

# **A Global Philosophy of Religion Project 2 Conference Calabar 2026**

**Transforming the philosophy of religion into a truly global and  
inclusive field**

## **Call for Papers: Spiritual Realities, Meaning in Life and Human Flourishing in African Philosophy of Religion**

The Global Philosophy of Religion project 2, University of Birmingham (with funding from the John Templeton Foundation – Grant Number 62817), in collaboration with the Conversational School of Philosophy, Nigeria, the Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria, and the Department of Philosophy, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria, is pleased to announce a call for papers for a conference with the theme: *Spiritual Realities, Meaning in Life and Human Flourishing in African Philosophy of Religion*, to be held in Calabar, Nigeria, on September 14-16, 2026. We are also pleased to announce that conference participants will be granted conference travel funding by GPR-2 on a competition basis.

### **Overview of the Conference Theme**

African Traditional Religion(s), or ATRs, often revolve around (i) belief in the existence of certain spiritual entities like God, lesser deities, ancestors, malevolent spirits, or vital forces, (ii) spiritual practices like the veneration of ancestors, and (iii) a view of the universe as (necessarily) relational in nature, etc. Adherents of ATRs often believe that certain ways of relating with these entities can promote or impede meaning in/of life and/or human flourishing. For instance, spiritual realities like God, lesser deities, and ancestors are sometimes believed to reward ethical living with worldly happiness and contentment (Mbiti 1969; Idowu 1973; Molefe 2019). Consequently, a meaningful life can be a life that involves pursuing a God-given purpose (or one's destiny), honouring communal values, establishing a relationship with one's ancestors (and thus legitimating their existence), augmenting one's vitality through worship, ritual, good works, etc., while eschewing evil, etc.

Furthermore, a life that is morally laudable and has been lived in the service of others (the community), qualifies an individual for postmortem existence as an ancestor in the African afterlife, a realm of increased vitality where the ancestor enjoys a significantly lengthy period of contented existence and continuing communion with living relatives (Mbiti 1969; Wiredu 1992; Attoe 2023).

This conference aims to explore African and Afro-Diasporic spirituality, as well as the nature of spiritual realities in ATRs and in syncretic religions that includes ATRs elements from a philosophical perspective. The conference especially aims to explore the relationship between human beings and these spiritual realities, and how such relationships might engender meaning in life and human flourishing as exemplified by hope, optimism, fortitude, gratitude, joy, contentment, cheerfulness, and other indicators of subjective wellbeing.

Some guiding questions for this conference include (but are not limited to):

1. How do Africans and formerly enslaved Africans in the Diaspora conceive of fundamental spiritual realities (God, malevolent spirits, lesser deities, ancestors, etc.)?
2. What is the impact of African Traditional Religions on the practice of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and other religions in Africa?
3. What is the impact of African Traditional Religions on the practice of syncretic religions in the African diaspora?
4. To what extent does belief in a maximal God and, conversely, a limited God influence a view of life that contributes to human flourishing?
5. Can belief in an afterlife, in the traditional African sense, determine, or contribute to, personal positive assessment of subjective wellbeing and overall life satisfaction?

6. Will the life of believers be more meaningful if they hold that the maximal God or the limited God exists?
7. What sort of spiritual life might engender meaning in life from the African and Afro-diasporic religious perspective?
8. Can human beings and societies maintain a high degree of vitality and flourish in the absence of belief in a maximal or limited God?

### **Important Dates**

Submission of extended abstract (1000-1500 words): March 15, 2026

Notice of acceptance and sponsorship: April 15, 2026

Conference date: 14-16 September 2026

### **Application process**

Potential conference speakers should submit their extended abstract for the conference here:

<https://forms.office.com/e/J3gQC6x27G>. Travel funding awardees will be selected on the basis of the quality of their extended abstracts, and would be expected to submit a draft of their full papers one week before the conference date.

More information on our website: <https://globalphilosophyofreligion.com/>

If you have any questions, please contact the organisers Dr Aribiah Attoe, Dr Ada Agada, Prof Jonathan Chimakonam, Prof John Inyang, Prof Martin Pickup (Project Lead, Global Philosophy of Religion Project 2) and/or Rabab Anjum at [[gpr@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:gpr@contacts.bham.ac.uk)].

