accessed on 25th July, 2015
27. Ibid.
28. Polycarp Ikuenobe, *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in Africa Traditions*, A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Oxford, UK, 2006, p. 52. (Hereafter referred to as Ikuenobe, *Communalism and Morality in Africa*).
29. Macaulay A. Kanu, *The Indispensability of the Basic Social Values in African Tradition: a Philosophical Appraisal* in [file:///C:/Users/teresa/Downloads/57930-101933-1-PB%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/teresa/Downloads/57930-101933-1-PB%20(1).pdf) accessed on 26th July, 2015.
30. Tanye, *Church as a Family*, p. 28.
31. Rose R. Korir, *An Analysis of the Nandi Proverbs and its place in critical psychology* in [www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5](http://www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5). Accessed on 20th Sept. 2013.
32. Charles V. Vicencio & Fame Du Toir eds., *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: 10 Years On*, New Africa Books Ltd, Cape town, South Africa, 2006, Pp. 75-76.

33. Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation Mission & Ministry in Changing Social Order*, Orbis Books Maryknol New York, USA, 1992 p. 20.
34. See Mutugi Gathogo.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), xi.
37. John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), p. 11. Koenig also states in his recent study on the missionary dimensions of the church's Eucharistic rituals: "Answering the command to join Christ's mission becomes possible only when we can savor the eager and compassionate welcome that he extends to each of us personally (Matthew 11:28f.; Romans 15:7ff.)." *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), p. 220.
38. See Mutugi Gathogo.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 172.
41. Julius G. Mutugi, *The Truth about African Hospitality: Is There Hope for Africa?* Salt Productions, Kenya, 2001, p.21.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Julius G. Mutugi, *African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ's Hospitality? Part 1* in [http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/120/Cman\\_120\\_1\\_Gathogo.pdf](http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/120/Cman_120_1_Gathogo.pdf) accessed on 26 th July 2015.
44. Unfortunately nowadays things are contrary. Malicious greetings exist almost everywhere. Many people do not want to show they are in bad term with somebody; they will exchange greetings as usual. But what happen behind this you cannot imagine. People are even killed by those whom they think is a friend without knowing.

45. Martin F. Baasten, *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies*, Peeters Publishers, USA, 2003, p.156.

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