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Interdependence of *Ubuntu* and Hospitality and the Link to Theological Perspective: A Biblical Reflection

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Abstract- The interdependence of Ubuntu and hospitality is drawn primarily from the investigation of theology and African cultural practices to address current Christian ethical practices of hospitality in the context of migration and the problems it poses to the practice of hospitality, and how it can be reconceived in the light of this context. This article argues that Christians have an identity defined by a new union in Christ, which has resultant ethics that flow from this relationship and 'theological life be considered as a pilgrimage of pressing to higher ideals in Christ' (Philippians 3:13). However, ethical expectations and conduct for people bound by Christ's fellowship have explicit ethical obligations to one another and a duty to fellow human beings, as people are created in the image of God (imago Dei). This suggests that our human actions as Christians should have an intentional goal of co-existence with other human beings as we are bound in contextual realities with other people. In this regard, Ubuntu means interdependence, communality, commonality and mutuality. The church and the individual Christian have a duty to be engaged according to Ubuntu's notion of identity and solidarity. Identity and solidarity imply a vector towards the other. This could be used to exhort South Africans to desist from acts of xenophobia as this is contrary to the ethos of Ubuntu that teaches the dignity of all people, as our well-being is intertwined and communally shared.

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Clement Kholopa

Abstract- The interdependence of *Ubuntu* and hospitality is drawn primarily from the investigation of theology and African cultural practices to address current Christian ethical practices of hospitality in the context of migration and the problems it poses to the practice of hospitality, and how it can be reconceived in the light of this context. This article argues that Christians have an identity defined by a new union in Christ, which has resultant ethics that flow from this relationship and 'theological life be considered as a pilgrimage of pressing to higher ideals in Christ' (Philippians 3:13). However, ethical expectations and conduct for people bound by Christ's fellowship have explicit ethical obligations to one another and a duty to fellow human beings, as people are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). This suggests that our human actions as Christians should have an intentional goal of co-existence with other human beings as we are bound in contextual realities with other people. In this regard, *Ubuntu* means interdependence, communality, commonality and mutuality. The church and the individual Christian have a duty to be engaged according to *Ubuntu's* notion of identity and solidarity. Identity and solidarity imply a vector towards the other. This could be used to exhort South Africans to desist from acts of xenophobia as this is contrary to the ethos of *Ubuntu* that teaches the dignity of all people, as our well-being is intertwined and communally shared.

I. Introduction

Sanders (2007) articulates that "*Ubuntu* suggests hospitality and acceptance of fellow human beings in that *Ubuntu* in its fundamental sense is hospitality as one's human being is folded together with the other, that other human being, being the stranger". Thus, the interdependence of *Ubuntu* and hospitality is drawn primarily from the investigation of theology and African cultural practices to address current Christian ethical practices of hospitality in the context of migration and the problems it poses to the practice of hospitality, and how it can be reconceived in the light of this context. Msafiri (2002:86-87) asserts that "the metaphors that reflect the relationship between the human community and the church can indeed be helpful in positioning *Ubuntu* ethos in the re-forming of communities that abide by the ethics that guide societal morality". Thus, we need to revisit and reinterpret the Bible considering the contemporary socio-political problems (i.e. *kairos* – xenophobia) and our experiences as Africans.

Genuine and true *Ubuntu* automatically assumes hospitality and vice versa. Such a human disposition can be maintained, sustained and made possible from humanity's natural common grace perspective. However, as also illustrated from biblical texts and theological discussion, the relationship and interplay of *Ubuntu* and hospitality reveals the very heart, essence and outward expression of how Christians should relate to one another. These concepts indicate an embodiment of Christian love, neighbourliness and concern. Practising such ideals is an embodiment of the 'one another' formula of the New Testament, Matthew. 25: 35-45, Mark. 6:34, Mark. 12:30-31.

Thus, *Ubuntu* according to Tutu (Battle, 1997: 6-7), concerns our relationship with God and neighbour and is what life is all about as our identity is formed by God, hence, the encounter with the reality of the Triune God reveals our personhood within the framework of interconnectedness that relates with God and with other human beings. However, this posture of *Ubuntu* as argued by scholars as a Christian notion is problematic. I argue that Christians have an identity defined by a new union in Christ, which has resultant ethics that flow from this relationship. At the same time Christians as people belonging to humanity are bound by the bond with other human beings as people are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*).

