VIRTUOUS LIVING:
TOWARD AN AFRICAN THEOLOGY OF WISDOM
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

My parents, Israel and Barbra Basabose, who introduced me to virtuous living by their own example and teaching;

Reverend Diana Mirembe Nkesiga, colleague, friend and wife, together with whom I endeavour to pass on the Christian faith to our boys, Ignatius and Themba;

All those who have received and will receive our ministry through the gospel of the Triune God.
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study, to embrace virtuous living as a call to moral transformation in Africa and the world over.

*Completed on this Trinity Sunday*

*Rev. Solomon Basabose Nkesiga*

*22nd May 2005*
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SUMMARY

The structure of this study is a complex inter-relationship of a variety of sources in a theological work, namely, personal experience, African social and politico-economic context, philosophical reflection, wisdom traditions and Christian theology. These sources form a coherent inter-relationship which is foundational for an African theology of wisdom.

The introduction gives an overview of my moral and theological formation. This is intended to provide a perspective through which the issue of moral orientation in African context has been approached. It is therefore entitled: *Moral formation and the shaping of a theological mind*.

The first chapter answers the question: Why is Africa in need of a wisdom theology that addresses the issue of moral regeneration? This question is posed in the broader context of the current African Renaissance debates. The links between the Italian (European) and African Renaissance indicate that moral regeneration is a crucial part of the socio-political, intellectual and economic re-birth of Africa.

This “socio-historical” source gives the context and urgency of a wisdom theology. It is therefore entitled: *A contextual analysis: The European and African Renaissance*.

The second chapter re-asserts the rise of virtue ethics as an alternative ethical theory to the predominant deontological and utilitarian traditions. This is achieved through analysing Alisdair MacIntyre’s earlier work, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981), set in the context of Iris Murdoch and Elizabeth Anscombe, the modern initiators of a virtue ethic.

This “philosophical” source gives the theoretical framework that addresses the question of moral formation. It is therefore entitled: *A philosophical analysis: The rise of virtue ethics as alternative ethical theory*.

The third chapter is devoted to two related “wisdom” themes: Firstly, the seven traditional virtues are briefly described highlighting the virtue of wisdom as
foundational. Secondly, the idea of wisdom is further developed via three wisdom traditions, namely: wisdom in the Hellenistic, Judeo-Christian and African traditions.

This “sapiential” source gives this African theology of wisdom its most important building blocks. This chapter is therefore entitled: *A sapiential analysis: Wisdom as foundation for virtue ethics in Africa.*

The last chapter brings the previous sources together under a specific theological perspective. It draws on aspects of recent African theologians’ work, notably: Kwame Gyekye and Benezet Bujo who engage with and bring together Western and African theological traditions. I answer a pertinent question, “What does such a ‘theological’ perspective entail?” I draw on Scripture and its Trinitarian tradition to demonstrate how African wisdom, reinforced by the framework of virtue theory, and developed in the context of present-day Africa by an African student of theology, has the potential to contribute to the moral transformation of Africa.

This more overt “theological” source is the distinctive Christian enterprise of an African wisdom theology. The chapter title is aligned with the overall title of this study: *A theological analysis: Toward an African virtue ethics?*

To this end, this study achieves its attempt to construct an inter-related framework from which an African theology of wisdom may emerge.

**Key words:** Theology, Renaissance, Africa, Ethics, Virtues, Wisdom, Proverbs, Morals, Leadership, Transformation
The formative influence of my parents

I owe the formation of my moral wisdom to my parents, Great East African Revival evangelists, who almost naturally introduced me to moral living according to Christian faith and beliefs. As I grew up in Uganda, in the South-western town of Kabale in Kigezi, I watched my parents in daily morning prayers, reading the Bible and living in fellowship with other Christians. During these morning meetings, they shared their testimonies in turn. They were open to each other with regard to their joys and sorrows, spiritual victories and failures. In case of spiritual weakness or failure, they always sought forgiveness from God and from whomever they had wronged. They called the whole process “walking in light”. Other characteristics of the Great East African Revival evangelists included repentance, fellowship, and witnessing or giving one’s testimony. Roy Hession, a missionary evangelist in East Africa recounts his own experience in this observation:

A great multitude of Africans, and missionaries among them, not only came to know Christ as their personal Saviour, but began to live a quality of life rarely experienced in even the most evangelical churches of the West. (Hession 1950:8).

