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African Renaissance, its politico-economic initiatives, its negations, and the contribution of African Theology of Wisdom.

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Definition of the term African Renaissance

African Renaissance is a term used to refer to a recent movement in Africa. In this movement, a new breed of African leaders makes an ambitious proposition, the rebirth of the African continent. This proposition is based on the conclusion that Africa had a destiny. This destiny was holistic. It covered social, politico-economic life of the African people. Here the evidence of its civilisations expressed in her social structural establishments, political arrangements in the traditional kingdom, and economic system are quoted by many African scholars. They also argue that given time, similar to what the Euro-western countries have had, this social politico-economic destiny would have been realised. Many histories have laid the blame of Africa's miserly to the disruptions caused by the ravages of the 400 years of slave trade, followed by a militaristic, oppressive and exploitative colonial regime. As if this was not enough, this imperialistic era was followed by the misgivings of the cold-war with its neo-colonial politico-economic interferences in African governance and economy. This tyranny, it is claimed, and rightly so, is responsible for curtailing Africa's advancement to her destiny.

The task of the movement is to recapture this sense of African destiny through are Renaissance. They proclaim that the African continent "the elephant is rising". Given the advantages of the modern technology and information high way, Africa should be able to cover the gap of its foiled speed to its destiny much faster than the Euro-western world in her time of politico-economic development. In fact Africa has done much more already in the last 40 years of superficial independence than what the Euro-western countries covered in say hundred years before the 19th century.

The new breed of African leaders has a goal. That goal is of "**a good life for all**". The objectives include Africa's engagement with the Euro-western social and cultural disparities. Firstly, Africans believe that the Euro-western moral trend is totally misguided and Africans should not follow it; Secondly, that the Euro-western concept of democracy might work for Africa albeit with some modification to suit Africa's unique culture and contextual environment; Thirdly, to develop an economic system that would achieve the prime goal "a good life for all".

A historical review of the African Renaissance

A historical review of the African Renaissance shows four historical periods, namely: the Pan-African Movement; the Harlem Renaissance; the African struggle for political freedom and the current movement for the re-birth of the continent – African renaissance

The popular claim holds that the term African renaissance was first used in 1994 at an OAU (Organization of African Unity) summit in Tunisia by Nelson Mandela with reference to Africa's renewal (see Makgoba 1999:10-11; Russell 2000:317)?. However, it would seem that Mandela's speech brought the "Renaissance" concept to the fore, but the spirit and objectives associated with the revival of the African continent are much older. They in fact originate from the Pan-African Movement of 1900 in America by the freed slaves; the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920 and 30s in America also.

Names associated with this Pan-African movement include: Liberian diplomat Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912); a Jamaican, Marcus Mozhiah Garvey (1887-1940); and Afro-American William Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963). Along the continuum of the development of the Pan-African idea was the spirit of nationalism. Although nationalist movements were geographically isolated, with little knowledge of each other, the usage of the term "nationalism" embraced the concept of "Pan-Africanism". The president of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), J.A Casely Hayford, addressing the NCBWA, said:

As there is an international feeling among all white men, among all brown men, among all yellow men, so must there be an international feeling among all black folk (in Davidson 1994:36).

Similar nationalist sentiments were noted in South Africa at an earlier date (1902), reaching nationalist magnitude in 1923, when the South African Native National Congress (formed in 1912) transformed into the African National Congress. As noted by Davidson, this was to be the "parent of the future" (cf Davidson 1994:38). There are indications that the Pan-African movement might have influenced the formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). Undoubtedly the founder of SANNC, Pixley Seme, had been educated in Columbia University, USA.

Garvey, the leader of the Harlem renaissance,, had founded a movement called: 'The Universal Negro Improvement Association' to promote black unity and betterment in Jamaica in 1914. Having transferred his headquarters from Jamaica to New York in 1919, and attracting an estimated following of up to two million supporters, he established branches in and around New York. His charismatic preaching articulated a militant black chauvinism. He asserted:

Blacks... belong[ed] to a gifted race with a proud past and a great future. They must therefore abandon their feelings of inferiority, build their own distinctive culture, and ultimately redeem their homeland in Africa (Cronon 1994:583).

One should remember that the Africans in diaspora, under the Pan-African movement in 1900, initially conceived this spirit of Africa's recovery. A.I Asiwaju and M. Crowder have made reference to the influence of Marcus Garvey on Kwame Nkrumah, and also that of Aime Cesaire on Leopold Senghor. These two, namely Garvey (1887-1940) and Cesaire (1913 -), belonged to the Africans in diaspora, like William Burghardt Du Bois (1886-1963), who among others formed the roots of the Pan-African movement. For them, the questions of identity, culture, and politico-economic self-determination were tied together in the struggle of the Africans, as distinguished from other races by the colour of their skin. However, the success of the movement depended on the African who was situated in Africa, from whence he could politically rule himself and forge his/her destiny. Nkrumah had remarked:

The road of reconstruction on which Ghana has embarked is a new road, parts of whose topography are only hazily sensed, other parts still unknown. A certain amount of trial and error in following the road is inevitable. Mistakes we are bound to make, and some undoubtedly we have already made. They are our own and we learn from them. That is the value of being free and independent, of acquiring our experiences out of the consequence of our own decisions, out of the achievements of our own efforts (Nkrumah 1963:120).

Nkrumah's argument was put forward as the forces of neo-colonialism unfolded. The superpowers had divided the world into economic blocs. Consequently, many formerly well-intentioned African leaders became victims of the ideological scheming of the Europeans' politico-economic manipulation, up to the present time (cf Harbeson and Rothchild 1995).

Mandela's speech in Tunisia set the agenda to African leadership, challenging them to revive the African continent.

Politico-economic initiatives of African renaissance

African unity

The achievement of African unity perhaps forms the prime initiative marking the rebirth of the African continent. But is this dream feasible? Can Africa's unity go beyond pompous presidential summits? The earliest proponent of African unity was Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. The title of his book, *Africa Must Unite* (1963) is vaguely quoted by Diop as "a common saying in the Pan-African doctrine" which "has now become vital for the continent's survival, due to the worldwide threat of market totalitarianism" (Diop 1999:8). Nkrumah had outlined most of the dangers which African countries would avoid if they pursued a union of African states. Unfortunately, since the union has not been

achieved, Nkrumah's utterances turn out to be prophetic (See Nkrumah 1963:216-222). Among his warnings, Nkrumah said:

We in Africa who are pressing now for unity are deeply concerned of the validity of our purpose. We need the strength of our combined numbers and resources to protect ourselves from the very positive danger of returning colonialism in disguised forms (Nkrumah 1963:217).

Nkrumah presented three objectives for the unification of Africa. They included an overall economic plan (now called NEPAD), the establishment of a unified military and defence strategy, and the adoption of a unified foreign policy. He concluded:

Proof is therefore positive that the continental union of Africa is an inescapable desideratum if we are determined to move forward to a realisation of our hopes and plans for creating a modern society which will give our peoples the opportunity to enjoy a full and satisfying life (Nkrumah 1963:217; Museveni 1997:18).

Nkrumah argued that independent African countries (1960s) should suspend pursuit of economic development until all African countries were free from colonialism. This meant that African independent countries would provide support to any African country seeking independence, by postponing economic development. Mbeki, in giving the overall aim of African Renaissance, forty years later (1999), demonstrated a further step in this vision, embracing both African unity and the postponed economic development thus:

Our vision of an African Renaissance must have as one of its central aims the provision of a better life for these masses of the people whom we say must enjoy and exercise the right to determine their future. That renaissance must therefore address the critical question of sustainable development which impacts positively on the standard of living and the quality of life of the masses of our people (Mbeki 1999:xvi).

Had the African leaders taken Nkrumah's vision of unification (1963), Africa would have made positive achievements in social and economic development in the first few decades following the independence of some African countries¹. Makgoba reiterated this crucial vision 36 years later (1999) when he advocated the necessity for political unity, because "no salvation is possible without the peaceful and democratic unification of African states" (Makgoba 1999:8).

The above political integration would precede the economic one. However, the two are not possible without stability. Stability would be possible only through "mutual and reciprocal surrender of sovereignty among states on the basis of common interest and free popular consent" (Makgoba 1999:8). Makgoba maintained that this principle of the union

¹ There were of course many other external interferences which delayed economic development. The Cold war and the policies of IMF and World Bank as discussed elsewhere in the study simply made the situation worse.

of African states was enshrined in the constitutions of some African countries, and now called for legitimate and selfless leaders to implement it (Makgoba 1999:8). Ghana under Nkrumah (1957-65) was among the first African countries to include in her constitution a willingness to surrender her sovereignty voluntarily for the “furtherance of African unity” (cf Nkrumah 1963:85).

The goal for the unification of Africa has not changed. As it was for Nkrumah’s time, so it is now. Makgoba redefined it as rebuilding Africa

as a self-centred power, based on the principles of autonomy and efficiency through democratic and ethical governance that can meet the needs and aspirations of the majority of Africans (Makgoba 1999:8).

It would seem that the African elite is now pursuing the goal of African union. The evidence is the recent signing of the document that acknowledged the formation of the Union of African states (Lusaka 2001) by African presidents, and the endorsement of the Millennium African Recovery Plan in Lusaka in July 2001 and the conversion of the “Organisation of African Unity” to the “African Union” (MAP 2001, NEPAD October 2001 and AU July 2002 in Durban). African leaders, including the presidents are part of the African elite. Indeed they have pledged to translate the African Renaissance into a movement for the ordinary masses (Mbeki 2001:1-9). In order to reach the masses, realistic economic groupings have been established. The whole concept is discussed in the next section, under economic integration.

Economic integration

The second initiative arises from the first one: Africa’s unity, which overcomes artificial racial, national, or ethnic conflict, is creating stability conducive to the enhancement of Africa’s economic potential (cf Makgoba 1999:8). Makgoba’s advocacy for Africa’s unity appropriately updates Nkrumah’s observation:

If we developed our potentialities in men (sic) and natural resources in separate isolated groups, our energies would soon be dissipated in the struggle to outbid one another. Economic friction among us would certainly lead to bitter political rivalry, such as for many years hampered the pace of growth and development in Europe (Nkrumah 1963:218).

Makgoba reiterated some of the benefits of this economic integration. With the strengthening of democratic structures, peace, and stability, economic development would follow (cf Makgoba 1999: xviii). Economic integration creates a “self-centred power base” in the emerging regional interstate economic groupings such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Southern African Development Corporation (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC).

The Millennium African “Recovery” Programme (MAP) identified five economic regions in Africa. These were: West, North, Central, East, and Southern Africa. The efficiency of the regional economic corporations of participating states would depend on democratically elected leadership that upholds principles of good governance (cf Makgoba 1999:114-115). The MAP initiative claimed that:

African leaders have learnt from their own experiences that peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic management are conditions for sustained development. They are making a pledge to work, both individually and collectively, to promote these principles in their countries, regions and the continent (MAP document 2001:9).

The African Renaissance is perhaps to be located in these pledges and strategies outlined in MAP (July 2001) and updated in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development and African Union (NEPAD October 2001). It is the renewed spirit in some African leaders in dealing with the old problems by which the African continent has remained marginalised, that carries the mark of an African Renaissance. The African initiative acknowledges the efforts by previous African leaders to revive the continent. There are a variety of reasons for their failure “both internal and external, including questionable leadership” (cf MAP 2001:6). The document strongly asserts:

We are convinced that an historic opportunity presents itself to end the scourge of underdevelopment that afflicts Africa. ...Across the continent, Africans declare that we will no longer allow ourselves to be conditioned by circumstances. We will determine our own destiny... There are already signs of progress and hope. Democratic regimes that are committed to the protection of human rights, people-centred development and market-oriented economies are on the increase. African people have begun to demonstrate their refusal to accept poor economic and political leadership (MAP document 2001:2).

In describing the spirit of African Renaissance, Richard Griggs in his paper *Geopolitics of a New Discourse* (1998) argues, “What is new is not African unification based on the starting blocks of African regionalism but the location, strategy and tactics for that achievement” (Griggs 1998:1). Mbeki confirms this African Renaissance spirit thus:

It is what we do to bring about these objectives that will take us a step forward in our quest for a new and better African reality. I believe that whereas before, as Africans, we might have said all these things are necessary, we have now arrived at the point where many on our continent firmly believe that they are now possible (Mbeki 1999: xviii).

It is with this spirit that Mamdani and others highlight the intelligentsia’s critical role on the African continent in bringing about an “African Renaissance”.

The democratisation process.

Although the democracy continues pose challenges because it is foreign, African leaders are trying to embrace for what it is worth. Subsequent to the signing of the Union of Africa agreement in Durban 2001, South Africa, there have been some gains in this direction. The number of African countries choosing to go the democratic way has increased. Coups have reduced and some have even been foiled. The foiled coup of Equatorial Guinea is a case in point. Of course there have been cases which play the game of those who insist democratic processes. These have changed national constitutions legally allowing them to continue in power. Zimbabwe and Uganda are cases in point here.

African leaders have made attempts and some have been successful in negotiating peace settlements in some countries where armed political conflicts had become endemic and permanent experience. Since 2001 such initiatives have seen countries such as Burundi, Sudan, Liberia, Angola and Congo emerge out of political conflict stand offs. There is still more to be done but the peace initiatives have breathed hope in what had been otherwise hopeless situations. Of course there are countries where these peace initiatives are still needed - Somalia, Ivory Coast, and Zimbabwe and Ethiopia and Eritrea albeit in different ways.

Let me discuss the developments in conflict in Uganda as a case of Christian contribution to a rebirth of the continent.

The Conflict in Uganda developed in 1987 between the NRM government under president Yoweri Museveni and LRM under its rebel leader Joseph Kony. Although Kony maintained that he sought to rule Uganda based on the ten commandments, his action and those of his commanders and soldiers spelt horror among his people – the Acholi. Girls were abducted from Schools who would be force to become sex slaves and children targeted to become soldier because of their unquestioning obedience. Over 18 years of this conflict have left about a million people internally displaced; several children and girls' lives eternally destroyed. Untold torture inflicted on those who did not support the resistance and others paid the price by their lives.

After many calls by religious leaders for a peaceful settlement of this conflict, the government has finally agreed to talk with the LRM.

There are positive developments in these talks. Where as government and the LRM have talked before, the is significant milestones in this round of talks. The two groups have signed an agreement on the cessation of hostilities. Within this was the move of LRA to two designated places in Southern Sudan. This meant that the rebels of LRM were to move from their hideout among the population , a significant achievement of the talks. This done we are crossing our fingers for the next agreements which would hopefully point the end of the conflict.