However, ethical expectations and conduct for people bound by Christ's fellowship have explicit ethical obligations to one another and a duty to fellow human beings. These ethical obligations are explicitly drawn from special revelation (Bible). The challenge, however, is to answer the question: from where does the challenge for non-Christians to act and respond ethically arise? Does this arise from human rights or natural revelation – herein lies the challenge of public pastoral care. Pastoral care in the public space needs to account for these dynamics.

II. Overview of Christian Public Ethical Issues: Biblical Analysis

Texts from the Old and New Testaments, notably, the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Peter, Philippians, Hebrews and Ephesians, will be used to ring-fence the *kairos* (ie xenophobia) facing the church. This article, therefore, advocates some normative responses to the challenges and what lessons could be learned. The Old Testament perspective on the stranger/foreigner is largely found in the legislative

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codes in a category that usually comprises the Covenant Code (Exodus 21:1-23.33), the Law of Holiness (Leviticus 17:1-26.46) and Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 4:44-26.19) (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2009:43).

These were legislated after the constitution of Israel as a nation following the establishment of the covenant on Sinai. The stranger/foreigner was given special protection under the law (Exodus 22:20) and was even loved as a native Israelite (Leviticus 19:34). The Hebrew Bible in its usage of different terminology for the stranger, as *ger* for the stranger residing permanently among Israelites, *nokir* for the foreigner in transit, and *toshar* and *sakir* for paid immigrant workers; takes cognisance of the place of the stranger in the Israelite community. It is thus unsurprising that in the Torah the solicitude of the *ger* appears constantly out of natural generosity as in Exodus 22:20; 23:9 or by informed generosity in recalling days of slavery in Egypt granted by God in Deuteronomy 16:11-12 (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2009:44).

The New Testament as the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of God, has its fundamental foundation in the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3, "A voice cries out in the desert prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God". The usage of this expression, however, was not a common or prevalent theme in the Old Testament but was rather an ardent wish of the post-exilic Israel as a desire for the coming of God to remove the injustices experienced by the people. This kingdom of God, interpreted by biblical scholars as preached by Jesus, contains the aspects of both the future and the present, and it has important implications for Christian morality as evil will be vanquished with justice reinstated and humanity restored to the values and virtues that conform us with the will of God (Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20.17:21).

The proclamation of the nearness of the coming of the kingdom of God by Jesus in his teachings (Matthew 4:17) and in the prayer he taught us (Matthew 6:10), is for humanity to be moulded by God's will as a departure point for the theological foundation of Christian ethics as echoed throughout the biblical tradition and summed up in Leviticus 19:2, "Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy". The beginning of the ministry of the Messiah is characterised by the presence of foreigners, the vulnerable and the sick, and He constantly interacted with them, showing that God's love is ever present in the world (Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 17:18; John 4). His death on the cross for the sins of humanity broke down the dividing walls of enmity, thus establishing peace and reconciling all to God through his death (Ephesians 2:14-18). Therefore, it is incumbent upon the church to actively help the vulnerable and strangers by always reflecting on its identity and unequivocal love of God for the hapless (Matthew 25-44) and hospitality to characterise the life of a Christian (Hebrew 13: 2;1 Corinthians 12: 28-29; cf Acts 13:1-2).

a) The perspective of the stranger/foreigner in the Old Testament

i. *The exegetical view of the stranger/foreigner from Exodus 22:20-23 and 23:9*

The locus of Exodus 22:20-23 in the Pentateuch or Law of Moses is the continuation of the narrative that began in Genesis with the English translation having its roots in the Greek Old Testament word *exodos* meaning "departure" or "going out" (cf Exodus 19:1). The main theme of the book of Exodus is the liberation of Israel from oppression in Egypt by God, in which the same God binds himself to an oppressed people and gets actively involved in their liberation (Barnes, 2005:24). This same God of Exodus is the God whom Christians have known as the Father of Jesus Christ.

