

OPTIMISTIC WEST AFRICAN RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGIES AND *JOY OF THE GOSPEL*
—REINVENTING OR TRANSFORMING WORLD CHRISTIANITY

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Elochukwu Uzukwu C.S.Sp. (Duquesne University)

How would Africa, a continent of bad news, resound with “Joy of the Gospel”? In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis presented the touchstone of pastoral ministry, closeness as ideal for building community: evangelizers “take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.” (EG 24) Furthermore, the Pope challenges world Catholicism to move towards “concrete realization of the collegial spirit,” abandon “excessive centralization” that prevents familial dialogue. (EG 32)

My proposal is that the genius/humanity of “despised” West Africa reinvents *Joy of the Gospel*; their interface generates renewal/reform in world Christianity. The genius is embedded in resilient interrelationship of existents: being here (human world) and there (spirit world), connecting here (Matriclan) and residing there (Patriclan), always resisting absolutism—“one thing stands but another always stands beside it” (Uzukwu, 2012); “There exists your truth, there is my truth and there is—the Truth” (Soyinka, 2012: 152). Truth is appropriated/approached in relationality, collaboration and tolerance.

My presentation proposes that instead of dismissing or destroying the genius of West African religious anthropology, the patent provides a template for reinventing community in troubled Africa and the world. The genius interfaces with *Joy of the Gospel* as bridge, as conjuncture of the humane insights of the Gospel and West African relational ethos. This reinvents missiological theory and pastoral practice: Pope Francis’s community generated by a pastoral of listening is structurally available in West African leadership style of plural listening (Uzukwu, 1996).

The proposed template challenges the pretensions of exclusivism and intolerance—of Roman Catholicism, etc., and of Islamic puritans besieging Africa, Al-Shabab or Boko Haram. In its place, relationality persistently posits, you live-we live, we belong to the tissue of one another (Ubuntu).

- Soyinka, Wole. *Of Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Uzukwu, Elochukwu E. *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness : Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012.
- A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.