Most important is the willingness of the Acholi victims and their relatives to forgive Kony and his soldiers for the pain and suffering inflicted upon them for the last 18 years. This is a Christian contribution as these people, like Jesus, have chosen to absorb the pain of the conflict rather than retaliation or retribution, for the sake of peace. This is in sharp conflict with the demands of the International Criminal Court which has served arrest warrants for Joseph Kony and his five generals so that they may face justice for crimes against humanity.

This move recalls the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa led by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in Nelson Mandela's reign (1995-1999).

Aspects inhibiting the development of an African Renaissance

The seeming contradictions of the developing African Renaissance include poverty, diseases, ignorance, and armed political conflicts on the African continent. The HIV/AIDS pandemic looms like a dark shadow over and permeates all other factors that inhibit the rebirth of our continent, and will be referred to on its own as well as in relation to other factors.

HIV/AIDS as a complex moral challenge

The development of an African Renaissance is one of the positive movements African leaders have recently revived. Poverty, disease, ignorance, and political conflicts embody the suffering, which characterises the identity of the African people.

Sub-Saharan Africa is more heavily affected by HIV and AIDS than any other region of the world. An estimated 24.5 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2005 and approximately 2.7 million new infections occurred during that year. In just the past year the epidemic has claimed the lives of an estimated 2 million people in this region. More than twelve million children have been orphaned by AIDS.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic personifies most of the negations of the development of an African Renaissance. The faces of people living with HIV/AIDS, with impoverished, disease-ridden bodies, ignorant of the magnitude of their predicament, and caught up in a cross-fire of armed political conflicts of power-hungry despots, are signs of leadership deficiency. There is a need for an input, which will awaken the compassion of Africa's public leaders with regard to the suffering of the people. The HIV/AIDS pandemic serves to show how neglect of one's obligations can lead to greater complex effects with aggravating consequences. The effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic fall into two categories – one psychological and the other concerned with politico-economic development. We shall deal with the psychological one concerning the identity of the African people.

Positive initiatives some of which could be attributed to Christian contribution

- Regarding prevalence, estimates are that national HIV prevalence peaked at around 15 per cent in 1991, *36 per cent 1996* and fell to 5 per cent as of 2001 and read *6 per cent 2004*. (italics refer to some other sources)
- High-level political support fostered a multi-sectoral response, prioritising HIV/AIDS and enlisting a wide variety of national participants in the “war” against HIV/AIDS.
- **Behaviour Change Communication (BCC)** interventions reached not only the general population, but also key target groups including female sex workers and their clients, soldiers, fishermen, long-distance drivers, traders, bar girls, police, and students, without creating a highly stigmatising climate.
- **Early and significant mobilisation of Ugandan religious leaders and organisations resulted in their active participation in AIDS education and prevention activities.**
- The most important determinant of the reduction in HIV incidence in Uganda appears to be networks and a decrease in multiple sexual partnerships. *Condom promotion was not an especially dominant element in Uganda’s earlier response to AIDS.* However, in more recent years, increased condom use has contributed to the decline in prevalence. **The ABC approach and here religious and political leaders offered their view on the recommended the first two choices and left the last one for the reckless.**
- The effect of HIV prevention interventions in Uganda during the past decade appears to have had a similar impact as a potential medical vaccine of 80 per cent efficacy.

Compare the above with South Africa

- (i) South Africa is experiencing a high number of infected persons with HIV (estimated 5.3 million persons live with HIV 520.000 are estimated to have died of AIDS in 2003)
- (ii) The impact of HIV/AIDS on households unfolds only slowly through time. This area is however inadequately researched because of the stigma attached to the disease.
- (iii) HIV/AIDS infects and affects people at different levels of political and economic participation and involvement.² The age group 15- 45 registers the highest infection rate, and yet they are the most economically active group.

² Schoeman (1997) and Whiteside and Sunter (2000) have done extensive research on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa and are convinced that at present the situation regarding HIV, and particularly AIDS-related illnesses and deaths, is only the tip of an iceberg. “As South Africa enters a new century, it is clear that, in macro-economic terms, the epidemic is not yet having a measurable impact. However, the impact of AIDS is gradual, subtle and incremental. It may well be that we will only know the true impact on government and the private sector when we look back from 2010 at what actually happened” (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:87).

- (iv) The interrelatedness of different political and economic social aspects on the individual can show the extent of the HIV/AIDS impact on a nation. This impact is described as “long-term, complex, and surprising” (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:82-85).³
- (v) The government is fully prepared, but not ready in terms of human capacity to fight HIV/AIDS (Gantsho 2002). The government has not been brave enough to offer a rollout treatment through state hospitals.
- (vi) Depravity within the leadership has continued to cause waste of financial resources. Unspent and yet unavailable HIV/AIDS funds is a worrying issue.
- (vii) General moral deterioration due to a worldwide trend in moral liberalism continues to cause an erosion of traditional moral values and standards.
- (viii) It is increasingly difficult to balance an individual’s freedom to do with his or her life whatever he or she likes, and an application of preventive measures that may impinge on this individual’s freedom.

Poverty

Simpson and Weiner define “poverty” as lack of means of subsistence, or a state of being unable to raise one’s living standard, or “the condition of having little or no wealth or material possession” (Simpson and Weiner 1989:253). Other sources define poverty as “an indigent state with a lack of means or a scarcity” or “an insufficiency of material necessities of life” (cf Beisner 1995:14). Inability to raise one’s living standard and insufficiency of material necessities seem to be reasonable statements for an understanding of poverty. This definition assumes that the poverty-stricken person is able to survive on very little obtained from such an individual’s means. In economic terms, this is referred to as “the vicious circle of poverty”. The “vicious circle of poverty” is itself a relative term that expresses a constant income and expenditure level for any given person, which such person may not change unless he/she receives an external financial boost. The viciousness of Africa’s poor is a reality. Poverty incapacitates and kills, and it is generational, now aggravated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

There are many causes of poverty, but in this paper I shall refer only to those that relate to moral leadership failure and HIV/AIDS in the context of the developing an African Renaissance.

Contrary to the claims that poverty causes AIDS, there is a clear indication that actually AIDS causes poverty. It is true that lack of money to buy the antiretroviral therapies leads to the HIV infection, developing into AIDS. Whiteside and Sunter (2000) have written in depth on the economic, developmental and social impact of HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa. They have made insightful comments on the relationship of HIV/AIDS and poverty. In their argument, they maintain that the link between poverty and health is indisputable. However, it would not be scientifically consistent to assert that AIDS “is

³ Little or no holistic research has been done to offer meaningful and correlated indicators on the developing impact HIV/AIDS on the politico-economic renewal in South Africa.

simply a disease of poverty” (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:91). They have shown that poverty undoubtedly helps in the spread of the epidemic. Their argument is demonstrable in the current cases of HIV infection, which are representative of people in all walks of life. What Whiteside and Sunter do not stress is that poverty does not cause HIV infection. However, because of poverty, the HIV-infected person without money for antiretroviral drugs, access to medical services for the treatment of opportunistic infections, and nutritious foods, will quickly develop AIDS and die sooner than a person with sufficient means to access the above-mentioned provisions.

Whiteside and Sunter state that AIDS increases poverty. Analysis of the demographical statistics of HIV infection shows 20–45 years as the age-group worst affected by the epidemic. This age-group comprises family earners, breadwinners, and human resource component of any given country. There are no data in South Africa yet to demonstrate a direct link between poverty increase and HIV/AIDS infection. We have noted already that the infected and their immediate family members (personal experience) spend their savings and sell property in order to prolong life through the antiretroviral treatment programmes. Cost of funerals and care of orphans are real costs that are indeed slowing down people’s economic advancement. Future research should be directed to the ways in which the HIV/AIDS condition affects people’s struggle against poverty.

In a NEPAD document (October 2001), African leaders pledged to create a better life for all. However, with the HIV/AIDS epidemic raging, this pledge is placed further out of reach. Not only do the leaders need to be morally transformed in order to counterbalance their predecessors who squandered Africa’s wealth in self-gratification, but they also have to doubly protect and expend resources faithfully to deal with the epidemic. If there is no moral transformation, this will imply that Africa’s political leadership is no different from their predecessors. Resources to alleviate poverty that have, for many years, been lost through corrupt means, will continue to be lost. This would mean that the HIV pandemic will worsen the already distorted and excruciating situation beyond current projections.

Diseases

Apart from HIV/AIDS, many other forms of endemic diseases are prevalent on the African continent. Disease is “any state in which the health of the human organism is impaired. All diseases involve a breakdown of the body’s natural defence systems or those regulating the internal environment. Even when a cause is not known, a disease can almost always be understood in terms of the physiological or mental processes that are disrupted” (Diseases: Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003).

“Diseases” in Africa refer to situations in which germs and other bacterial infections are common, with little ability to control illnesses caused by them. When public leaders talk about eradicating disease, they mean treatable, controllable, and preventable disease. Usually these efforts are expressed in the establishment of hospitals and disease-control centres, through immunisation, research, and primary healthcare campaigns. Government is expected to sponsor most of these efforts, but uses the rhetoric of providing these services in the process of winning popularity. In Africa, the resources for these services

are government revenues and foreign grants and loans. Very few countries in Africa have been able to privatise medical services. Of course, their services are for the “rich”, while the poor continue to suffer and die.

Generally, Africa is a continent where diseases are common owing to weather conditions that are conducive to harmful disease-carrying organisms. The anopheles mosquito, for example, the vector that carries the plasmodium bacteria responsible for causing malaria, is found only in areas where most of the African population live. Ebola Fever, which has reappeared recently in the Congo and Northern Uganda, is one of the unique tropical diseases. Other controllable diseases elsewhere are cholera, tuberculosis, and sexually transmittable infections (STIs) which are a menace in Africa. HIV/AIDS uses these as its opportunistic diseases.

Just before I return to the scourge of HIV/AIDS, it may be important to raise the concerns cited by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, in his popular book *Civilisation* (2000). He observes:

Despite the “miracles” of modern medicine, disease seems unconquered, except in complacent or inert imaginations. Micro-organisms which cause disease tend to evolve rapidly. Just as staphylococcus and streptococcus beat penicillin, so current strains are showing a tendency to resist antibiotics: these adaptations, at present, are outpacing the ability of medical research to respond (Fernandez-Armesto 2000:552).

He goes on to observe that, some years ago, tuberculosis was thought to be close to extinction as a result of global vaccination programmes. But the “New W-strain of the disease is resistant to every available drug and kills half its victims”. (Fernandez-Armesto 2000:552). For Fernandez-Armesto, HIV/AIDS is simply one of those diseases which will kill millions before a cure is found. He ventures to predict that more pandemics may be on the horizon, such as the influenza pandemic of 1917-18, which killed more people than those who died in the First World War (1914-1918).⁴ He also mentions drug-resistant malaria, and the fast-growing population of urban rats. He concludes with an important scientific criticism:

Here is a speculation worth taking seriously: in medical history, as in most other respects, the last couple of hundred years have been a deceptive interlude – an atypical episode. We have convinced ourselves that the diminishing virulence of diseases was entirely the result of our own efforts in hygiene, prevention and cure. It is equally likely that we have also, in part benefited from an evolutionary blip – an undiscerned and unrecorded period of relatively low malignity in the biology of disease. If so, there is no reason to suppose that this period will be indefinitely prolonged. (Fernandez-Armesto 2000:552).

From this point of view, it would seem hopeless to contemplate any solution to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In fact, it may be argued that efforts to stem HIV/AIDS are not helped by modern moral degeneration with regard to unregulated human sexual practices. In

⁴ Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome confirms Fernandez-Armesto prediction.

addition to this, the fight against the epidemics and HIV/AIDS is in the hands of the leadership insofar as they are in positions of financial trust. The power of words of wisdom, and purposeful mobilisation, and spending of state resources are some of the positive contributions anticipated from African leaders. HIV/AIDS is a morally complex disease because it is spread through private human interaction, namely sex. At this level it is each individual's responsibility to draw resources from moral virtue in order to prevent HIV from spreading further. We may not be sure how it evolved. But we do know that it silently and viciously spreads while people are privately enjoying what is considered a 'good' time. We know the modes by which HIV is transmitted, and we need the moral will to avoid them. This calls for moral transformation, aided by God's intervention.

HIV/AIDS causes a human body condition that attracts diseases, gives them leeway to destroy the body's health defence system, and eventually leads to the death of its victim. The diseases that take advantage of the human-immuno-deficiency virus in the body are called "opportunistic diseases" (Evian 1993:29). These are some of the many diseases that have contributed to the suffering in Africa mentioned earlier.

Then what do we mean by saying that these diseases are a negation of African Renaissance? When a government fails to manage the established health system because of financial mismanagement, then people die of ailments that would otherwise be treatable. Can Africa afford further financial mismanagement and corruption in the face of HIV/AIDS epidemic? Would continued corruption be indicative of a lack of political will to renew Africa? There is a moral responsibility required to fight HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS epidemic may be an indication of general moral deterioration. Gideon Mendel, in his submission *Broken Landscape HIV&AIDS* (2003) makes a comment full of insight regarding the world moral trend. "AIDS isn't just a disease. It is a symptom of something deeper that has gone wrong with the global family" (Mendel 2003:1).

It could be argued that HIV/AIDS may be seen in the context of moral decay that has been going on for too long. To revive Africa, we need more than HIV/AIDS survivors who have successfully used condoms; we need people who have experienced a holistic moral transformation. In other words, a virtuous human resource that can respond to particular moral standards is what is critically needed for political and economic development (cf Davidson 1994:158-159; Norman 1998:146), and indeed for the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The outbreak of Ebola fever in Congo (2000) and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Asia (2003) were amoral and air-borne epidemics. The victims, like those of the black plague, were people who shared space. To catch one of the above epidemics, one had to be in the wrong place – the air passage - of the virus. In comparison, HIV/AIDS is a result of a sexual act for the largest number of infected people. Most of them offer their consent, with exception of children born with the virus, rape victims, and those who acquire HIV through professional hazard.

In contrast, SARS attacks everyone, rich and poor alike; discipline is required from all. SARS is a public matter; testing is not negotiable; wearing a nose cover is not an option

depending on an individual's choice, and each individual must respond to the rules and regulations in a communitarian paradigm. This is what we have failed to implement in the fight against HIV/AIDS epidemic because of a deficient moral stance and lack of public commitment.

Ignorance

By "ignorance" is meant the lack of knowledge or understanding, or the condition of being unaware or uneducated. Such lack of knowledge could be general or with respect to a particular fact or subject. Ignorance is also used here to include an ideological obsession so powerful that the mind seems to be closed down with regard to other people's insights and inclinations. In all cases, ignorance is a state of unknowing or being uninformed or unlearned (cf Simpson and Weiner 1989:640).