The message of Exodus can be summarised into three basic components, being the punishment and judgement of the oppressor nation, Egypt; the deliverance of the Israelites by the mighty arm of God; and the establishment of the Israelite nation through the covenant at Mount Sinai as his chosen people as those who obey Him alone. The submission to his authority in its canonical formulation in the apodictic laws details the morality of duties (deontology) for a balanced moral reflection suitable for our times (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2009:38). These moral duties pertain to our relationship with God to whom we offer absolute homage, and our values regarding the relationships between persons such as dignity of the human person, solidarity, preferential treatment of the poor and the common good.

ii. *The analysis of the key verses in Exodus 22:20-23 and 23:9*

These key verses state: verse 22:20, "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" and verse 23:9 "You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt". This is part of the apodictic laws as they specify the conduct of persons in respect to others, especially the vulnerable of society, namely the compositional triad of orphans, widows and aliens. The verses are an earlier expression of humanitarian concern for the unfortunate and the needy as they are most often in society prone to injury and abuse (cf Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:17-22). The Israelites themselves, after Sinai and the wilderness, were given the gift of the Promised Land. They would lose God's permanent presence if they sinned and would become temporary residents of the holy land (Jeremiah 14:8). Unsurprisingly, the entire existence of Israel has been bound up with offering a blessing to foreigners (Genesis 12:1-3).

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iii. *The exegetical view of stranger/foreigner from Leviticus 19:33-34 and 23:22*

According to Longman and Dillard (2006:83) Leviticus by its very nature, like the rest of the Torah, is a theological instructional history. Thus, it was written for Israel to live a holy life in fellowship with God, create awareness for people to know and value their privileges and responsibilities before God and how to maintain a continuous relationship with God by expressing it through worship. Therefore, the content of Leviticus is primarily aimed at supplementing and completing what has been stated in the Decalogue in Exodus for inclusion in the religious and social spheres.

iv. *The analysis of the key verses in Leviticus 19:33-34 and 23:22*

Leviticus 19:33 warns thus: "When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him". This is a strong message in Leviticus from the Lord directing that we must learn that a wrong done to another human being is also a wrong done to God. It is a reminder that they are *imago Dei*, people belong to God who has given them their lives in trust and whoever violates their basic rights, it is not only a wrong to that person but to God as well (cf. Genesis 39:9; Psalms 51:4). The challenge facing Christians today in South Africa is the sinful silence in the face of xenophobic attacks on foreigners with the hopeful wish that "Jesus paid all our sins", albeit forgetting that we could never compensate God adequately for the wrong we do to Him by sinning.

Verse 19:34 emphasises the love for the strangers as it states "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God" (cf. Exodus 12:43). This reflects the application of the commandments to life situations and the expression of charity to your fellow human beings as neighbourly love is extended to everyone, irrespective of their social origins. The embodiment of the stranger/ foreigner as befitting acts of love and charity, is the forerunner to the teachings of Christ (Matthew 22:37-39: Mark 12:30-31) wherein "the neighbour" is applied in its broadest meaning with this lofty precept taken together with Deuteronomy 6:5 that sums up the whole of the Law and the Prophets.

b) The perspective of the stranger/foreigner in the New Testament

i. *The exegetical perspective of the stranger/foreigner from Hebrews 13:1-3*

Hebrews is placed last in the Pauline collection of Epistles in which the author exhorts Christians to persevere in the light of persecution. For all intents and purposes the author is unknown, even when he mentions Paul's collaborator Timothy in verse 13:23, nor does he claim any personal apostolic authority. The central theme of the epistle is the doctrine of Christ the Priest and His role as mediator between God and humanity (Koester, 2001:63).

The epistle is very unconventional in that it is written in epistolary conventions that are evident in some parts, as well as being cast in the form of a sermon. The epistolary conventions are pointedly in the last eight verses of the book, with the sermonic attributes taking up most of the book. The appearance of the sermonic attributes can be largely ascribed to the circumstances the Jewish Christians found themselves in. It was with this in mind that the author chose a sermonic tone to "exhort" the congregation towards Christian fellowship and love, as expounded in Hebrews 13:1-3, with exhortation being akin to a synagogue homily (Acts 13:15).