Later, Hession recounts how he was enabled by the Holy Spirit to appropriate the gains of this revival in his own life:

As my wife and others humbled themselves before the God and experienced the cleansing of the blood of Jesus, I found myself left somewhat high and dry – dry just because I was high. I was humbled by the simplicity of the message, or rather the simplicity of what I had to do to be revived and filled with the Holy Spirit. When … others were testifying as to how Jesus had broken them at His cross and filled their hearts to overflowing with His Spirit, I had no such testimony. It was only afterwards that I was enabled to give up trying to fit things into my doctrinal scheme and come humbly to the Cross for cleansing from my personal sins. It was like beginning my Christian life all over again (Hession 1950:9-10).

This revival experience was carried from the church meeting into schools and homes. Every evening after supper, we all gathered in the living room as a family, and sang a
The Word of God would be read from the Bible. Our father or mother would highlight some aspects of the Word often showing how it was challenging his or her own life. This kind of sharing often prompted us all to examine our lives in light of the Word of God. One after the other, we would share those areas where the Word had touched us. The flow of testimonies was spontaneous. Usually this fellowship would be followed by a reflection on the challenges of the closing day or tasks to be undertaken the following day. Depending on the nature of what was shared, words of encouragement, advice, commendation, and prayers would be given.

I started school when I was about ten years old, because our home was such a long distance away from the nearest school. In addition to these mornings that I spent with my parents while they read “Scripture” (as they called it), my mother tried to make up for the years of tuition I missed before I could attend school. Her lessons were often Bible stories of Noah, Joseph, Moses, Samson, Samuel, and Jesus. She also had a wealth of African folktales and songs, riddles and proverbs. I can remember that she always concluded her story with its moral teaching. She taught me how to pray and gently introduced me to repentance and a simple way of asking Jesus Christ to be my friend.

My father was also instrumental in contributing to my moral formation. I watched him caring for and protecting the family, tending our flock of sheep and goats, and preaching at the local church, and I often sat near him during “light” conversations. He gradually introduced me to tending the flock, which in fact meant standing at the edge of fields and watching along the line of cultivated plots. The flock was given the freedom to wander in the fields to select from a variety of shrubs to eat but, if not carefully watched, would rush into the maize or potato vine gardens to feed on the fresh crops. So, tending the flock was not so much protecting them as keeping them away from the crops. This was opposed to tying the sheep or goats to pegs with long ropes, an option often taken if there was no one to tend the flock. Sometimes in these cases one or two of the animals would become entangled as they ate around and between the shrubs, and the ropes would become increasingly tighter ultimately strangling one of them.
My father often warned me to watch the goats carefully, for they were cunning and swift to sneak into the cultivated plots. If I became absorbed in some game or daydreamed, the flock could wreak havoc in a neighbour’s garden, resulting in serious consequences for me and a fine for my father. Consequently, I quickly learnt the danger of leaving sheep and goats without a shepherd, or with a negligent shepherd – a phenomenon the New Testament compares allegorically to a people without knowledge of Jesus, the chief Shepherd.

Later I would listen to my father preaching, using these experiences and relating them to the parable of Jesus concerning the sheep and the goats. From looking after domesticated animals, I learned the principles of care and leadership, and the need for directing people to that which was beneficial to their well-being.

As I look back now, I realise that the wealth of Christian heritage and the African cultural wisdom which my parents had and used, had much to do with the initial moral formative influences on me and the shaping of my life and future career as a priest1. The next important formative influence was the political events in the years after 1971.

The political situation in Uganda

On 25 January 1971 Idi Amin Dada overthrew Uganda’s first civilian government after independence. I can remember when I brought the news home from school, my father said, “Trouble has fallen on this nation also”. He was referring to the phenomenon whereby the military personnel were increasingly taking over civilian governments in Africa. Uganda had now fallen into a similar political catastrophe (African Research Bulletin 1971:1996).