The term "fighting ignorance" is commonly used by African politicians in claiming to lead their countries in the path of modern civilisation. In this context, the phrase means lack of knowledge and skills such as are commonly offered through formal education. Informal education is often disregarded, since it falls into the category of unregulated and suppressed African wisdom. For African leaders, institutions of learning, such as schools, are the instruments to be used to eradicate such ignorance.⁵

It was generally assumed that with education, many problems of poverty and disease would easily be fought, and politico-economic development would come out of this educationally transformed ethos. Of course, formal education lit the torch of enlightenment among the descendants of African slaves in the Americas in the 1900s, and sparked off the "Back to Africa" movement of the Harlem Renaissance (1920). Most educated Africans from missionary-led schools in Africa entered higher institutions of learning in Europe and America. They later came back to lead the African masses on the road to 'independence'⁶

Has education provided the needed knowledge and skills for politico-economic development in Africa? To some extent, the answer to this question could be affirmative. However, most political and economic boosts for the creation of jobs and industrial production have come from foreign investors and foreign consultants. With the exception of South Africa, largely because of its sustained colonial and apartheid rule, none of the other African countries can claim to have manufacturing industries, if they have any at

⁵ I recall the time when in the 1970s the Ugandan government forced uneducated adults into clubs where they were taught the three "Rs", reading, writing and arithmetic. School leavers in formal education were asked to offer months of voluntary teaching in these three areas.

⁶ Africa's independence was not real. Though African leaders took up the administration of their respective nations, the continent had been severely divided by colonial occupation. In addition to this, the onset of the 1960-1989 Cold War retarded meaningful politico-economic development. The pursuits of Euro-Western capitalistic economy have now ushered in the global free market, at a time when Africa needs foreign investors for an economic boost. Is national independence possible? This will remain a question to be dealt with by future African generations.

all, that are fully manned by nationals. Even where attempts have been made under 'African affirmative action', such governments are moving fast into privatisation. Government corporations are sold to foreign investors (or in partnership) where they may be cost-effective in terms of expertise. Edward Boateng, in discussing the role of information in promoting economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa, observes that Africa offers 'profitable' investment opportunities. He goes on to say:

But a good number of potential international investors lump our nations together when determining their foreign investment strategies. In spite of the vastness of our land surfaces, the outbreak of war anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa can adversely affect the investment policy of a major transcontinental corporation which may have harboured serious thoughts of investing in a nation located thousands of kilometres away from the war zone (Boateng 1999:394).

Boateng overlooks the fact that Africa waiting for foreign investors may mean that Africa has not developed investors of her own. Nevertheless, the point made in this observation reveals how seriously investor knowledge and managerial skills related to big business corporations are still needed in Africa. In the meantime, such expertise has to be imported. With it will come the loss of capital in profits for the investor, which is not necessarily the promotion of national production. Besides, there are always strings attached to investments, which keep Africa's poor vulnerable – a phenomenon that is now aggravated by globalisation.

Boateng's submission highlights another aspect of the African problem. Imported Euro-Western education did not address matters of morality, among other omissions. Basil Davidson (1994), a British historian with long and arduous years of research in Africa, has confirmed that European education did not prepare Africans for their own politico-economic development. At most, European education sought to make Africans better suited to serve European colonial and economic interests in Africa.

Having abandoned or been uprooted from the African sources of moral values, Africa's new elites under the colonial governments had to obey the colonial commanders. These were not democratic leaders, for they had fought their way through pre-colonial African resistance to power. Most of Africa's emerging leaders knew no other models of leadership in the new "civilised" world than the colonial government officials who relayed orders (dictatorship) from colonial offices in London, Paris, and Lisbon. This was the setting for rampant military dictatorships in the last three decades of African politics as power-hungry despots resorted to martial confrontation as a means to resolve political differences or serve personal politico-economic interests.

Beneath the veneer of Euro-Western education, there was another emerging problem. The fact was that the kind of education offered was not geared toward creating skilled labour for scientific and technological advancement. Limited education was offered to common labourers, and in a small way, in training teachers, nurses, prison warders, and in teaching the language of the colonial masters so that African "servants" might be able to receive orders from their Europeans masters.

Once education was out of the hands of Christian missionaries (1960s), there was a shift towards a duty-based-ethics that did not include the moral virtue component. Many people in Africa could be said to be educated but still ignorant of basic moral survival skills. This observation could also be true if measured against Euro-Western modern moral dilemmas, since this was the general trend of moral thought worldwide. However, multiple factors contributed to the depravity of Africa's leadership; the influence of colonial models of governance; insufficient education; military and political activism as the pathway to political leadership; the 'survival race' ("gravy train" mentality) which manifested in the self-enrichment schemes of some political leaders; and persistent aspects of cultural superstitions. At times, one or two of these combine to cause irrational thinking, especially in times of crisis. One such crisis is the HIV/ AIDS epidemic, by which the bedrock of rational morality is being tested.

Consider the following myths that have come up from the HIV/AIDS pandemic: having sex with a virgin will cure HIV; white condoms are racist, rather make those that match the skin complexion of the users; and HIV/AIDS statistics are greatly exaggerated. Could these be a reflection of varied levels of ignorance, or desperate options associated with the epidemic?

Illiteracy, where a person has not interacted with formal education, is the type of ignorance politicians imply in their objectives for Africa's development. Yet we know that there are persons who are well informed through informal education based on African wisdom. Large sections of African rural communities have survived on the provisions of Africa's 'informal' education, transmitted through oral communication. Although people who are not formally educated may not understand the technical terms used in the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many communities of this description have developed terms by which they understand the AIDS epidemic. For example, in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, HIV/AIDS is referred to as *Ogawulayo* (something that chops); in Uganda and Rwanda they use the same term *slimu* (an ailment with a ghastly emaciating effect on the patient). These terms are developed out of lived experience with full-blown AIDS sufferers. Cases of ignorance encountered in this epidemic are related to cultural superstitions, racial prejudices, allowing oneself to be overcome by sexual desires, and the mysterious nature of the HIV infection.

Many persons, regardless of their education and background, are still consulting the Sangomas about diseases, employment, the goodwill of employers (in the face of common retrenchments), and generally matters concerning the future. Culturally this may be a contentious issue, given the high regard and fear with which the Sangomas are viewed. Their contribution to the development of social economic resourcefulness (social capital) is yet to be measured. Whereas sufficient information has been disseminated, in print and on TV regarding the HIV/AIDS, ignorance continues to characterise the myths associated with the epidemic. Concomitantly, most of the government information on the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign is, by policy, supposed to be moral value free. This is consistent with the general moral trend in Euro-Western thinking.

In his book *Living the Ten Commandments in the 21st Century*, J. John writing from a contemporary British moral context, says:

When you look at almost all social trends, Britain is in deep decline. We are being confronted with a rise in crime, family breakdown, personal debt and drug abuse. We live in a generation that has lost its fixed standards. Our society isn't just a ship that has slipped loose from its moorings; it is a ship that has lost its compass and rudder too. For a society desperately adrift, the Ten Commandments offer us both a land mark and an anchorage (John 2000:11-12).

J. John's observation can be used to generalise the trend of moral decline in Western Europe in the 21st century. Another Euro-Western writer, J. M. Boice, confirms J. John's view, albeit in seeking other alternatives, when he maintains:

The result of this situation is a crisis in the area of knowledge today, as in ancient times. Many thinking people quite honestly do not know where to turn. The rationalistic approach is impersonal and amoral. The emotionalistic approach is without content, transient and also often immoral. "Is this the end?" many are asking. "Are there no other possibilities?" Is there not a third way? (Boice 1986:21).

For the African, African Christian wisdom becomes our alternative. The opportunity avails itself in the development of an African Renaissance for us to effect a moral regeneration. Such a moral regeneration would not only address the question of HIV/AIDS, but also general widespread depravity in African private and public life. Euro-Western moral philosophers are revisiting the ancient Greek moral thinkers. This is what seemed to work in their historical past. Africans may have to revisit African wisdom in proverbs, and draw out the "good" that might exist in Euro-Western moral thought and Judeo-Christian traditions which this study considers to be universally applicable, for theories and insights that will be tested as virtuous knowledge for moral regeneration in Africa.

Armed political conflict

"Armed political conflict" refers to situations of power struggles that more often than not have degenerated into military coups and/or rebel armed conflicts. They are usually born out of intra-state conflicts of persons who are competing for the control of state machinery such as the army, finances, or any other main income-generating entity in their own country. The politics of factionalism has been the plague of African politics and its morally deprived leaders since Independence (approximately 40 years ago). Though some factions are externally instigated (cf Russell 2000:100), others cannot escape the criticism that they are largely caused by the selfish schemes of some African leaders in their power-hungry survival struggle (cf *African voice* 2001:1-2). Here I would like to reiterate Mbeki's critical observation while addressing the first ever conference on the African Renaissance on 28 September 1998, in Johannesburg. He said:

I am certain that none of us present here will dispute that the cancer of self-enrichment by corrupt means constitutes one of the factors which account for the underdevelopment and violent conflicts from which we seek to escape. ... many of us will be familiar with instances in which wars have dragged on seemingly without end, because soldiers and their political accomplices find the situation of conflict profitable as it opens up business opportunities for them to earn commissions on arms purchase, to open possibilities for criminal syndicates to loot and rob and set themselves up as private business people (Mbeki 1999: xvi).

Natural disasters in Africa

Famine and floods are mainly a result of gross weather changes worldwide. These phenomena are becoming common natural disasters in Africa, claiming hundreds of casualties. Active volcano eruptions (Akpan-Ohohe 2002:34-35), have on some occasions killed people. It is not the nature of these disasters that constitutes a negation to African Renaissance. It is the preparedness and the readiness of a country with regard to common and recurring problems. Do these disaster-prone countries in Africa have alternative scenarios for handling the unforeseen aspect of the situation if it arises? Have these countries built the capacity to handle disasters better, especially if they occur annually and are of a fairly predictable nature?

The famines in Ethiopia (1985-90 and 2001-2002) and central Africa (2002), and the floods in Mozambique (2001) have demonstrated that the leadership in these countries have no contingency plans apart from waiting for the international world to intervene year after year. This matter becomes a leadership challenge toward the development of an African Renaissance. Malawi is said to have sold its food surplus, and now the nation is under the threat of famine. Apart from international agencies, little progress has been made in the form of a strategy on the part of African leaders to handle the human suffering arising from these situations. Zimbabwe's internal political struggles and the redistribution of land from the white farmers to war veterans is largely responsible for the food shortage in and around Zimbabwe. Poor planning which results in rural-urban mass exodus has left less able-bodied people to till the land and support the ever-growing idle masses in towns and cities in Africa. In Ethiopia, T. Butcher (2002) has laid subtle criticisms against the government concerning the current famine situation. It seems that they wait until they have images of emaciated Ethiopian children with bloated stomachs in the arms of their skeletal dying parents to be shown extensively on TV as motivation for funding. Bob Geldof, an official of "Live Aid", a British agency raising funds to rescue the situation, was quoted complaining that the imminent famine in Ethiopia "showed that government-to-government aid programmes had again failed" (Butcher 2002:1-2). He wondered what else the government had on the political agenda while 15 million of its citizens were dying in this famine.

The causes of food shortage or famine in Africa are fivefold. I have already noted the main cause, the change in weather patterns. This is a worldwide phenomenon. The other four causes are as follows:

- (i) There have been recurrent droughts, poor rains or floods. The result has been dwindling harvests causing an ever-increasing food crisis. This food crisis has now reached a level where there are starving masses in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Angola (Barnaby 2002).
- (ii) Political factors have also contributed to this famine crisis. Barnaby and Butcher have cited poor planning and high military spending that do not allow for well-funded research geared toward predicting disasters. Senseless civil wars result in the displacement of masses of people, either internally or externally. In both cases, they are not available to till the land and engage in food production. They are reduced to a population dependent on foreign aid. Politically, these countries have to service a national debt that is exorbitant. This leaves fewer funds to spend on any meaningful programmes for combating this famine situation (Mburugu 1999:1-2; Ndungane 2001:1-11).
- (iii) Corrupt government officials have been cited as another cause of famine in these starving nations in Africa. Self-enrichment schemes, diversion of funds intended for poverty alleviation to politicians' accounts, and high remuneration in salaries is a serious moral problem in most African governments.

Among other causes of famine, the performance of the government manifested poor planning ahead of recurring disasters, and political conflict surely arises from depravity. If the leadership succumb to selfish desires or external forces and pursue priorities of a military nature at the expense of their dying populations, then they have lost the very reason why they should exist as national leaders.

The Virtue of Wisdom as Foundation for Virtue Ethics in Africa- The contribution of Christian Theology

Although African renaissance is a movement about renewal, the new breed of leaders is not paying attention on the moral regeneration imperative. I will argue that this imperative moral regeneration the one excellence that should be put to the centre of the African Renaissance movement. Any talk about rebirth of the African continent should include a virtue theory as framework of such a renaissance. We can now move closer to the actual "content" of such agency centred ethic through an outline of the four cardinal (also known as classical) and three theological virtues. After this outline, a choice is made for the virtue of wisdom as prism through which all other virtues may be viewed. Classical virtues are discussed here below.

The virtue of wisdom

Aristotle described the virtue of wisdom as "practical wisdom, prudence, or good sense", which "deals with matters of ordinary human interest". It is different from "speculative wisdom, which is wisdom *par excellence*" dealing "with the first principle of things" (Sherman 1992:745).

Aristotle was redefining an earlier understanding of wisdom translated from the Greek word *phronesis* which is often used in ethical discourse as “prudential or instrumental reasoning” which is “intimately linked with virtue” of the moral agent (cf Sherman 1992:1000). From the Platonic point of view, *phronesis* could also be used to refer to “general intellectual ability, such as intelligence, understanding, or intellectual expertise”. A.R Gordon builds on this submission and defines wisdom

as the direct, practical insight into the meaning and purpose of things that comes to shrewd, penetrating, and observant minds, from their own experience of life, and their daily commerce with the world (Gordon 1992:742).

This approach results in the exercise of virtue in such a way that it is sensitive to the specific requirements of different circumstances in their singularity, particularity, and fragility, that is, attending to both immediate and final consequences of actions (cf Van der Ven 1998:358).

Emotional capacity is necessary for the discernment of morally relevant particulars. This enables the moral agent to know when it is relevant to respond to a situation in its particularity against other rival demands. The emotional element brings to the surface what “the dispassionate intellect” does not often recognise. Practical wisdom is

often required for making dispositional ends of character occurrent, e.g., for noticing the appropriate occasions for generosity, for recognising that now is a moment to show gratitude toward a friend. Recognising the means for an end that is now occurrent, for knowing just how to be generous given present resources and rival demands (Sherman 1992:1000).