ii. *The analysis of the key verses in Hebrew 13:1-3*

The key verse in the chosen biblical text is verse 2: "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels". Hospitality was considered an important virtue in early Christianity as apostles and others were often on the move from community to community, relying on the support of generous believers, and this was extended to the poor in Luke 14:12-14. Worship in itself is an act of hospitality by God, as Newman (2007:174) explains "in worship we are welcomed and received, through Christ and the Spirit, into God's triune communion, God's desire to be with us, God gathers us". The exhortations to be hospitable are not only intended for some, but for all (Romans 16:2; Philippians 2:29; 1Peter 4:29), with particular emphasis on local churches (1Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Hospitality is recorded in the Bible, including the Old Testament, where people received unexpected blessings because of entertaining strangers in their midst, as in the case of the Patriarch Abraham (Genesis 18:2-8) who gained God's blessings because he entertained three men he thought were strangers but who were in fact angels. Lot (Genesis 19:1-15) avoided certain disaster with his family because he entertained two angels; Rahab the harlot (Joshua 2:8-15) and her family avoided death in the invasion of Jericho; the widow of Zarephath by serving the stranger, the prophet Elijah, and her jar of flour never got used up nor did her oil run dry. Therefore, those who have entertained and been merciful to strangers since time immemorial have gained God's grace and blessings, with His son reinforcing God's attitude towards strangers and making it a requirement for us.

iii. *The exegetical perspective of the stranger/ foreigner from Ephesians 2:11-22*

The letter to the Ephesians is more of a sermon than an outright epistle with the author specifically intending for it to be circulated to various churches around the Ephesus area, i.e. in Asia Minor. The basic theme of the epistle is to exhort the Christians to

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celebrate the life of the church in Christ and to live their lives in a manner worthy of Christ. The epistle places the position of the Gentiles prior to their conversion as a condition whereby they did not have the Messiah, nor did they have an outward relationship with God according to the Mosaic tradition. Unsurprisingly, the epistle has many baptismal themes so that it may originally have been intended to be composed as a baptismal homily as a forerunner to unity with Christ and among members of His church in the self-sacrificing love of Jesus himself.

iv. *The analysis of key verses in Ephesians 2:11-22*

The key verses in the epistle can be grouped together as they seemingly emphasise the same subject matter, albeit, in a complementary manner. Verses 11-13: The opening verse acts as a reminder that Gentiles were ridiculed by the Jews calling them derogatory names and referred to as uncircumcised. The reference in the verse of them being 'Gentiles in flesh' is a metaphor for them having no outward sign of a relationship with God in accordance to the Covenant Code, but by the blood of Christ they have 'become near', signifying their access to the awesomeness of God, as the people of the covenant.

Verses 14-17: The peace in verse 14, envisions the peace provided to the world by Christ as his purpose by God which must be promulgated by the church throughout the world (3:1-21).

The church as a community of people of God should take leadership in the promotion of peace and take the prophetic and pedagogical role in the formation of conscience by welcoming all people regardless of their status, especially the poor, marginalised and the suffering (1Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29). The church is called upon to 'break down the dividing wall of enmity', in that there should no longer be ethnic and racial hostility as Christ himself has abrogated the law as there should be a "new humanity" (the church) before God, as in Jesus' death God and the world are no longer strangers (cf. Isaiah 65:17.66:22; 2Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:1-2).

Verses 19-22: In Christ, all are the children of the common household of God where everybody is equal in dignity and privileges and no longer a stranger or sojourner, since access to God has been achieved through Jesus whose death has broken all barriers. The imagery of the building is used by the author to place the church with its foundations as the 'apostles and prophets' with Christ ('capstone') being the structure that holds the building together. In this structure, Christ, the church, will grow like the body with the Christian community becoming the temple of God.

v. *The exegetical perspective of the stranger/ foreigner from Philippians 3:20*

It is generally accepted that the epistle to the Philippians was written in AD 62 while Paul was in prison in Rome. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony named after Phillip of Macedon the father of Alexander the Great, which Paul visited on his second missionary journey. The book of Philippians is characteristically Gentile in its nature as it is an informal letter with no doctrinal arguments nor a coherent plan in its spontaneous outpouring of love and gratitude, neither was there any error to refute or any wrongdoing to correct. The important themes in this letter throughout is personal joy, fellowship, the gospel and the purpose of Christian life as Christ-centred.

vi. *The analysis of the key verse in Philippians 3:20*

The key verse 3:20a "But our citizenship is in heaven", is a promise of dual citizenship for the Christian both here on earth and, later in heaven. It is a word of hope and an encouragement to Christians to look forward to a brighter future despite the tribulations they may face in life. The analogy chosen by Paul to his audience in Philippi, being of Greek ancestry but of Roman citizenry by virtue of their colonial status, was immediately understood by them. They might have citizenship on earth, but they had another in heaven. This was an encouragement for the Christians to conduct themselves in a manner befitting their citizenship in heaven as wherever they were they should be mindful of where they belong, that is, heaven. This also acts as a reminder that we are to live as citizens of heaven in our time on earth because the moment we received Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour we also took heavenly citizenship.