During Idi Amin’s eight years of tyrannical rule, over 300,000 people were abducted, some were publicly executed, and others have not been seen since their arrest. He hunted down the intelligentsia, which included Makerere University lecturers and

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1 MacCunn J in his book: *The Making of Character* (1900) has recounted the very important influence of parents on their children. He has argued that parent to child influence in character formation is peculiarly effective because it is made easier by the tie of natural affection. It is the trustful confidence that facilitates the transaction of values aided by a continuity of theory and practice in a home context as a constant familiar environment (cf MacCunn 1900:104).
church leaders. Anyone who was a threat to his dictatorship was hunted down by his
henchmen until all learned citizens opposed to his rule were out of the country. This
dictatorship stalled national politico-economic advancement. The expulsion of the
Asians - the economic backbone of the country - increased the general social and
politico-economic decline of Uganda. Poverty, disease and “ignorance” crept back
into Uganda. Most of all, many people learnt that dubious ways of survival cause
widespread moral decadence. Corrupt living became the order of the day. Public
leaders were no different; in fact, such devious schemes were considered a form of
“wisdom” in the circumstances. The moral damage done to the nation was deep, and
would take a long, slow time to resolve. This was the setting for a power struggle in
Uganda. Since then, armed political conflicts have persisted up to this day.

As I progressed in my studies at college later, I learned that Uganda’s social and
politico-economic problems were in fact a continental crisis. From the end of the
1960s, state after state on the African continent experienced a military coup d’etat. I
started to ask myself why this was the case. Civilian leaders received the instruments
of state control from colonialists at independence in the 1960s. The military officers
of these civilian governments accused their executives of political bankruptcy and
corruption. The military governments would announce that they intended “putting
things in order”, and after that would hand state matters back to civilians. Soon, most,
if not all, military dictators slid into corruption and tyrannies, often becoming worse
than their predecessors had been. Repeatedly, another reigning military power would
be removed, and terror filled the continent as civilians suffered the scourge of power
struggles that ruled Africa. “Were these armed political conflicts merely the result of
internal conflicts?” I asked myself.

2 “Idi Amin began eight years of terror and misrule on 25th January 1971. He increased the size of the
army, murdered his political opponents, and began a reign of terror directed at the people of Buganda,
Obote’s Lango tribe, and at their neighbours, the Acholi. It is estimated Amin ordered the killing of
around 300,000 Ugandans. He also expelled more than 60,000 Asians, many of whom were
entrepreneurs, from the country.” (Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003:1; also an article on Uganda in African

3 The word “ignorance” is used here in three categories. First, it is used to refer to illiteracy, where the
benefits of education are not accessible. Second, it is used to describe a situation of political
suppression creating lack of knowledge and information by means of political propaganda. Third,
“ignorance” has a subtle dimension displayed in people who strongly pursue an insular point of view, a
political line or a religious stance without consideration of other people’s views and inclinations. This
third meaning of “ignorance” was and is common among most African public leaders, and was
common in Uganda’s post-independence political leadership.
During our module in “Modern Ideologies” at Bishop Tucker Theological College, Dr. Kevin Ward, our lecturer, introduced us to the struggle that existed between the Capitalist and the Communist blocs as two opposing world politico-economic forces. Africa had been caught in between. I learned of the ravages of the Cold War in the process of entrenching the gains of the capitalistic Euro-Western world against the Communist East.

“Less well known perhaps was the involvement of Soviet-financed Cuban troops in Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique in the early 1980s to support left-wing nationalists in the civil wars following independence” (Milner 2003:1).4

There were also neo-colonial interferences, which were immoral in themselves, as European hardware industries sought markets for their military equipment, the instability of Africa was often a matter of economic survival for these European industries.

Then there was the contradiction of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank economic structural adjustments of the 1970s, most of which were ill informed, as the leaders subsequently confessed. After all, the moral failure of the African leaders was not the only cause of widespread poverty, disease, ignorance, and most of all, the armed political conflict on the African continent. Nevertheless, who would take the blame for the suffering of the masses on the African continent - Euro-Western capitalists or the African leaders? The moral weakness of most African leaders was and to some extent still is the main cause of Africa’s enduring problems and would be a negation to claimed development of an African Renaissance.