This is what Aristotle referred to as “practical *nous*, or practical insight ... a capacity to recognise and evaluate particular circumstances of action” (Sherman 1992:1001). It is noted that emotions such as anger or pity can render the practical insight or *nous* defensible. To this end, considerable exposure and experience of different situations helps in habituation and developing one’s emotional capacities, so that one is able to respond prudentially.

This does not mean that practical wisdom inferences established from previous experiences become rules. Aristotle argued ethical theory will have certain rules which hold for the most part. These summarise previous experiences and inferences which might have been of great help in that situation. A moral virtue agent might refer to these “rules” in making a practical choice. However,

they remain underdetermined with respect to future circumstances, and even when highly specific, guide only to the extent that an agent can recognise appropriate occasions for application. Yet recognising the instances cannot itself be a part of formulating a rule. To know a rule no matter how specific, and know how to apply it, are two different things (Sherman 1992:1001).

Practical wisdom forms the essential practice of a “reflective self-understanding”. This is to say, a wise person should be able to affirm his/her sense of virtuosity and the claim that living prudentially “is the most meaningful life” (Sherman 1992:1001). Such testimony is in itself a necessary defence of virtue in general.

The virtue of wisdom is therefore directly related to having the sense of right and wrong. It differentiates between those who are wise and those who are foolish. Practical wisdom negates the actions that are done with shrewdness, such as machinations and the cleverness often associated with mafia-type crimes. Such wisdom is outside virtue.

African and Christian Contribution to wisdom

Some values and norms have been preserved both in the African and Christian traditions. They are like pillars in a “freedom square” supporting the goodness of the community. They provide safety for the wise who choose to march into the “freedom square”⁷. Both African and Christian wisdom has not been in the forefront of moral reflection since “the wise” referred only to intellectuals in particular disciplines.

However, even now when moral wisdom is in suppressed mode, it continues to sustain nations in the current problematic moral situation⁸. These traditions are effective in communities whose members share the *Sitz im Leben* and have allowed it to shape their moral lives albeit under the critical eye of what is “good” and “right”. The accumulated wisdom in proverbs, sayings, and poems which communicate the good in the community has to be scrutinised and “if necessary purified” by universal justice, regarding what is right. The application of the product of this process requires wisdom for the African Christian community in the context of the development of an African Renaissance.

African wisdom tradition

In dealing with African wisdom tradition, we shall start by considering oral tradition as the form in which African wisdom existed for a long time before it was committed to written form. This is important as it will reveal the social context in which this wisdom was constructed. While aware that African wisdom includes poems, folk-songs/tales, and mythology, we shall concern ourselves with proverbs as the main source of moral value transmission in the broader sense of this tradition. We shall then look at the theological nature of African proverbs, particularly in the attributes of God and life experiences, showing how these attributes become the vehicle of moral influence and transformation.

⁷ The “freedom square” is different from “no man’s land”; it has boundaries and it is a symbol of human achievement and a means to preserve the memory of freedom into the future. In “no man’s land”, it is presumed that the individual is under no authority. But it follows also that where there is no authority there is no protection either.

⁸ President Y.K. Museveni of Uganda made a similar observation that, even when Christian values are practised by a few, yet their impact is the only good that seems to sustain the nation. He made this observation during his opening speech, when he hosted a Regional Heads of State Summit in Uganda (cf Museveni, 1997:158).

Finally, we shall have a sample of proverbs which reflect on everyday experience. Let us now turn to the oral form as the original source of African wisdom.

The oral tradition in African wisdom

There were three tiers of settings that provided avenues for oral tradition as the source of wisdom in Africa. These were the fireplaces in the homestead; at any place of work (such as clearing fields for crops or building or preparing meals); and the communal events, rites of passage, and council meetings at the chief's courtyard. It was often during communal events such as initiation ceremonies, naming, circumcision, marriage, funerals and times for the veneration of ancestral spirits, that spontaneous conversation offered opportunity for extensive use of proverbs. Dr. Ryszard Pachocinski, who has collected over 2,600 Nigerian proverbs, explains that he could not establish precisely who the authors were. He observes that all speakers who used proverbs started their speech by saying: "*Awan agba man so wipe...*" meaning "The elders used to say that..." (Pachocinski 1996:3). A similar pattern of speech introduction in the usage of proverbs is true among the Xhosa in South Africa. They, too, introduce their proverbial statements in this way: "*Amaxhosa athi...*" meaning "the Xhosa people say that...". The Baganda in Uganda also introduce their proverbial statements by saying, "*Abaganda bagaba...*" meaning "The Baganda say that...."

All these examples across sub-Saharan Africa confirm the oral tradition of proverbial communication. Even when proverbs have been collected and committed to writing, their usage is still limited to orality (the spoken word).

Orality as mode of communication was consistent with the oral tradition that characterised pre-colonial Africa. It is not correct to consider this mode of communication as primitive and belonging to the illiterate, as some Euro-Western ethnographic scholars such as Ryszard Pachocinski previously construed it. He observed that orality was a result of or reflected "historical tradition and the level of the socio-economic development of particular countries, regions and even continents" (Pachocinski 1996:1). However, after a credible scholarly work in Nigerian, he had a different perception. He recollects that in the "absence of written literature, proverbs serve as the guardian and the carrier of the ethnic group's philosophy and genesis" (Pachocinski 1996:1). This shows how the African social framework was sustained. African wisdom, especially when communicated through proverbs, shows the extent of African habits and customs, religions, language usages, belief systems, values, interests, preferred occupations, divisions of labour and social institutions. All these were maintained in an oral tradition and through them societies were sustained (cf Pachocinski 1996:2 and Naudé 1995:34).

In a popular proverb, we learn how the elders were the "wisdom texts" of proverbs in this African oral tradition:

Akatsitsa kakuru niko kajumbika omuriro (Rukiga-Runyankole –Uganda)

Translation: An old tree-stump is the one that keeps the fire.

Interpretation: Treasure the elders because they give life, and preserve it with their wisdom and experience (cf Cisternino 1987:330).

Interpretive note: Usage, preservation and transmission of African proverbs were the responsibility of the elders. They were the custodians of African wisdom.

In most African societies, rites of passage mark the entrance from one age group to another. I shall elaborate on this process later in this study. It is sufficient to note here that such age groups are usually men, although women formed an “elders” age group of their own and would be consulted in matters of a feminine nature. The honour of an elder, among other qualifications, finds credence in how often such an elder uses proverbs. The elder is a “text” from which real life experiences are “read” and communicated. To be wise is to know the wealth of wisdom, especially through proverbs and to have the ability to use them appropriately. Yet a wise elder is never alone. He takes his/her place in his/her age group, listening and participating as the process of becoming (receiving and giving) wiser. Young adults sit close to the elders to listen and learn the art of using proverbs especially in ethical injunctions. The method of allowing young men to listen and learn makes it possible to transmit the tradition of wisdom and culture from one generation to another, hence preserving and transmitting norms, values, and beliefs which would have otherwise died. There is no doubt that proverbs play an essential role in preparing these young people for their different roles, especially in instilling into them a respect for their elders. Pachocinski confirms that indeed proverbs help “in broadening the educational, social, psychological and economic development of children and youth in the traditional society” (Pachocinski 1996:1).

However, Pachocinski laments that this social structure that provides the setting in which proverbs play a vital role is being lost. In many cases this loss is attributed to the fact that orality has failed to exist alongside the writing and reading culture. Moreover, textuality seems to have a “power” that displaces memory. Young generations in “modern” Africa have become “lazy”, as it were, because they have alternative ways of storing information. They also have a system of education that offers other ways of being wise, other than listening from the elders. The written sources offer a means of catching up with the past, keeping abreast of the present, and even speculating about the future. These are features which the few surviving elders cannot provide for or keep up with.

Willie Van Heerden (2002), who has taken an interest in African proverbs, raises some questions concerning the loss of orality in African proverbs. Could this loss of orality affect the holistic nature of the African wisdom tradition? To what extent has “textuality” of proverbs in the modern textual culture affected the usage of these proverbs that thrived in an oral culture? Van Heerden observes:

We are heirs to the process of alienation from the oral world produced by writing and print. We have internalised it until it seems natural, and we do not recognise that there is another world-view (Van Heerden 2002:468).

He goes on to observe that a text has a dynamic power because it freezes the word and places it in the hands of interpretive experts. According to this observation, the oral

proverbs are being collected, and gradually what were community's resources for moral reflection is becoming the property of scholars.

Piet Naudé (1995) has already stated this observation. In his research into a subsection of the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) among the Venda in South Africa, Naudé applied the knowledge advanced by acclaimed scholars in literary scholarship like Milman Parry, Albert Lord, Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Ruth Finnegan and Jack Goody in oral hermeneutics (cf Naudé 1995:31-32). These sources enriched his investigation with regard to the oral theology that is indeed inherent in the moral and religious force of the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC). The fact that the ZCC is one of the fastest-growing Christian churches in South Africa might be attributed to the fact that its core internal beliefs and expressed religious aspects are essentially oral. Naudé's task was to harness the force of the huge ZCC membership by furnishing to his readers a theological framework in which justice, tolerance, and mutual values can grow into the context of a new South Africa (cf Naudé 1995:v).

I shall employ two important points from this work.

First, as Ong has shown, "orality shows ... a certain tenacity which dominates a society long after the introduction of writing. ... to a varying degree many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality" (Naudé 1995:33-34). To appreciate this point one has to understand that most of the African moral thought was preserved and transmitted orally, as noted earlier until the advent of colonialism. Thereafter, moral systems, textually presented, suppressed African moral thought. Many attribute the moral dilemma in Africa to the fact that Africans were uprooted from their oral sources of moral thought and its oral communication often in a situation's particularity, singularity, fragility and tragedy to borrow terms from Van der Ven, used earlier on (cf Van der Ven 1998:9). The problem of Africa's moral deficiency could be a result of adopting Euro-Western and textually presented moral reflections. In addition, moral depravity could be attributed to the current problematic Euro-Western moral theories discussed in Chapter Two.

However, as argued by Naudé, the tenacity of the African oral culture has been preserved by some communities. Some of these tenacious moral-preserving qualities of the oral cultures are indeed inherent in the proverbs. As such, they should be awakened in the rebirth of knowledge under the development of an African Renaissance.

The second point made by Naudé is in connection with a participatory style for the purpose of highlighting an oral hermeneutic. In Naudé's presentation, the experience of this participatory style is captured in the Zionist Christian Church hymns at the Itsani-congregation of St Engenas Lekganyane, among the Venda of South Africa. This feature, common to African wisdom literature, includes music and proverbs. I have identified a similar construction of proverbs during speeches, in such a way as to make their usage instantly recognisable. The participatory element in proverbs is achieved when the speaker mentions the first phrase of the proverb and the audience responds with the second part. I observed that some proverbs are composed of two conjoined phrases.

Here is an example:

Nyine ka kwabyamira orurimi: Eze zibyamira eshaabo (Rukiga-Runyankole- Uganda)

Translation: “When the elder in the homestead sleeps on his tongue” is the first phrase that the speaker mentions and the audience responds by completing the proverb with the last part: *Eze zibyamira eshaabo*: (Literally: His cows will sleep in their urine).

Interpretation: A true and effective leader prevents laziness and irresponsibility by giving orders and exacting obedience (Cisternino 1987:320).

Interpretative note: This participation by the audience means that the audience also owns the message. It is no longer the speaker’s property, and putting into practice the implication of the proverb is, therefore, communal. This is what Naudé identifies as the oral performance encased in communal reaction, the communal “soul” (cf Naudé 1995:39).

It might be correct to conclude that the effectiveness of proverbs lies exactly in their orality. As in theology, it is not until the communities begin to theologise that the gospel becomes effective. In the same way, it might be that, unless proverbs are communicated orally, their effectiveness will be reduced. We have noted that orality aids the transmission of proverbs where communities are not accustomed to reading. However, if orality were acceptable at the same level with textuality, it would be found more effective because of its interactive nature. Writing and reading of a text as a means of communication is often a lonely enterprise for both the author and the reader. When proverbs are transmitted in conversation, they are contextual, at least when applied to the subject being discussed. When a moral advice is read, it has already become history to the present context in which it is read.

With the irreversible change from orality to textuality in the use of proverbs, we have to make the best of what is possible. It has been shown that when a proverb transcends its own context and acquires an enduring status, then it becomes a universal source of wisdom. Here the original story from which it was created may not be necessary. This is because the moral statement in the proverb can stand on its own. Part of what qualifies mere statements or phrases as wisdom is their freedom to be independent, meaningful, and usable in different and changing contexts. As many proverbs are collected and committed to writing, we shall depend on new and modern ways of interpreting them so as to make them attractive and accessible to the modern mind. One of these ways is to study the genre of African proverbs within the philosophy of an African world-view in which proverbs were created. The world-view itself has been constructed orally through the centuries.

We shall now turn to the African ethos from which African wisdom and proverbs in particular, were constructed, used, and transmitted to successive generations. Consideration of proverbs reveals a stylistic genre that evokes the imagination and creativity of the African mind. Let us turn to the analysis of genre of African proverbs, by showing their dominant features.

The reflection on everyday leadership experience as seen from proverbs

I shall offer examples from the collection of proverbs by Fr. Marius Cisternino (a paremiologist). He collected proverbs from two groups of people, the Bakiga of Kigezi, and the Banyankole of Ankole in Uganda. Coincidentally, although my mother-tongue is Kinyarwanda, I was born and raised among the Bakiga-Banyankole people. Cisternino offers five categories of proverbs with regard to moral leadership. I shall take three samples from each of these categories.

a) **Importance of authority in leadership**

(i) *Enjoki zitarimu mukama n'obuyayo* (Rukiga-Runyankole Uganda)

Translation: Bees without a queen do not make a swarm

Interpretation: Any form of organisation, community or country needs a leader. For the Queen bee her capacity to lay eggs assures the sustainability of the swarm

Interpretive note: A leader has to be productive as a qualification of his/her leadership. This qualification relates to the nature by which the leader's qualities sustain the community he/she leads.

(ii) *Ogwine kyenegyeza tiguraara* (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)

Translation: A tended fire never goes out

Interpretation: A good leader keeps his household or community cared and provided for. Without a good leadership a community dies or becomes destructive.

Interpretive note: A community has a fragile life, because it is composed of many different people who have different needs and different ways of perceiving reality in order to turn them into effective members of a community. A good leader attends to them with virtues that keep the community motivated in their participations and effective in their contribution to the development of the community.