Verse 3:20b "and from it we also await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" enjoins Christians to always have the excitement and expectation of the coming of Christ, and what awaits them in heaven. Heaven is the abode of all good things, where there is no pain, no mourning, no crying, no death or sin, only the fullness of joy and an unending succession of happiness beyond our imagination, and the glory and character of God is fully manifested forever. It is then incumbent on every Christian to have a cardinal guiding principle of living a Christ-centred life.

vii. *The exegetical perspective of the stranger/ foreigner from 1 Peter 4:8-11*

The epistle itself claims to have been written by "Peter the apostle" (1:1), and the church has historically accepted from the time of Eusebius for this to be the case, a fact strongly supported by the author's claim to be a "witness to the sufferings of Christ" (1Peter 5:1). The theology is very Pauline, and the degree of church organisation it assumes would seem to discount Peter being the author. The genuine Peter would have referred to the period of the historical Jesus, however, the period of the letter reflects the reign of the Roman Emperors who reigned after the martyrdom of Peter.

The epistle was generally written to the Gentile Christians, in which he encourages them to endure

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suffering and persecution (1 Peter 1:6-7; 2:18-20; 4:1-4,12-19) by giving themselves entirely to God (1 Peter 4:19). It was a message of hope to those who persevere in faith while suffering persecution as they will certainly enjoy ultimate salvation since they are already enjoying God's saving promises here and now through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

viii. *The analysis of the key verses in 1 Peter 4:8-11*

Verses 8-9: These verses act as an exhortation to respond to suffering in a godly way, as "love covers a multitude of sins" in the sense that seems to be, that love will overwhelm and offset the wrongs that are being done to us and the call for love be in connection to Parousia, as in Romans 13:8-10; 14:9. It also encourages Christians to be hospitable to strangers in a way that is worthy to God so as to continue on their way as co-workers in the truth because they have testified their love for all people before the church (Romans 12:13-21; Hebrews 13:2; 3 John 5-8).

Verses 10-11: The stewardship of the church is entrusted to every Christian as they all share in the responsibility of its mission through baptism and confirmation. This responsibility is borne by the gifts given to every Christian by the Holy Spirit so that they are invited to share them with others to build the Christian community. All Christians have the obligation, including the poorest, to use their God-given talents for sharing the spiritual and temporal resources with members of the community and the universal church (Matthew 25:1-13; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-30; Ephesians 4:3-7). It is therefore imperative as the good steward in God's spiritual household to dispense to others what has been entrusted to your care.

In conclusion, the biblical texts from the Old and New Testaments, emphasises that hospitality towards strangers/foreigners is deeply embedded in the realms of biblical ethics as a virtue to be practised. This is characterised in the Old Testament by Abraham (Genesis 18:2-8) and in the New Testament by church elders (1 Timothy 3:2). The preaching of Amos (5:21) and Isaiah (1:10-20) espoused the linkage of divine worship with respect for rights and justice, and thus the moral preaching of the prophets places its accent on the concept of social justice. The biblical admonition exhorting the Israelites was encapsulated in the following verse since they also had a history as foreigners themselves: "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt".

Innumerable texts deal with interpersonal relationships with the Decalogue listing fundamental duties to others and the various Israelite legal codes paying attention to the physical and economic welfare of the vulnerable in society. Deuteronomy 16: 11-12; 26: 11-12, makes it a social moral obligation for the hospitable treatment of the weaker members of society, the classic trio 'the widow, the orphan and the strangers', to be shown utmost compassion and respect. This is in many ways manifested in the mission of Jesus himself by his compassion and the utter commitment to heal the sick and feed the hungry, following the same long-held fundamental biblical ethic. This tradition of love of God and neighbour as fundamental tenets of the law enshrined in the Old Testament, has been repeatedly confirmed by Jesus when he declares in Matthew's gospel that he does not abolish the law and prophets but fulfils them (Matthew 5:17) and directs his disciples to continue the same mission in the life of the church (Matthew 10:7-8).