Although there were external influences, to continue to blame Euro-Western bad influences simply meant that African leaders had little moral ability to resist these evil gains. Cold War, Neo-colonialism and military equipment sales were and still are, to the disadvantage of the African people, and deprived their leaders of moral integrity.

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4 Kevin Shillington gives a review of the effects of the Cold War in Southern Africa. National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi was supported by South Africa and United States of America in their fight against the communist inclinations of José Eduardo dos Santos who was being supported by Russia. Civil war was sustained for over 20 years by a guerrilla warfare “perpetuated by these Cold War antagonisms” (Shillington 2003:1)
Even now, some Euro-Western “forces” continue to arm military factions in Africa and instigate civil wars/conflicts for their own financial gain\(^5\). To resist these temptations in order to provide a better life for people they lead is the onus of African leaders as a matter of moral excellence/virtue.

At that stage, I was headed towards becoming a preacher. I believed that putting our faith and hope in God bore the answer to our troubled country. Recognising my enthusiasm, at the age of 27, my local church forwarded me for training in the ministry at an Anglican theological college with a liberal theological stance. I took the opportunity, hoping that this theological education would equip me for a fruitful ministry in the church.

**Exposure to different theological paradigms**

My exposure to theological education in the 1980s raised questions of moral living and theological scholarship. I was discouraged because I had hoped to be a better preacher and win many souls for Christ. I went to this theological college in order to gain a better understanding and presentation of the love of God in the work of Jesus Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I hoped that I would learn how best to present it and make it easy for my listeners to understand and respond to it. However, this was neither the substance of the lectures nor the stance that the lecturers wished to offer for our theological orientation, at least not in the 1980s. Four theological approaches characterized my period of theological training. They are briefly touched upon in the following paragraphs:

**Western scholastic theology**

At the theological college, we began by considering systematic theology, in which we were to learn how to organise “… specific theological principles and beliefs into a coherent whole, in which each part is shown to have direct bearing on and relevance

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\(^5\) The aborted plot to oust a civilian government in Equatorial Guinea is here a case in point. Mercenaries from a South African private military company arrested in Zimbabwe in 2003. In August 2004 Mark Thatcher, the son of former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was arrested by the Scorpions, (a national agency for the investigation of high profile economic and political offences) for his alleged involvement in financing the aborted military coup d’etat. Though the government in Equatorial Guinea is considered morally “bankrupt”, the spirit by which these coup d’etat plotters were arrested is accredited to the new spirit of African renaissance.
to the others” (Bray 1988:672). From medieval scholasticism came a study of the work of Thomas Aquinas, which was concerned with the development of "philosophical arguments for the existence of God, which led him and his successors to an ever-greater elaboration of their first principles” (Bray 1988:672). Their method, typical of Western theology as I came to understand it, proceeded from a formulated question. A good and correct theological question usually led to correct answers. In all, these arguments often led to "a whole range of theological speculations” (Bray 1988:672).

The problem with this approach was both the nature of the questions and the method. The questions were completely irrelevant to my theological needs and to my understanding, and to the needs of the congregation that had sent me. We had never doubted the existence of God and in fact to raise the question would have been outside our belief system. The teaching method was even worse. We had “real” issues to deal with. We did not have to formulate any imagined questions, let alone speculate on theological matters, although I now know that we did have implicit theological convictions. Generally, the whole approach of this type of systematic theology had – as presented then - little to say about moral transformation. There was a real desire to experience something different, something in which Christians would express their faith spontaneously. This desire was to be met in the Uganda’s Pentecostal/Charismatic movement of the 1980s.