(iii) *Nyinente tahunga* (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)

Translation: The owner of the cattle does not flee

Interpretation: Facing responsibility and hardship is a necessary quality of a true leader

Interpretive note: In the face of danger, a good leader does not abandon his people. They depend on him/her for their defence, direction and well-being. He/she may have to put his life in danger in order to protect the lives of the led.

b) **The helpfulness of leaders**

(i) *Omukama okukunda akutuma owanyu* (Rukiga-Runyankole –Uganda).

Translation: A chief who likes you sends you as a messenger to your home village.

Interpretation: A good leader is known by his gift of practical wisdom.

Interpretive note: This is a commendation of the leader's ability to match tasks with abilities. Although the proverb appears to be perpetuating favouritism, it in fact implies the employment of people according to their

capacity much with socio-political conduciveness in order to maximise their effectiveness.

(ii) ***Omukama n' okukamire***

Translation: A chief is one who gives you milk

Here is a play on words

Interpretation: The word “*omukama*” carries within it the sound of milking. It also suggests that indeed a “*omukama*” is one who has cows to milk. For the subjects of such a chief, the “meaning” of the existence and lordship of this “*Omukama*” is when such leader shares his/her wealth for the benefit of his people.

Interpretive note: A leader is acknowledged if he delivers the “goods” of leadership to his/her subjects.

(iii) ***Engozi erondwa omu bazaire (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)***

Translation: A baby-sling is found only among parents.

Interpretation: Information and help is found only among real, concerned leaders.

c) **Personality of Leaders**

(i) ***Obukuru obweha (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)***

Translation: Elderhood is acquired

Interpretation: It is not old age, but maturity of mind and behaviour that makes an elder.

(ii) ***Ente ezitaine muhingo tizizaara gye (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)***

Translation: Unfenced cows do not produce good calves

Interpretation: Protection secures well-being.

(iii) ***Ekyafa aha mwaro bakibuuza mukuru w'enyanja (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)***

Translation: What happens on the shores of the lake is best known by its king

Interpretation: A good leader is well-informed. Going to him gives you a quick and balanced picture of a place.

d) **Leaders as role models**

(i) ***Nyineeka kuy' ataagura mukaru biri yaayorekyerera abaana be (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)***

Translation: When a father cuts dry meat (with his teeth), he sets an example for the children.

Interpretation: When a leader does something good or bad the children will imitate him.

Interpretive note: Leaders are role models. Whatever they do, their subjects copy them. Sometimes it is necessary to do particular things

privately in order to protect the children from early influences. However in terms of community leadership as a role model, leaders should be careful to be virtuous and go about their lives with goodness, justice and wisdom. This is because successive generations are greatly influenced by the present leadership.

- (ii) ***Ohinga na iba taba mworu*** (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)
Translation: The woman who tills a plot of land with her husband can never be lazy.
Interpretation: When a leader participates in community tasks everyone works hard and there is success.
Interpretive note: This proverb refers to the importance of unity between the subjects and the leaders where each one makes their contribution by playing their role for the progress of their community. Moreover, subjects often imitate the work ethic of their leaders.

- (iii) ***Entare Enshaija eti “N’eryangye” Enkazi: Turikwataine*** (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)
Translation: The lion says: “The forest is mine”. “It is ours,” says the lioness.
Interpretation: Cooperation between leaders and followers produces good results.
Interpretive note: Though the powerful Chief may claim all the success he/she should never forget some significant others who have helped him and share in this success.

- e) **Bad leaders**
 - (i) ***Orushaka rubi rurugamu enyamaishwa mbi*** (rwakityokori) (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda).
Translation: A bad animal comes from a bad bush
Interpretation: A bad leader comes from a bad community.
Interpretive note: The task of moral transformation should involve everyone in the community including the leaders. Though leaders have influence on the community once they are in office, they are often chosen from the community. A good, just and wise community is likely to choose a virtuous leader; moreover the community tends to choose the best among them.

 - (ii) ***Eiteme rya Kaburabuza ryambutsy’ ente*** (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)
Translation: The path of “Mr. push-and-pull” leads the cows across hills and valleys.
Interpretation: The actions of a deceiver make even their most docile subjects run away for their lives.
Interpretive note: With a bad leader, even the simplest things seem to go wrong.

Kugaburira nyineeka, omufumu aragurira busha (Rukiga-Runyankole – Uganda)

Translation: When the father of the homestead lacks wisdom the witch doctor's divination yields nothing.

Interpretation: A leader should have practical wisdom. He/she cannot learn it or get it from a witch-doctor.

Interpretive note: It is difficult giving advice to a chief or the head of the family; all efforts may be wasted since he may be too old/proud/ignorant to change. Assessing his deficiency does not make him any wiser (cf Cisternino 1987).

The individual/umuntu as an agent of virtue ethics: the anthropological dimension

Contrary to popular notions of an exclusively “communitarian” African world-view and ethic, African scholars who have made contributions toward the development of African moral thought subscribe to the fundamental importance of the individual/*umuntu* in the materialisation of virtue ethics. These include Gabriel M. Setiloane (1986), Benezet Bujo (1990), Mogobe B. Ramose (2002) and Kwame Gyekye (2002). Before we look at some of the arguments, it is good to remind ourselves of Schreier's observation that wisdom theologies are mostly constructed on the basis of the individual's experience as a journey with and toward the divine. It is therefore important to establish the status of the individual in African thought so as to avoid the perceived totalitarian communal perspective sometimes presupposed in popular notions of the *ubuntu* philosophy.

Ramose argues that *umuntu*, from the moral point of view, is the ontological and epistemological category of “actual existence of the living organism that perceives and is aware of its existence as well as that of others” (Ramose 2002:325). He goes on to explain that through *umuntu*, the faculty of consciousness or self-awareness releases the speech of “being and pursues its rationality by means of dialogue of being with being” (Ramose 2002:325). This is how the individual/*umuntu* discovers and interacts with others. *Ubuntu* is the moral quality, so to speak, that facilitates the interaction between beings, but these beings have a self-awareness that is distinct but not detached from being-with-others.

Bujo's contribution affirms the relative autonomy of the individual. This means that the individual is free and enjoys inalienable rights as his/her divine endowment (Bujo 1998:42). What does the African perceive of the individual in the event of establishing virtue ethics? Bujo argues that the autonomous view of an individual advanced by Kant, especially in his book *Fundamental Principles of Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), over-positioned the individual's freedom and will:

The autonomy of the will is the property the will possesses to be its own law (independent of the nature of the objects of willing). The principle of autonomy is therefore: always to choose in such a way that the maxims of our choices constitute universal laws in our willing (see Bujo 1990:14-15).

From this principle, Kant developed his problematic idealistic formula of the categorical imperative that presupposes an a-historical individual, free-floating to take decision through rational means. Bujo brings to our attention that this modern understanding of autonomy impacted on theology as well. He argues that in “modern theology, autonomy means the fact that human beings by reason of their intelligence can interpret the happenings they are faced with, and arrange their own moral life” (Bujo 1990:16). To this extent the individual is responsible for his/her actions and is also expected to make his/her own decisions when faced with moral dilemmas. Is this a denial of the intricate link between God, individual and community? No, this is simply a category of an anthropocentric dimension of African conception of morality implicitly rooted in God.

The right kind of relative autonomy of the individual is in agreement with Bujo’s view. He calls it “theonomy” or the divine authority from which the individual derives his/her moral foundation and guidance. Such an individual is available for him/herself and for the community as a participant in the “good” of the community. From this perception, he/she can be a moral agent – one with a good heart.⁹

This concept of a “good heart” refers to that interiorised goodness in an individual/*umuntu*. This conception is common in Africa. For example, the Banyarwanda of Central Africa uses the term “good heart” or “bad heart” (*umutima mwiza/umutima mubi*). The Baganda of central Uganda call it a good or bad spirit (*Omwoyo mulungi/mubi*). Both these phrases use the symbol of a human heart to illustrate the human spirit that is internal to being human. To be morally bad, they maintain, does not come about by failure to follow rules or codes, as opposed to doing the right things, but is a result of drawing from a bad source so that the individual’s potentially good heart is misdirected toward becoming evil. Breaking rules and doing wrong things is simply a manifestation of a heart that has lost its connection with the source of goodness (cf Gyekye 2002; Luke 6: 43, 45). What this means, is that morality is internal to being. It is not something that one does, but what one is. It does not mean that such morality is innate in the sense that it is “pre-programmed”. For example, individuals draw morals from a good source; they “grow” good hearts, and harvest virtues. The contrary is also true, that if individuals draw from a bad source, and “grow” bad habits, they will harvest vices.

⁹ Bujo owes this argument to Paul Tillich, who has contributed a great deal of what has developed into the ethics of responsibility. In his argument, Tillich maintains that the moral imperative is the command to become what one potentially is, a person within a community of persons (see Schweiker 1995:82). He argues that the goal of a moral life is self-actualisation. To reach this state a person must be centred, stable, and free. For Tillich, this can only be possible if the individual listens to his/her inner voice – the conscience or silent voice (see Schweiker 1995:82). But conscience is built out of community interaction internalised through time, and has a heteronomous moral influence on the individual. Bujo argues that this is how the African qualifies an individual (*umuntu*), one with a “good heart”, individual-in-community, but nevertheless an independent moral agent.

Bujo makes clear that the concept of the cultivation of virtues involves a process of interiorisation or absorption of moral “goods” – that is, standards, values, and virtues - offered in community. These moral “goods” are often stored in the subconscious of the individual, which is referred to as the “heart”- the assumed seat of moral feelings (cf Bujo 1990:98-100). The Bakiga-Banyankole call the results of such a good heart “*Engyesho nungi*” (literally: good moral harvest) and a bad heart “*Engyesho mbi*” (bad moral harvest). This means that morals are grown and are also cultivated by the community in every individual. It is up to every individual to harvest good morals. However, some individuals “absorb” vices. This is because the good and the bad sources of moral influence are all found in the community.¹⁰ The question is, “How does one get the orientation to harvest the good morals only?”

Let us pursue the idea of individuality (seemingly an anthropocentric ethic) further: Kwame Gyekye, in his contribution, *Person and community in African Thought* (2002), argues that moral questions are often linked to the conception of an individual. Gyekye gives three related aspects that influence these moral questions and presupposes a relatively free individual:

(i) The status of the rights of the individual. This status is reinforced by rights, and as already noted, all moral philosophers agree that rights are fundamental for the individual’s well-being and for making moral decisions. For this reason they should not be easily over-ridden by circumstantial arguments. (ii) There is a distinct place for duties, which concerns itself with how the individual sees his/her socio-ethical role in relation to the interests and welfare of others. (iii) The individual’s interaction with others should demonstrate a sense of common life, a kind of awareness of the collective/common good (Gyekye 2002:297).

Gyekye argues that the individual is accepted in his/her community to the extent that his/her moral capacities, or at least potential, is anticipated and can be evaluated by the community all along the different stages according to their moral expectations. The individual can, Gyekye maintains, stand outside the views of the community and question its values and even dare to change them (cf Gyekye 2002:305). In other words, the individual can rebel against the community. But he/she must have a moral view that protects *umuntu* and promotes *ubuntu*. If these two are not protected, that is both in the person of the individual and others, the radical individual challenging the moral status quo is no longer part of the community by his/her own choice. However, there is no

¹⁰ It may seem at this point that both the good and bad exist alongside each other to facilitate learning about their differences. This learning is made possible by means of the consequences that follow the good actions or the bad ones. Examples of these consequences are captured in the proverbs that become a source of seasoned wisdom. This wisdom is used to caution the individuals in the community. One does not have to go through the process of testing actions in order to discover whether they are good or bad. The wisdom in proverbs (among the Bakiga-Banyankole) has been accumulated to provide this teaching resource. **Kworumwa enjoka otiina omwina**, (Lit. Once beaten by a snake, you fear the hole where it dwells. Interpretation: One should make one particular mistake once and then learn to be careful.)

ceremony for “excommunication” of such individual but he/she becomes a reference for moral deviance.

The Bakiga of Uganda express this situation that isolates the deviant individual in this proverb:

Ahu embuzi embi eri: tosibikaho yawe (Rukiga)

Translation: Where a bad goat is tied, you do not tie yours there.

Interpretation: Parents should not let their children interact with morally bad people

Interpretive note: Bad behaviour is often very enticing. Individuals, especially young people, are likely to be swayed into wrong behaviour if that is the dominant way of life around them. A good moral environment is conducive for good moral formation. The reverse is also true.

Now that we have established the relative autonomy of the individual as responsible moral agent in African ethics, let us turn to the virtue of *ubuntu* and the importance of communities in cultivating virtuous people.

The virtue of ubuntu as building life-in-community: the communitarian dimension

The individual who fulfils the virtue expectations of the community is referred to as one with *ubuntu*, vaguely translated as humanness. Mogobe R. Ramose explains that “*ubuntu* as a concept and experience is linked epistemologically to *umuntu*. On the basis of this link, *umuntu* posits *ubuntu* as its basic normative category of ethics” (Ramose 2002:324). Augustine Shutte expounds that *ubuntu* is a concept which embodies an understanding of what it is to be human and what is necessary for human beings to grow and find fulfilment (cf Shutte 2001:2). Shutte, clarifying the concept of *ubuntu*, says:

It is an ethical concept and expresses a vision of what is valuable and worthwhile in life. This vision is rooted in the history of Africa and is at the centre of the culture of most ... Africans. But the values that it contains are not just African. They are values of humanity as such, and so universal (Shutte 2001:2).

The Zulus, the Xhosas¹¹ of Southern Africa, and the Banyarwanda in Central Africa use the term *Ubuntu* in moral reflection and in reference to an individual who manifests virtues in his/her character disposition. A person with *ubuntu* is referred to as *umunyabuntu* or *infura* among the Banyarwanda. It could also mean a hospitable, kind, just and generous person.

¹¹ C.L. Sibusiso Nyembezi, in his paremiology of *Zulu Proverbs* (1963), offers a description of *ubuntu* similar to that offered by Rutesire and Barlow. He defines *ubuntu* as humanness, that is, an individual with good character disposition and good moral nature. As a conglomeration of virtues, *ubuntu* manifests in behavioural aspects such as hospitality, expressions of gratitude, and kindness.

Anton Rutesire, a linguist and director of African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE) in Rwanda, provided this information. He explained that among the Banyarwanda *Infura* is the descriptive name given to a person with *ubuntu*. He went on to explain the virtues of *infura* in a rather poetic style:

*“Infura nowomusangira tagucure,
mwaganira ntakumenere ibanga;
mwajana ntagusigye,
wapfa akakurerera abaana’*

Translation: *Infura* is a person who is fair, generous, honouring confidentiality, patient and considerate, kind and caring (informant: Rutesire August 2002).