This in effect, encourages Christians to love one another with familial love as an ongoing process through their expression of welcoming strangers and remembering those who suffer. This is the basis for pastoral reflection in addressing the manifestation of xenophobia by remembering those who are going through persecution, suffering and rejection by doing good to those who are stigmatised and undesirable in the eyes of society. This is an expression of love and justice in accordance with God's covenant of love and reflecting on the consequences of our deeds in the coming judgement in the Kingdom of God.

III. Christian Public Ethics and the Injunction to Care for the Overall Public

Christian public ethics is about operating in the public space, i.e. a non-church environment, where xenophobic practices are performed. Christians exist in that public space as an institution (church) and as private human beings (individuals in the community and in their homes). It is in this space according to Muller (2003:300) where specific contexts and experiences are interpreted; in-context experiences are listened to and described; interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed; a description of experiences as it is continually informed by traditions of interpretation; a reflection on God's presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation; a description of experience, understood through interdisciplinary investigation and the development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community. This suggests that our human actions as Christians should have an intentional goal of co-existence with other human beings as we are bound in contextual realities with other people. In this regard, *Ubuntu* means interdependence, communality, commonality and mutuality. However, the excesses of *Ubuntu* that manifest themselves in nepotism, corruption and benevolent acts of good and bad determined by family and community should be moderated by Christian values, as observed by Magezi (2017:118).

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Magezi (2020:4) asserts that true *Ubuntu* values are Christian values with a sense of humanity where human beings are universally bonded with Christ. He (Magezi) further elaborates that, "thus, when the humanistic notion of human dignity, based on human rights (*dignitas*), and the theological notion of the image of God (*imago Dei*) are considered together, pastoral care will be for the community by community individuals" (Magezi, 2020:4). This is reinforced by Louw's (2014:178) assumption of transspection which relates to putting oneself into the head as opposed to the feet of another person; and introspection which he (Louw) explains as the awareness of the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of meaning within the network of relationships, akin to what is meant by *Ubuntu*: "I am a human being through another human being" (Magezi, 2020:7). Therefore, to achieve the objective of being universally bonded by Christ, we must be guided by the biblical text John 15:5: "…, because without me you can do nothing". In Augustine's view, we are totally dependent upon God's generosity and unmerited attention to humanity, by which the process of healing may begin through the grace (*gratia*) of God that is freely (*gratis*) given (McGrath, 2001:446). Magezi (2017:117-120) suggests a shift from traditional to liminal *Ubuntu* where Christ is the bond of all humanity (*imago Dei*), *Ubuntu* is inclusive, benevolence is judged by principles of common good for all humanity, service is to all humanity accompanied by responsibility and duty-bound norms and values, and theological life be considered as a pilgrimage of pressing on to higher ideals in Christ (Philippians 3:13).

IV. Ubuntu and Hospitality and the Link to the Christian Theological Perspective

According to Sparks (1991), *Ubuntu* was created as a social security system based on reciprocal obligations that supported and protected the individual, and which obliged the individual to adhere to certain commitments in return. The assumption was not based on reciprocity to the giver but firmly based on the possibility of non-reciprocity. This then implies that *Ubuntu* implicates a form of survival that depends on the relationality that generosity is vital, but reciprocity is optional.

Furthermore, *Ubuntu* is cherished in a life grounded on appreciating the placing of a high value on harmony and community. According to Metz (2007:321-341), harmony manifests itself in solidarity and identity. Solidarity is having a relationship with every other human being and an obligation to pursue their well-being, especially in situations where they are not able to take actions on their own. This pertains to the fact that an individual is morally required to be concerned for the good of others. Therefore, "solidarity is the recognition of interdependence and the duty to act for the common good, that common good ultimately stretching to all who inhabit this planet" (Webb, 2017:252). Identity relates to a sense of shared belonging that is founded on a common vision of the nature of human life and relations in coordinating their behaviour to realise shared ends based on norms governing these. Christian ethics is guided by the principle "Do to others whatever you would like them do to you. This is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). This is encouraged by the words of Jesus, "the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21). Therefore, authentic Christian spirituality is undoubtedly concerned with the shaping of and practice of human life but embodies everyday practicalities and serves as a framework of ethics (Sheldrake, 2019: xi). In *Ubuntu* the failure to identify with each other could go beyond mere alienation and involve outright divisions between them as evidenced in the treatment of migrants and the subsequent violent actions of xenophobia directed at them. However, within theology the enabler is the Spirit while in *Ubuntu* it is identity and solidarity.