**Charismatic movements**

In the 1980s, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement was sweeping through Uganda. This movement had experienced a temporary recess after Idi Amin banned all religious formations except Islam and Christianity (Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox) which were the only religions to be practised in Uganda (1971-1979). During the 1980s, after Amin’s tyrannical rule, many Pentecost/Charismatic movements - mainly from America - flocked into Uganda. Those who claimed to be members of this movement believed that they had been “filled with” and/or “baptised in” the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

This movement seemed to be superficial with regard to the realities of the day. After the fall of Amin’s regime, Uganda was a hurting, divided, politically and
economically degenerate country in need of reconciliation and reconstruction. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement sprang up among the youth of the urban population, serving a superficial purpose of immediate comfort for the broken-hearted. The mainline Christian churches lost members in droves to these movements in which there seemed to be free and spontaneous expression in worship. This was in contrast to the use of established liturgies, for example the use of the popular Anglican Book of Common Prayer in our case. Indeed, the movements took advantage of people’s disoriented emotions following the traumatic experiences of Idi Amin’s dictatorial rule. Moreover, they lacked grounding in holistic theological knowledge to be able to address the needs of the whole person, and lacked an adequate assessment of the social politico-economic demands of the day on the people.

If this was an awakening to spiritual advancement, there was one to come with even greater power, an awakening against social injustice. This found its expression in what was to be known as “liberation theology”.

**Liberation theology**

Liberation theology was largely influenced by the awakening of the Catholic Church in Latin America, owing to widespread political and economic oppression of the poor. Uganda shared these feelings in a very real and experiential sense. We had gone through Amin’s political oppression and economic decay followed by years of internal armed political conflicts caused by a poor and morally deprived leadership. Amidst this political turmoil, Ugandans somehow shared in the suffering of other African people under oppressive regimes such as black South Africans under the apartheid rule, albeit in a different way.

The instability of one or two countries created social and politico-economic problems for no fewer than three neighbouring countries. This led to a move in theological education to establish solidarity with the principles of liberation theology, a wave that was sweeping throughout “third-world countries”\(^6\), Africa included. Latin American

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\(^6\) The term “third world” (see Trumble 2001:1019) was first used to refer to an inferior quality of an item or the difference between capitalistic and communist economies. The usage applied in this study refers to developing countries of Asia, South America and Africa. However, the poverty level cannot
notable Rubem Alves and Gustavo Gutierrez articulated a “theological perspective which suggested social and political dimensions to the concept of salvation” (Bonino 2003:1). A systematic theology module was abandoned, almost half-way in our study, in favour of the then popular liberation theology. In liberation theology several Biblical motifs and approaches became central:

(i) Emphasis on God's particular concern for the poor, as expressed in the books of the prophets, the Covenant, and the ministry and message of Jesus, instead of trying to prove the existence of God in the astute work of Paul Tillich, for example, Bonino, explains that liberation theologies are “‘contextual’ in the sense that they consciously and explicitly address a particular historical and social situation” (Bonino 2003:1).

(ii) An emphasis on the concrete, historical character of the Biblical God, as opposed to the purely subjective, individualistic, and spiritualistic tendencies in modern religion and existentialist theology. They are “‘inductive’ in method, beginning with the concrete facts of the condition of oppression and then ‘theorizing’ from those facts” (Bonino 2003:1).

(iii) The concept of the Kingdom of God, as the new order of peace and justice, here and now, which Jesus taught and initiated in his ministry.

(iv) The expectation of “a new Heaven and a new Earth”, not only as a future supernatural event or as utopia, but as a reality which is partially present in history, as God's liberating purpose and action is achieved through human agency (cf Bonino 2003:1-3; see also Gutierrez 1971; Sobrino 1985).

Although liberation theology attacked social and politico-economic injustice, it failed to translate this moral challenge from “systemic sin” to individual responsibility. Its practitioners seemed to assume that individual moral transformation would follow systemic change. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case, and forms of moral depravity persisted even after relative liberation from systemic injustice. In fact, signs

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be merely looked at as a quantifying index, but from the point of view of liberation theology, because of oppressive regimes, internal and/or external.

7 Gustavo Gutierrez published a book offering the first systematic articulation of his views in his Teología de la Liberación (A Theology of Liberation) (see Bonino 2003:1).
of a moral collapse seem to intensify after the fall of oppressive regimes. Freedom from Western-oriented systematic theology, charismatic spontaneous worship, and the liberation movement opened wide doors for those African scholars whose ideas were previously not heard. They were then able to revive African religions and philosophy.