Semantimba Barlow, the author of *Aboluganda abend’emu* (1987), and an executive member of *Luganda* Language since 1985, explains that among the Baganda of Uganda, *ubuntu* is ascribed to a person in whom virtue conglomerates (similar to an agent-centred morality). Such a person is referred to as one with “*buntu bulamu*”. This descriptive term is given to a person who is conversant with virtues and is also virtuous. Being virtuous is understood as the individual’s balanced capacity manifested in the way he/she behaves (*empisa*) or the manner of character disposition. The individual with *buntu buramu* exhibits self-control, kindness, obedience, respect for all people in the community ranks (from children to elders); he/she is consistent, industrious, and knowledgeable in prudential and instructive wisdom.¹²

It is clear that the *ubuntu* concept is in direct opposition to an individualistic form of moral rationality, as in some Euro-Western points of view. Although *ubuntu* is “intrinsicly related to human happiness and fulfilment” (Shutte 2001:30), it thrives on human nature located in the being-together from which both the individual and the community derive their being. *Ubuntu* is always good and wise and calls for the moral obligation of “entering more and more deeply into community with others” (Shutte 2001:30).

The individual entering this “freedom-space” offered by one that exercise *ubuntu*, discovers the boundaries of the freedom-space in the circumstances of practical living. These boundaries create security, stability, and identity. People are drawn to an

¹² Barlow goes on to describe the opposite of *buntu bulamu*. He says that the opposite of *buntu bulama* is called *bukopi* (depravity). He explains that the etymology of the word *obukopi* has undergone changes from a class-segregation term to an ethical one. In the past, until the mid-twentieth century, the term *ubukopi* was used to differentiate the royalty from the commoners in the monarchical system of government in Bunganda (Uganda). This meant that *omulangira*, one born in a royal family and, *mukopi*, one born in commoner’s family, were descriptions that included material wealth. Royalty associated with material wealth made it possible to practise generosity, while a *mukopi* had nothing to give. As commoners moved into the wealthier class, the word *obukopi* acquired a new usage. It is now used to refer to a person who is morally poor (depravity). In the new usage, a “royal” is referred to as a *mukopi* or behaving as a *mukopi* if he/she is unkind, unproductive, irresponsible, and lacking self-control. Conversely, a materially poor person or a commoner who is kind, self-controlled, works hard and is productive according to his/her means, will be referred to as *muntu mulamu*, and not necessarily a *mulangira* or royalty.

individual with *ubuntu* because of these boundaries that protect the “freedom-space” that calls forth community. *Ubuntu* is therefore the space where the false dichotomy of a closed individualism and ideological communitarianism are transcended as human persons find their being through others in the free space of being-together. This can be said of the African community of *abantu* who possesses *ubuntu*.¹³ The question then arises what kind of community do we need that will ensure the well-being of the individual person (*umuntu*) in the context of the community so that a reciprocal force of *ubuntu* is released and realised in practical life?

The community is the cradle of the individual’s life, and has the responsibility of passing on values in order to model the individual into a moral being. Kindness, sharing, responsibility, and mutual respect are among the virtues expected in an African community. Every individual is expected to participate in the life of the community from which he/she derives the sense of belonging. Communalism generates the “vital participation” that binds the community together.¹⁴

¹³ This *ubuntu* concept can be likened to the way in which Murdoch describes the goodness of a person or a system. Goodness, Murdoch observes, is “indefinable and empty so that human choice may fill it” (Murdoch 1970:80). Goodness is therefore the freedom-space in the individual’s scheme of virtues deliberately created for other people. Naturally, we always offer this freedom-space to those who have claims on us such as spouses and offspring or people we deliberately choose to extend this goodness to. From an African point of view, this goodness is expected from every individual. Each individual offers and is offered this “free-space” which Murdoch calls “goodness”. The ability to create freedom-space forms the criteria that defines the initial expression of community relationships. To have *ubuntu* is to have, among other virtues, a freedom-space for other people in one’s life. This can be the character of an individual, community, social organisation, or state. The individual quickly recognises this “freedom-space”, filled with virtues. People come into this “freedom-space” of goodness naturally by “surrendering into its space”. The experience of security in this space and a desire to imitate or emulate the goodness of this freedom-space is born out of the desire to protect the goodness of this space. This is why we love those individuals who create space for us, because they welcome us by their goodness into their freedom-space. I find this to be similar to the freedom-space offered in the African community and by individuals. Although there are no preconditions, reciprocity is anticipated. Thomas Aquinas alluded to this earlier in his explanation of virtue of charity. He used a similar metaphor of goodness as a “freedom-space”. He argued that the individual who enters into the “freedom-space” discovers in a gentle way that it anticipates reciprocity. He maintained that it was natural that whenever an individual is allowed into this “freedom-space” there is often a reciprocal response of offering the same spatial freedom. This is the substance of a friendship that facilitates the practice of virtue ethics (cf Thomas 1989:356).

¹⁴ Gyekye explains the relation between individual and community from the communitarian features of the social structures of most African societies. He explains that the fact that an individual is born into an existing community suggests that the person is communitarian by nature, with the following implications: (i) The human person does not voluntarily choose to enter into human community, that is, community life is not optional for any individual person. (ii) The human person is at once a “cultured being” subject to the formative power of the community. (iii) The human person cannot – perhaps must not – live in isolation from other persons. (iv) The human person is naturally orientated toward other persons and must have relationships with them. (v) Social relationships are not contingent but necessary. (vi) Following on this, the person is constituted by social relationships in which he/she necessarily finds him/herself (Gyekye 2002:300). The Akan people have a proverb which illustrates this conception of the individual in society “*Onipa nnye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho*” (a person is not a palm tree that he should be self-complete or self-sufficient).

Two references are given by Gyekye to highlight the intricate relation between the community and the individual in Africa. The first one is from Leopold Senghor. He remarked “Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individuals, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society.” (see Gyekye 2002:298). Jomo Kenyatta made another remark regarding life in traditional Kenya: “According to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather his (sic) uniqueness is a secondary fact about him; first and foremost he is several people’s relative and several people’s contemporary” (see Gyekye 2002:298).

All these observations owe their starting-point to Mbiti’s statement which is a parody on the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*:¹⁵ “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (quoted in Gyekye 2002:298). The same conception is common among the Xhosa, expressed in this maxim: “*umntu ng’ umntu ngabanye abantu*” (a person is a person because of other persons). Bujo brings the argument to an African version of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, by offering the African conception: *cognatus sum ergo* (I am related, so I am). Kinship (*cognatio*) is akin to relationship (*relatio*). Bujo asserts that it is almost impossible to think (*cogito*) outside relationship (*cognatio*) (Bujo 1998:54). *Umuntu, ng’umuntu ngabanye abantu* becomes a statement that expresses a unity of reciprocal implication where being either as isolated individual or as bland communalism, is balanced in a constitutive, ontological relation between individual and community.

From these observations, Menkiti has made the following inferences: (i) The African view, in contrast to modernist trends in Western thinking, is clear that “it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory”. (ii) The African view supports “the notion of personhood as acquired” via community with others. (iii) Personhood is therefore something “which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed”. (iv) “As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail” in the event of isolation from the community through acts of selfish closure (see Gyekye 2002:298). Mulago explains this relation between individual and society in terms of participation:

Participation is the element of connection which unites different beings, as substances, without confusing them. It is the pivot of relationship between members of the same community, the link which binds together individuals and groups, the ultimate meaning not only of the unity which is personal to each man (person) but of that unity in multiplicity, that totality, that concentric and harmonic unity of the visible and invisible (see Setiloane 1986:14-15).

Now that we have acknowledged the constitutive link between individual and community, the question is: How does moral formation take place?

¹⁵ Bujo argues that “the ethics of discourse remains loyal to the Western tradition of *cogito*, which seeks to define the human person solely through reason. It is not an ethics, which knows only the principle of rationality, in danger of making reason absolute and discriminating against those who do not have the possibility of achieving the same rational prudence” (Bujo 1998:55).

One of the powerful ways through which the community exercises its task of moral formation, is the rites of passage. These rites of passage are marked by ceremonies and rituals. The overall result is respect and obedience to people who have gone through such rituals. Each new stage or rank which the individual joins has an “induction ceremony” during which community expectations are spelt out. Ranks define roles and roles define the level of authority of the individual in the community. In this way clarity of moral responsibilities is gained and reciprocal duties as expression of such responsibilities are established.

These rites of passage – as moral formative stages – should be understood from an integrated spirituality embedded in a holistic view of reality and encompassing all spheres of life. Kasenene observes:

According to African spirituality, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the physical and the spiritual, the religious and the moral. The African world-view blends the sacred and the mundane. The religious and the moral intermingle with the physical, material, political and social concerns of the people (Kasenene 1994:142).

The African world-view of holism focuses on the wholeness of life by promotion of the well-being of the members of society. The individual attains or is absorbed in holism when he/she is *umuntu* with *ubuntu* (physically a person and morally virtuous in making space for others). When holism has been achieved, it is manifested in personal integration, environmental equilibrium, and harmony between the individual and both the environment and the community (cf Kasenene 1994:142). A balance of forces have been attained in which moral growth become possible and is enhanced.

This notion that individuals whilst contributing to the community are also the product of the community, is ingrained in the African wisdom traditions. An African source of wisdom advises us by way of a proverb:

Orushaka rubi rurugamu enyamaishwa mbi (rwakityokori)

Translation: A bad animal comes from a bad bush.

Interpretation: A morally corrupt community will bring forth morally corrupt people.¹⁶

Interpretive note: Morally degenerate communities will not bring about moral regeneration or produce virtuous people. This would be a contradiction, such as a bad bush producing a good animal. By implication the reverse is emphasised, that is a virtuous community produces good people.

¹⁶ This African proverb carries the same message as the one given by Jesus: “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit... The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things stored up in his heart” (Luke 6:43, 45).

It is this moral conception (with respect to leaders) that calls for the moral transformation of African communities since they hold power and influence over their members. A community of the good, just, and wise - a conclusion reached earlier from Ricoeur's argumentation - is able to bring forth good, just and wise leaders.

It is thus clear that moral renewal requires community renewal. The crucial question arises as to where do we find such communities? Or: Which communities are we talking about? In the light of the dramatic effect of modernity and globalization on the African continent; in the light of a post-colonial identity crisis referred to under our contextual analysis; in the light of rapid urbanization and the reconstruction (destruction?) of traditional African societies, only a naïve person would pin the hope of community renewal on "traditional" communities that exist in all probability only on paper (or in remote rural areas). The latter is not to be underestimated, but would not suffice for the renaissance of Africa as such. There are obviously new "communities" that may be the target of moral regeneration and formation of which schools are probably the most powerful and important for creating a "wise" and virtuous future citizen. This and the issue of institutional renewal of other secular spheres are not pursued in this study.

For different reasons than those put forward by Stanley Hauerwas (see below), and in line with the ecclesiological dimension of Christian wisdom expounded earlier, this study would still regard the church as one such possible "community of character". The hope here is that the Christian conception of community builds on, informs and, where necessary, transcends the African view of community that sometimes carries an exclusivist tribal connotation.

Let us look at some insights from Stanley Hauerwas in his book, *A community of Character: Toward a Constructive Social Ethic* (1981) in order to strengthen our African conception of a community of character. We shall integrate Ricoeur's combination of the good, the just, and the wise with Hauerwas' community of character. Hauerwas takes an apologetic stance at the beginning, in trying to "re-assert the social significance of the church as a distinct society with integrity peculiar to itself" (Hauerwas 1981:1). He defends:

The church is too often justified by believers, and tolerated by nonbelievers, as a potential agent for justice or some other good effect. In contrast, I contend that the only reason for being Christian (which may well have results that in a society's terms seem less than "good") is because Christian convictions are true; and the only reason for participation in the church is that it is the community that pledges to form its life by that truth (Hauerwas 1981:1).

African Christians would share this conviction with Hauerwas, and in this argument the terms "Christian" and "church" will be used because of their neutral implications with regard to different Christian denominations. Although the Christian needs to be "separated" from the social context, separation is only in his/her beliefs concerning what is good, just and wise. Otherwise he/she is indeed embedded in the social community in which he/she is a witness to this goodness, justice and wisdom as manifestations of

Christian truth and virtuous living. This is what makes a Christian a role model - “salt” and “light” - in the community (Matt. 5:13-16).

Hauerwas has offered theses, some of which I would like to reiterate for a Christian’s critical consideration in the adoption of virtue ethics. The fact that Hauerwas’ theses are geared toward inculcating a Christian character through narrative, some of his ideas are directly attuned to the oral context of many African churches where the only access to the gospel is via oral narrative and a mnemonic recalling of biblical narratives that are contextually integrated with personal and communal narratives. I shall highlight some important aspects relevant to moral character formation, while integrating and affirming these theses using African proverbs in the line of African moral thought.

Firstly, the Christian community - a community of the wise (cf Wall 1997) is the custodian of the story of the gospel embedded in a people’s community. The gospel introduces the triune God to the African community, giving us the importance and locatedness of the Christian character. This is the “freedom-space” where accountability, moral reference, and support are sought and given as boundaries that define the identity of such a community. A community is given its significance as the transforming structure in which the purpose and holiness of the triune God define the community’s wisdom and character.

Secondly, the community of character bears the story of the individuals’ lives, where their social and politico-economic contributions are constructed, lived, told, corrected, and transformed. In this community the individual contends with forces of “freedom versus equality, the interrelation of love and justice” (Hauerwas 1981:10). These struggles form part of the correlative substance in individuals’ narratives in the context of a larger one – the narrative of the community of character. Each individual shares his/her narrative, as contributory to the overall story of the community.

This conception of the influence of the community and the individuals on each other is illustrated in a Kyinyarwanda proverb:

Umuryambwa ab’ umwe, agatugish’ umryango (Kinyarwanda)

Translation: One eats a dog, and humiliation falls on the whole clan.

Interpretation: The actions of one person evoke shame for his/her whole community

Interpretive note: It is a common perception that the perceived community character is often used to judge every member of that community. Conversely, character impressions of a single member are used as representative of the character of his/her community

Thirdly, it is imperative that each individual tell his/her story faithfully and willingly. That is, sharing the awareness of what is good and bad and declaring common intention to pursue the good. This is important so that the individual may be encouraged to carry on being morally upright, that is, good, just and wise. If the individual’s story includes weaknesses, the individual is counselled and supported as he/she corrects those moral

deficiencies in his/her life. The individual is expected to be “open” to the community, much as the community is also “open” to him/her in proportion to his/her level of maturity and expectation.