The Christian practices of hospitality within the Judeo-Christian tradition and scripture are theologically conceived as welcoming the stranger or alien into a home or congregation as an ethical responsibility mirroring the welcome of God in Jesus Christ (Sweeden, 2012:2). "A rather succinct description of the interrelation between *Ubuntu* and hospitality" is formulated by Mandela as follows (Stuit, 2013:31):

> A traveller through our country would stop at a village, and he didn't have to ask for food or water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of *ubuntu*, but *ubuntu* has various aspects…. *("Ubuntu")*

Many Christians scoff at the assertion that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was being inhospitable yet that is precisely the sin Jesus refers to when he talks about Sodom. Scripture is clear about the necessity of this for committed Christians as opposed to cultural Christians. What the Bible says is very important because the Scriptures are the basis of our faith. Since Jesus clearly says the sin of Sodom was being inhospitable, not other failings associated with Sodom, and without ever mentioning homosexuality as the sin of Sodom, we can place the scriptures above human opinion and as wise Christians joyfully agree with Jesus on this issue.

Solidarity as foundational in *Ubuntu* is also encapsulated by Pope John Paul II's definition of solidarity as, "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (John Paul II, 1987:38). It is, therefore, the destiny of all to be in communion with God and to the fullest fellowship with all human beings. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love another.

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No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us" (1John 4:11-12).

According to Gutierrez (1973:198), to refrain from serving is tantamount to refusing to love, and refusing to love is a sin as you reject the communion and fellowship of all people, and therefore you reject the very essence of human existence. The churches in Brazil have taken the attitude that if Christ's proclamation of God's Kingdom of love and justice is to make any sense, we must be at the forefront of public social issues in the country despite people having different theological perspectives. To accept migrants in our midst is to be mindful that acceptance is the cornerstone of the fellowship of all people. It is in the parable of the Good Samaritan that we find the inversion of the original question when Christ was asked "And who is my neighbour" and the reply "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbour to the robbers' victim" (Luke 10:29, 36). Indeed, it is the Samaritan who was the neighbour as he approached the injured man and made him his neighbour. The neighbour is not whom you find in your path but rather it is whom you approach and actively seek out (Gutierrez, 1973:198-199). Pope Francis has made a call to us not to forget the tenderness and gentleness of Christ's love that has been aptly captured by the Prophet Isaiah "A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smouldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth" (Isaiah 42:3-4). As disciples of Christ we are also enjoined to show gentleness to others (Brislin, 2017:9).

Individual local positioning and church positioning in the community suggests it is a challenge to be integrated and engage with issues affecting people in that community. The church and the individual Christian have a duty to be engaged according to *Ubuntu's* notion of identity and solidarity. Identity and solidarity imply a vector towards the other. The invitation into the community is also an invitation into the socio-cultural context of the community whereby hospitality has to be examined taking into account those cultural and socio-historical factors of society, the underlying models of worship and theological nuances as well as differences such as culture, race, ethnicity and language that can act as contributory factors to a welcoming or non-welcoming environment (Sweeden, 2012:3).

Bennett (2003) argues that "practicing hospitality means a radical openness to the other, attending to him or her in sharing and receiving insights and perspectives about self and the world". This means therefore, that being hospitable is a practice and discipline that requires us to do small things that might seem inconsequential in the eyes of the world but which from the perspective of the gospel is a manifestation of the kingdom of God (Newman, 2007:174). In fact, this is reinforced by the familiar verse "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." as a testament to His love that is universal and that has been revealed in one particular place and time and in one particular person (Newman, 2007).

African hospitality is embedded in the notion that no one is an island and emphasis is placed on interdependence, as every person is part of the whole community. Gathogo (2008:276) asserts that this agrees with the Pauline theology that we need to recognise other people's talents and gifts in order to strengthen the community at large and the church (Ephesians 4:10-12, 1Corinthians 12). The communal nature of hospitality in the *Ubuntu* sense is aptly captured by the Sesotho idiom: '*matshoho a hlatswana*', meaning that one hand helps to wash the other hand. In other words, by helping another person you are helping yourself. This is related to the fact that Jesus said that "…. whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" as a sign of his presence and active involvement in the worlds of those who are trying to do good and their loving deeds to others, a duty to act by Christians just like the solidarity and identity in *Ubuntu*. Hospitality is espoused by the verse (Leviticus 19:33-34):

> When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God.

This could be used to exhort South Africans to desist from acts of xenophobia as this is contrary to the ethos of *Ubuntu* that teaches the dignity of all people, as our well-being is intertwined and communally shared.

According to Gathogo (2007:115-116) in Kikuyu language a person who is hospitable is called *mutugi*, which is synonymous with 'a gracious person' and/or 'hospitable person'. It shows that Africans associate grace with hospitality, as grace is a divine attribute. God is described as 'gracious' among Africans with the person being hospitable partaking in God's gracious acts of doing good unto others, including working, for assisting in economic or social well-being of the society in general as well as the individual. Gathogo (2001:21) asserts that the Kikuyu proverb *Indo nikurimithania*, meaning 'wealth comes by working together', enjoins the community to work together in cooperation and mutual support for prosperity and success which is an agreement with Christ's admonition that no town or house divided against itself will stand (Matthew 12:25); with God as determiner of our being it suggests our duty to our fellow human beings – be like your Father in heaven (1John 4:16-18).

In some theological discourses *Ubuntu* is construed as identical to the biblical concept of kinship and hospitality (Psalm 133:1). Thus, some of the Mediterranean biblical values are used in reference to the concept of *Ubuntu* by some scholars as being synonymous (Tutu 1999:6; Vervliet 2009:20). The

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Christian ideal of existential being is synonymous with *Ubuntu* as it lends itself closely to biblical moral values such as love, compassion, friendship and peace. In the case of xenophobic attacks in 2008, the Bible was invoked in social media with the moral imperatives of verses like "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9), as these narratives reflect on moral bankruptcy as evidenced in the attacks, and a cry for a return to the moral and ethical reorientation of African society as guided by the ethos of *Ubuntu* – humaneness. According to *Ubuntu* one has a moral obligation to provide warmth for all humanity regardless of whether they are outsiders or not. However, the moral aspect of *Ubuntu* in South Africa has not yet begun to arrive at any solid convictions or an authentic basis for actions. In an article, Walter Rauschenbusch (2014: 286-287), illustrates that *Ubuntu* has been talked about in different spheres and has been dismissed, not because the country has been able to solve its problems, but because we have not yet confronted the problems the country faces.

V. Conclusion

The article revealed that the interdependence of *Ubuntu* and hospitality as African communal behaviours can be linked to the theological perspective to restore humaneness, hospitality, respect and love. Buthelezi (1995:166-173) observed that "we must focus on the present situation using the Good News to address itself to the problems of the culture and society in which it is immersed and rediscover what it signifies to be human in the situation we find ourselves in, with the different challenges of today". Msafiri (2002:86-87) asserts that "the metaphors that reflect the relationship between the human community and the church can indeed be helpful in positioning *Ubuntu* ethos in the re-forming of communities that abide by the ethics that guide societal morality". Thus, we need to revisit and reinterpret the Bible considering the contemporary socio-political problems (i.e. *kairos* – xenophobia) and our experiences as Africans.

Considered from a moral philosophical perspective, the discussion embodied in the article provided insight and understanding that the relationship between *Ubuntu* and hospitality can be characterised as two sides of the same coin. Genuine and true *Ubuntu* automatically assumes hospitality and vice versa. Such a human disposition can be maintained, sustained and made possible from humanity's natural common grace perspective. However, as also illustrated from biblical texts and theological discussion, the relationship and interplay of *Ubuntu* and hospitality reveals the very heart, essence and outward expression of how Christians should relate to one another. These concepts indicate an embodiment of Christian love, neighbourliness and concern. Practising such ideals is an embodiment of the 'one another' formula of the New Testament, Matthew. 25: 35-45, Mark. 6:34, Mark. 12:30-31.

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