Fourthly, Hauerwas maintains that whilst engaging with social concerns, the church maintains its identity as church. The church is a social ethic by merely being the church. The individuals who are a community of character have a story which is collective, and includes “skills for negotiating the danger of existence, trusting in God’s promise of redemption” (Hauerwas 1981:10). Like Christ, the believers refuse to resort “to violence in order to secure their survival” (Hauerwas 1981:10). This does not mean,

a rejection of the world or a withdrawal from ethics, but a reminder that Christians must serve the world on their own terms; otherwise the world would have no means to know itself as the world (Hauerwas 1981:10).¹⁷

A community of character is the authentic place for moral leadership transformation and development. When we give the story of our lives truthfully, our fears are taken away. With the help of the community, we make a fresh start in that community that knows our story. Henceforth we can speak and hear the truth from each other without any obscurity and suspicions. Therefore, truthfulness is an important virtue in the survival of any community. It counteracts the reign of falsehood that otherwise breeds fear, and fear perpetuates falsehood. Fear re-enforces authority with a show of power, and power oppresses. A dysfunctional community becomes a danger to itself and to its neighbours. Similarly a community of character is beneficial to itself and to its neighbours.

Among recent moral philosophers from the West who have highlighted the importance of community (long evident in Africa!) in the rise of virtue ethics is Lawrence Blum. He observes that regard for community reverses the liquidation of the individual, by positioning him/her in the community composed of other restored individuals – the community of the wise. Blum argues that a community of people who have common moral standards provides supportive resources that aid moral transformation.

This is because virtue ethics does not depend on the moral agent as an individual alone. Blum and other virtue ethicists see the foundations of virtue as lying not only in “the rational agency but also in habit, emotion, sentiment, perception and psychic capacities” (Blum 1996:231). These are communal entities that interact with and constitute the moral self.

Blum goes on to suggest six fundamental contributions of a community in the development of virtue ethics. The first one is learning. He asserts that virtues are social

¹⁷ Hauerwas argues that this social ethic is governed by the understanding that Christ is in control of history. Such an attitude allows the participating Christians not to worry about their own security; after all, Jesus Christ transforms their stories by his virtues. The practice of virtues exonerates the virtuous from such fears.

products that cannot be generated simply by an individual's rationality or reflection. They are acquired, "learned and they need to be nurtured only within particular forms of social life, including families" (Blum 1996:232). Secondly, is that virtues can be sustained only in community. He reiterates MacIntyre's testimony:

I need those around me to reinforce my moral strength and assist in remedying my moral weaknesses. It is in general only within a community that individuals become capable of morality and are sustained in their morality (Blum 1996:232).

MacIntyre himself maintains that: "our moral agency is at least in part constituted by the communities of which we are members" (see Blum 1996:232). Thirdly, that a community is "agency-constituting", in that the community essentially embodies and guards the moral identity and the agents themselves as its members. This point leads to the fourth one, that since the community generates the virtues, and sustains and guards the moral identity and agents, it is also "content-providing". He elaborates:

of social life in which we operate (Blum 1996:233). Our communities tell us how to apply our general moral principles to the world; without them we would not know what principles bid us to do in the particular contexts

The community provides the content that is fundamental to communal life. This content is sentient to the abstract virtue principles of lived morality. By living within a complex form of communal life, we learn those particularities cognitively and also live out such moral life that requires forms of perception and consciousness. We become aware of moral relevance, situations-descriptions, habits of action, salience of certain considerations, and adjustments and compensations in moral interaction within a given community (cf Blum 1996:233).

This does not mean that the community becomes monolithic, because in fact MacIntyre has suggested that morality in a community "involves internal variations and conflicts, and can leave some room as well for individual interpretation" (see Blum 1996:233). Members coming out of a virtuous community carry the imprint of the virtues constituted in their moral disposition. There may be differences in emphases or virtue contents that are completely opposed to each other in two different communities, but those virtues will have had the capacity to sustain and differentiate one community from another.

The fifth point is regulatory in nature and re-emphasises the previous point, since virtues may be opposed to each other in two different communities. Every community sanctions only those virtues that are worth conferring. Although each community will confer its own honour on virtue agents, there is always that interaction which calls for commonality of what is honourable in all communities. In fact, in some cases there is room for debate, should there be a need to arrive at a consensus of what a worth-conferring moral agent should be.

Finally, virtues sustain the community, much as the virtues need the community to be sustained. Every aspect of a community has ascribed norms, values and virtues, without

which such a community would not be resourceful - attuned to moral learning, be capable of sustaining itself, be agent-constituted, or confer worthiness to moral agents. Ultimately, such a community would not have an identity apart from anarchy, because it would have no worthy existence (cf Blum 1996:234).

The genre of wisdom literature is presented in such a way that it does not impose itself on the moral agent. Rather it gives inference of experiences and observations in an African and/or Christian traditional moral system. Often these proverbs are focused on one particular, singular, and fragile situation. And as such, wisdom in proverbs operates not as principles but hints in moral reflection, aiding critical consideration of a situation before making a judgement on, or a choice in, a given situation. Sometimes proverbs offer ironic, sarcastic, or even contradictory comments on what one might be looking for in order to make up one's mind. The effect of such ambiguities is to awaken the mind to see aspects of moral consideration that might have been blinded by one's selfish passions, fears, or mere common ignorance of immediate alternatives needed in a specific situation. Ricoeur concludes that the spirit of wisdom

creates an awareness and respect for relationship between ability and desirability by taking all relevant factors in consideration and weighing them in terms of the practical question of what action is both desirable and achievable in a given specific situation (see Van der Ven 1998:79).

If the perspective of wisdom determines what is good and right according to specific situations in their singularity, fragility, and contingency, then wisdom is a critical criterion for application of moral virtue (cf Van der Ven 1998:77). In my presentation of virtues, Ricoeur's elucidation of the "good, just, and wise" becomes my description of a new community. I shall be using these terms interchangeably, using the community of believers, the community of the wise, and the "Renaissance" community.

The fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom

Dermot Cox in his book *Proverbs* (1982) writes with a passion on Old Testament Wisdom. As a Jew, he seeks to recapture this ancient Jewish heritage. He skilfully manages to refocus our attention on deep insights from a complex language to an understanding of the crucial role played by wisdom in Israel. In addition to prompting our passion for wisdom's significance to our secular needs, he develops and elucidates a particular concept of "fear" implied in some maxims found in Proverbs, Psalms, and Job.¹⁸

The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and discipline (Prov.1:7);

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh,

¹⁸ "Fear" in Greek language has three possible inferences implied by the word *phobos*. There is fear of God known as reverence, fear of person as in respect and fear of danger as in terror (cf Newman 1971:194).

and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Prov. 9:10);

The fear of Yahweh is training for wisdom,
and before honour comes humility (Prov.15:33);

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh,
a good understanding for all who practise it (Ps. 111:10); and

The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and the avoidance of evil is understanding (Job 28:28).
(Von Rad 1972:66-67).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” is identified as the motto of the Wisdom literature. “Beginning” refers to “origin”, “foundation”, or “source”, whose “vitality” permeates all wisdom. The “fear of the Lord as wisdom” is an inherent principle throughout the Book of Proverbs. It permeates the virtue of wisdom (prudence) to be applied in singular, particular, and fragile situations for moral effect. The fear of the Lord is instruction/training for wisdom, which becomes the vital force of a growing relationship with the God of a virtuous character (cf Kidner 1964:59; Toy 1970:318).

Naturally, one would like to know how this argument serves the existence of wisdom or knowledge in other disciplines. Here Kidner argues that to have knowledge in other fields, which closes off God, is “precocious and distorting” as in the event of the Fall. While procedural ethics may be evident in such cases, it is generally motivated by law, accidental or totally fallen. The prophet Ezekiel announces the folly of such “wisdom”.

By your wisdom and understanding
You have gained wisdom for yourself
and amassed gold and silver
in your treasuries.
By your skills in trading
you have increased your wealth,
and because of your wealth
your heart has grown proud.

Therefore this is what the Sovereign
LORD says:
‘Because you think you are wise,
as wise as a god ... (Ezekiel 28:4-6).

Although such wisdom demonstrates skill and understanding and bears material results, it is considered as human and self-centred, and as such, devoid of virtuous quality. The prophetic message from the Lord is not to perpetuate such a distorted ethical mentality.

J. Goldingay, in his commentary on Proverbs in the *New Bible Commentary* (1994) has argued that the statement under consideration, namely, “the fear of the Lord is wisdom” points to wisdom as the foundation of all wisdom and its discourse. This is because there is no single moment when one ceases to need wisdom. He maintains:

Proverbs assumes that you cannot make sense of the world or live a full and successful life unless you see God behind it and involved in it, and seek understanding of it from God with reverence and humility (Goldingay 1994:586).

The "fear of the Lord" is indeed a statement that evokes such strong emotion that it requires close attention in the broader scheme of moral discourse in which our relationship with God is foundational to moral living. *B.M. Newman in the concise Greek-English Dictionary* (1971) shows three possible applications of the word "fear" (Gk. *Phobos*), namely reverence for God, respect for people and being terrified. In our case we shall take reverence for God as the rendering appropriate to this context. Cox qualifies this "fear" as a "healthy one". As such, this "fear" is not to be taken at the surface value of the word, such as fear motivated by the concepts of retribution or forensic justice and punishment. It has ethical benefits. Hence, Cox argues that the "fear of the Lord" should be understood as a "standard of moral conduct" motivated by a "personal relationship with the one who imposes the imperatives of moral law on human conscience" (Cox 1982:70). Cox goes on to explain that this particular "fear" creates an inner intuition that provides a sense of "what is right in a given situation, even if clear rules are unavailable" (cf Cox 1982:70). This is an experience substantive to theological faith as a "form of conscience that calls for an intellectual adhesion to principle, the divine order, the concept of goodness of life and a guarantee of 'success'" (Cox 1982:70). This success is not, however, to be understood in material terms. It is a success in moral goodness, measured in divine blessings.

The "fear of the Lord runs through the wisdom literature integrating secular and religious morality" (cf Cox 1982). It manifests itself in knowledge that forms the link with other forms of wisdom providing the substance for the educational process. It is said to have emerged from the Israelites as part of their religious instructions, but gradually became the foundation of a true conscience, something of a more permanent and enduring religious moral value (cf Cox 1982:68).

From the above, we learn that this healthy "fear" comes out of a cultivated experience and intimacy with God. This experience and intimacy is achieved through "submission" to God. For the Jews it requires obedience to the words given from their religious leaders, such as prophets, priests, and judges. This means listening to the reading of the scroll during public gatherings in order to receive people's experiences of God, and performing activities attributed to works of his hands, love, grace and wisdom. The intimacy grows into a relationship, although initially the whole process may seem to be more intellectual than moral. The intellectual accepts "knowing", which is anterior to "doing". This kind of fear becomes a "source of wisdom" and an "access to understanding and intelligence" (Cox 1982:68).

From proverbs, we learn about what is true and good, and also about "self-knowledge". This in turn raises questions like "What is human existence?" and "What is mankind all about?" The ramifications to human existence from these questions bring in a deeper

“awareness”, a kind of inner perception of a need for moral virtues that is more intuition than knowledge. It is this sense of the numinous that holds the roots of moral meaning, a sense of values and standards in life that in turn restore individuals, bringing them together into a community of a people of God (cf Cox 1982:68-69)¹⁹

This is the basis of the moral agent’s knowledge and judgement of alternative moral offerings that can be qualified as valuable if they are in accordance with truth that identifies with the divine order. Cox goes on to argue that this could be the birth of faith, since it is invested in a personal relationship and attitude toward God. Ultimately, this “fear” nourishes a constant relationship with God resulting in a belief in Him and a commitment to his ways. This is what is meant in Job, Psalms, and Proverbs, that the “fear of the Lord is wisdom”. This is also the quality expected as the identity of a wise person, not only in “the temple precincts but on the street and in one’s home at everyday tasks” (cf Cox 1982:69). In other words, wisdom flourishes interactively in our participation in community life.

If we perceive the above phrase: “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” as in the foregone submissions, then the wisdom tradition can claim to have achieved a faith that liberates knowledge. This is because the “fear of the Lord” adds a “more comprehensive dimension to knowledge – a feeling for the breadth of human experience” that fosters moral goodness.

Von Rad, a renowned German Old Testament scholar referred to earlier, suggests that in our consideration of the statement: “the fear of the Lord”, we should “eliminate, in the case of the word “fear”, the idea of “something emotional, of a specific, psychical form of the experience of God” (Von Rad 1972:66). Von Rad maintains that the expression the “fear of Yahweh”, though with a wide range of meanings, in “a few prominent passages mean simply obedience to the divine will” (Von Rad 1972:66). This kind of “fear” is perceived parallel to the concept of “integrity” or “right moral comportment”. He believes that “In this context, the term is possibly used even in a still more general, humane sense, akin to our ‘commitment to’, knowledge about Yahweh” (Von Rad 1972:66). Therefore, according to Von Rad, we should conceive of the “fear of the Lord” as “a positive attitude, appropriate to Yahweh” a “concept of confidence” in our God.

Von Rad develops another concept in which wisdom has found its starting-point. This is noticeable in the phrase: “beginning of wisdom”, which is used all in five references quoted above. He maintains that though “fear” and “wisdom” are present and closely linked, the emphasis seems to be on “wisdom”. However, the relationship of the two makes the “fear of the Lord” a “prerequisite of wisdom” (Von Rad 1972:67). A very important point has been made, which is that all wisdom, all knowledge and understanding begin in God. This assertion, maintains von Rad, casts doubt on the origin of other forms of Wisdom. The repetitions seem to indicate a cautious frame of mind.

¹⁹ Robert W. Wall calls such community “the community of the wise” which he bases on the book of James (1997), and Stanley Hauerwas (1981) calls it “the community of character”. Hauerwas suggest(s) virtue ethics as the fundamental quality of character. Both agree that such moral values are possible when the community is composed of people who are in relationship with God.

This may be a strategy to guard against the influences of wisdom from other cultures, though it is also theologically significant to have God as the origin of our wisdom and understanding. Von Rad concludes:

To this extent, Israel attributes to the fear of God, to belief in God, a highly important function in respect to human knowledge. She was, in all seriousness, of the opinion that effective knowledge about God is the only thing that puts a man (sic) into a right relationship with the objects of his perception, that it enables him to ask questions more pertinently, to take stock of relationships more effectively and generally to have a better awareness of circumstances (Von Rad 1972:67-68).

The second part of this proverb affirms that this “fear of the Lord” “is wisdom”. Von Rad offers different meanings which the word “wisdom” might have implied. For von Rad, the usage of wisdom in these particular proverbs perhaps carries all the meanings that we may consider from words such as “understanding”, “knowledge”, and “prudence” (Von Rad 1972:53). These terms, as Von Rad prefers to call them, appear alongside each other as though they are synonyms. Some examples here will highlight the point as well as showing different verses that offer emphasis on wisdom as a locus of these proverbs:

For Yahweh gives wisdom;
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Prov.2:6)

For wisdom will enter your heart,
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
Prudence will watch over you
And understanding will guard you (Prov.2.10f.).

He who does not waste his words is an expert in knowledge,
and a cool-headed man is a man of understanding (Prov. 17:27)

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Yahweh,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Prov. 9:10).

An intelligent mind acquires knowledge,
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Prov. 18:15).

A wise man is ‘mightier’ than a strong man,
and a man of knowledge is more than one full of strength (Prov. 24:5).
(Von Rad 1972:53-54).

Von Rad opens this argument by reminding us that, more often than not, the Old Testament affirms that Yahweh is the “giver of wisdom”. What then does it mean when several verses in proverbs repeatedly in different ways insist that “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom”? It seems that the perception that Yahweh was the giver of wisdom was common knowledge to the Jews and perhaps more so during the pre-exilic period. But it was not the case in the post-exilic period, given that at this time knowledge seemed too

general and its sources wide. However, within this nuanced understanding of wisdom there is a theological consideration which Von Rad describes thus:

For the wise men (sic) who taught in this advanced period, the endowment of man with intelligence and with productive ability for differentiation was not simply on the same level as other gifts of God – honour, life, wealth, posterity – but was recognised and thought of as a phenomenon of a particular type and, above all, of special theological significance (Von Rad 1972:55).

The theological pronouncement in this statement points to the wisdom that transcends anything that nature can give to a person. God-given wisdom is sometimes received as a “gift” or an “inspiration”. Contrary to known ways of acquiring wisdom through life experience, which means only the aged would be considered wise, God’s wisdom comes even to the young. Such wisdom was to be identified with the utterances of the prophets and also of Job’s statements. Prophets made mention of “the word of the Lord came to me” (cf Isaiah 6:8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-5; Ezekiel 28:1,-4; Daniel 9:22); Job mentions how a “word stole in” his mind and his “ear received a whisper of it”. He said “I heard a whisper, “Is mortal man righteous before God?” (Job 4:12-17).

A brief exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on the cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2: 5-11) New International Version).

I shall show in an exegesis of selected phrases from the text (Phil.2:5-11), how Christ restores the traditional belief in a triune God, restores the individual, and establishes a new community of the good, just, and wise. All this is summarily illustrated in the attitude of Christ as shown below.

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (v5). Foulkes suggests that this could mean the attitude of the individual or a community such as expressed in relationship. The word “attitude” could be the same as “mind” (*phroneō*). Its usage implies the choice to exercise one’s mind, that is, to be mentally disposed or willing to apply the wisdom (*phronesis*) of Christ for a virtuous character disposition.

Browne defines “attitude” as a kind of settled way of thinking, or feeling, describing a person’s intellectual faculties or his/her attention or will. Christ’s attitude was based on a *telos* of establishing God’s kingdom facilitated by virtues. Here are some of the virtues of

Jesus Christ expressed in this text: humility, servanthood, modesty, meekness, obedience, and altruism. Borrowing the observation of Schreiter with regard to wisdom theology (cf Schreiter 1985:85-87), the unit of virtues is expanded to embrace all the virtues attributed to the triune God. Love, justice, wisdom, kindness, self-control, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness and faithfulness are, all brought into focus in Jesus Christ's attitude. Similar virtues have been expressed in the attributes of God and use of proverbs to show the Africans' way of perceiving God as virtuous.

For the African, the model of Christ's attitude, which is open for all, fits in well with the expectations of *umuntu* with *ubuntu*. The virtues demonstrated in Christ are similar to those anticipated in *umunyabuntu* (the possessor of *ubuntu*). However, Christ's virtues have been expanded, and they transcend the cultural limitations of the Banyarwanda and any other people's clan and tribe. After all they have the capacity to redeem, transform and fulfil the African concept of *ubuntu*.

“Who being in very nature God” In this phrase, Paul presents Jesus Christ as God. He was there at the beginning. He was the daily delight of God, alluded to in the Proverbs 8:30. Jesus was the wisdom and power behind the creation. “Through him all things were made: without him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3), Christ is the wisdom, “but not the wisdom of this age... that will come to nothing... No ... God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (1 Cor. 2:6b-7). Because of his divine power and wisdom, He is able to do what humanity cannot do for itself, that is, the mystery of our salvation. It was this mystery that was “a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:21b-24).

In the cross of Jesus Christ was hidden the mystery of our salvation. By his obedience to this altruistic death on the cross, he gives us eternal life. Eternal life, Jesus explains, is to know God, and to know Jesus Christ whom God sent (cf John 17:3). From an eschatological point of view, eternal life points to the gift that the faithful shall receive. However, the following statements of Jesus: such as “he who believes in the son has eternal life” (John 3:36) or “he who believes has everlasting life” (John 6:47), suggest a kind of “quality” life that is linked to the character of Jesus. The argument follows, therefore, that in order to have eternal life even in its eschatological sense, we must practise the character of Jesus – the life of virtue – here and now. This is what will lead to a return to eternal happiness with God.

The phrase, **“did not consider equality with God something to be grasped”** (v6b), is particularly important as it suggests that Jesus Christ did not desire to take advantage of his position of power and authority. Most importantly we see Jesus during the temptation, when in human flesh, with all its weaknesses, He stood firm in obedience to God (cf Luke 4:1-13). Unlike the old Adam who disobeyed²⁰, Jesus Christ, the new Adam, must

²⁰ God had said to Adam and Eve: “... but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil...” (Gen.2:17). The devil deceived them that the reason why God forbade them to eat from this tree was that

obey (cf Foulkes 1994:1253; Wenham 1994:63; Moo 1994:1134) in order to restore humanity to God.

“being made in human likeness. ... being found in appearance as a man”. The phrase introduces God into the human realm of being *umuntu*. Here Jesus Christ became human, an individual, *umuntu*. He could feel hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. He could feel the emotions of love/compassion, anger, loss of loved ones, desire for power and authority, and even the unbelief of testing God (cf Luke 4:1-13; Marshall 1994:987). Jesus Christ suffered the pain of political injustice and religious rejection, and he was disowned by some of his own people (cf Mark 14, 15; Cole 1994:973-975).

From a human point of view, Jesus had a variety of human experiences. Therefore our analysis of historical contexts relating to Africa’s dire situation is not outside Jesus’ experience. He knows how it feels to be in poverty and knows the pain of an incapacitated body and disease. He encountered people with different types of ignorance, and He himself was a victim of social conflicts and political injustice (Wright 1988:348-351). Nevertheless, he did not give up. In fact, his power and wisdom transcended human efforts that sought to destroy him and end his ministry. Instead, Jesus Christ used the injustice of his captors (their sin) to save humankind from self-destruction. Moreover, he did not simply demonstrate human nature; he did much more.

“taking the very nature of a servant ... humbled himself... became obedient...” (v8b) Verses 7 and 8 speak of Jesus becoming *umuntu*, first in human nature as expressed in the phrase, **“being found in appearance”**. The next phrases introduce a different level, in which his character is described. Christ demonstrates virtue or *ubuntu* by his humility, obedience, servanthood, and altruism in this level. These excellent traits are qualities of character for service. He does not take advantage of his position as **“something to be grasped”**. Instead, he uses his position to promote the importance of virtues as a means for service to others. Jesus Christ enhances what it means to be *umuntu* with *ubuntu*, a person or an individual with virtue.

This is the substance/essence of Christ’s being that carries the purpose of his mission on earth. We noted earlier his conscious decision to pursue the way of righteousness, and by so doing he introduces the way of righteousness by taking up the baptism of repentance.²¹ This was a fundamental undertaking in which a complete transformation was required. It was not a new religious practice, since in Judaism Israel was constantly called to return to the Lord their God (Ch. 7:14). The Greek verb *metanoein* meant, “to change one’s mind”. Kearsley comments:

This small phrase, however, describes a radical change in the individual’s disposition, for the change of mind concerns his (sic) judgment upon himself and

then they would be like God (Gen 3:5). It may seem that Adam and Eve desired to be like God, that is, having the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1-8; Rom 5:19)

²¹ Apparently this concept of repentance had been overshadowed by the idea of “doing your penance”. Martin Luther rediscovered the “*metanoein*” during the Reformation in the 16th century, meaning the change of one’s mind aligned with one’s virtue of faith (Kearsley 1988:590).

his sin together with an evaluation of God's demands upon him (Kearsley 1988:580).

Jesus Christ fulfils his duty as our "prototype" by directing us to the requirement of righteousness. The virtues attributed to Jesus in Philippians, including the theological ones discussed earlier, become our requirement of a new moral attitude following Christ's example.

Although *metanoein* points to a decisive conversion, it does not guarantee permanent righteousness. We are constantly reminded of the renewal of our mind as an active process of virtuous living and our faith in God (cf Kearsley 1988:590; Rom. 12:2). Earlier on, Menkiti argued that personhood is something at which some individuals could fail. If they did, then there would be no hope for them by Africa conception. Yet Christ, who transcends human limitation, is able to restore anyone to full personhood (see Gyekye 2002:298). This is because in Christ Jesus, humanity become joint heirs and share in his exaltation, as we shall see below. The triune God creates, redeems and enables the respondent individual to fulfil his/her moral pledges.

Part of our pledge is to respond to Christ call to imitate him in the sacrificial event. But for us we are to be living sacrifice (Rom 12:1). In this sacrificial event we are also challenged to absorb pain if that means ending the circle of violence. This is a contradiction in terms given our world of justice and retribution. Christ accepted the way of the cross so as to end the tyranny of sin. Our repentance should also include sacrificial acts that break the circle of retaliation and end the tyranny of sin. It is until then that we can anticipate sharing with Christ his glory.

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place... gave him a name above every name ... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (vs 9 to 11). This is Christ's exaltation, an acknowledgment of his obedience, which led to the completion of his assignment. Although the full conception of a church is not explicit in this text, we can safely broaden the implication of **"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"** to be a statement that implies worship. The other phrase that implies worship is **"Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"**. It carries the very first statement of the Christians' "creed" acknowledging Jesus Christ as God and worthy to be worshipped. All these create the picture of people gathered together, kneeling before Jesus. Such a picture brings to mind the community of believers, the church as we know it theologically today.

Worship of Jesus has many metaphorical meanings. DJ Smit, has developed one of them. The full expression of worship is here achieved in the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Smit calls it the "act of looking in the right direction". Worship is being preoccupied with imitation of Christ Jesus in his virtuous living. Augmenting the importance of worship, Jones says: "Christian worship, many ethicists are of the opinion, is one of these 'social locations', perhaps one of the most important places and occasions where Christian believers learn to see" (see Smit 1997:260). Borrowing from Stanley Hauerwas, Smit goes on to explain:

Christian worship teaches us to look in the right direction, ethics is first a way of seeing before it is a matter of doing. The ethical task is not to tell you what is the right or wrong but rather to train you to see. That is why, in the church, a great deal of time and energy are spent on the act of worship: In worship we are looking in the right direction (Smit 1997:262).

Smit uses this metaphor in urging South Africans to look in the right direction as they face the challenge of social transformation following the end of the apartheid rule. To “see” Jesus becomes seeing the world as it is in its weakness and then to see its potential. That is what it could be if people took up the attitude of Christ Jesus. The more we worship, the more we shall be able to “see” better in an experience of progressive moral transformation.

Looking in the right direction entails embracing the “triune God, who through his word, the Bible, and by his Holy Spirit, enlivens, enlightens and enables all who believe, in order that they may worship and serve him in spirit and in truth” (Morris 1988:732). Worship is therefore communal. At the name of Jesus, as we kneel in humility and submission to him, we meet each other and learn to “see” together. This virtue helps us to know that we all belong to God. What we are and what we do is for God’s glory and not for the promotion of our political party and or a means of achieving our selfish ends.

“**to the glory of God the father**” (v11b) suggests that, even when Jesus Christ is given the highest name above all names, when all is said and done, glory belongs to God. The possession of virtue/*ubuntu* is not for self-gratification, though it may seem so. One does not boast about the service, greatly enhanced by these character qualities. To boast about one’s virtue and service would be at odds with the virtue of humility, and a misunderstanding or even an abuse of the source of one’s enabling, namely God.

Jesus becomes a human being and individual – *umuntu*. But he has to go further to qualify this *umuntu*. This is the moral transformation of the new Adam. Christ Jesus overcomes human depravity, typified in Adam’s fall. Jesus is *umuntu* with *ubuntu* as demonstrated in his virtuous life. What is more, in Jesus, the individual’s identity is renewed, from being a slave to sin and the law, to being a friend with God. This is the anticipated moral transformation. It is achieved through and by imitating Jesus Christ, our moral prototype, we achieve moral transformation and development. He also introduces us into a fellowship of virtuous individuals the new community of the wise.

Jesus Christ is worshipped. This suggests a body of believers - the church. Of this church, Christ is the head. Those who have embraced Jesus Christ’s virtues become his body. They are the new community of hope, where goodness, justice, and wisdom are manifested. Jesus Christ, by his wisdom and power, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, supplies virtues to His body – the new community. By means of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ, the community of character (the good, just, and wise), is constantly reminded of its virtuous vocation. It is also renewed and transformed to meet the

challenges of a changing world, by means of Christ's wisdom, to the glory of God our Father.

It is clear from the exposition above that the complex interplay between individual and community – expressed in the African relation between *umuntu* and *ubuntu* - constitutes a virtue ethics as deeply communitarian. This has been confirmed by both African and Western moral philosophies, and found a specific Christian expression in the church as community of character. The tribalistic and exclusivist tendencies of some African ideas of community – the source of nepotism, civil wars and ethnic cleansing (Rwanda genocide) on the African continent - are critically superseded by the church as catholic community: “You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 26, 28). He not only embraces the individual but the whole community, energising both for virtuous living.

It is knowledge of the transforming power of the wisdom and power of God that lays the force for African renaissance. Since it is available in God through Jesus Christ it follows, therefore that the moral renewal will have as of necessity embrace God or the efforts of the African renaissance movement shall be in vain. To this end this knowledge of God's wisdom in the re-birth of the African continent must be popularised in the churches, schools, market places, in the corporate institutions and in political circles for maximum impact. This is being achieved through renewal of family values; re-establishment of church led schools; improved preaching in churches; and encouraging Christian not to shy away from the corporate and political environment.

When all this has been done, then African renaissance shall come.

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