**African traditional religions and philosophy**

The fourth dimension of our theological training was an increased interest in the works of African scholars such as John Mbiti (1969), E.A Adegbola (1983), J, M Bahemuka (1982), and others. Their emphasis was on retrieving previously suppressed African religions and philosophy. With this in place, other aspects, such as indigenisation, and enculturation, were added, in the process of Africanising Christianity.

Most of these “theologies” tended to be apologetic as they drew insights and inferences to authenticate African religions and philosophy in relation to the Christian heritage. The preoccupation of these theological stances was primarily that of reviving the previously suppressed African religious heritage. I then found that little concern was given to recapturing moral values as teaching sources against the deteriorating moral situation on the continent, although I already then sensed that there was more potential in these “cultural theologies”, but was unable to pursue it at that stage of my theological development.

In all these four theological currents there was, according to my interpretation, a lack of concern for moral transformation as such. In teaching, this was conspicuously absent. Whenever I raised matters of moral concern in our theological classes, I would be snubbed, as if questions of morality spelt weakness and lacked intellectual power. Yet it would be conceited to maintain that I did not learn anything from these theologies. At least they sharpened me into becoming an independent thinker with a theological goal and a quest for more learning. In the process Scripture itself became for me rather an underdeveloped source of moral thinking and development. Later I would endeavour to explore the wealth of its moral potential.
The potential of Scripture

At theological college, I was keen to find the sources of moral transformation that go beyond the intellectual theological articulation. Two exegetical assignments played an important role in my thinking. The first one was taken from 1 Kings 3:1-12, an episode whose central point in King Solomon’s prayer was verse 9: “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (New International Version). This was King Solomon’s prayer for wisdom. He was guided and guarded by the Davidic covenant that spelt out God’s relationship with King David and his descendants, Solomon being the first of them. He desired wisdom, with which to rule a people who he knew belonged to God. He sought the virtues of wisdom and justice, so that he might care for people. God chose to give him wealth and fame as a bonus. Though there was wisdom in other traditions as well, many nations expressed astonishment at Solomon’s wise exploits and accomplishments.

The second exegetical work was Paul’s letter to the Philippians 3:1-15. The compelling verse in this narrative was verse 10: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and to somehow attain to the resurrection from the dead”. The moral transformation in Paul’s life is a prototype of mental resolution, concomitant with the experience of salvation. Ultimately, Paul grew into greater knowledge of God’s purpose, and of his own participation in this divine plan.

Undoubtedly, Paul had found something spiritually fundamental in the Christ-Event. Indeed, this caption of God’s power in Jesus Christ rose above the Old Testament ritualistic traditions, as highlighted in Paul’s testimony. In Paul, we see the link between engagement with God and living out that faith practically, a phenomenon to be emulated in moral formation and development. This link connects wisdom and virtue, which find their full expression in Jesus Christ. W. Bardeny in his book *All-Sufficient Christ* (1964) reiterates Paul’s emphasis: “The basis of Christian theology and its splendour is Christ, one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Bardeny 1964:57). D. Bonhoeffer, with regard to the connection of character formation and this Christ, asserted: “only he (sic) who shares in Him
(Christ) has the power to withstand and to overcome. He (Christ) is the centre and the strength of the Bible, of the church, and of theology, but also of humanity, of reason, of justice and of culture. Everything must return to him” (Bonhoeffer 1949:56).

The potential of Scripture as an effective source for moral transformation was firmly awakened in me by these and other texts. In successive years, I longed for an opportunity to link up Scripture with other sources of moral transformation in a theological treatise. This, I hoped, would change theology from being just an intellectual exercise, to a source and a means of character formation and development. I was increasingly moved toward African Christian theologians with an interest in moral transformation. As I read some of their works, I was motivated to take their contributions further in order to enhance African scholarship in the specific area of moral regeneration.

In a survey of theological developments in Southern Africa, John Mbiti observes that liberation theology is presented by scholars such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Simon Maimela, Takatso Mofokeng, Allan Boesak, Zephania Kameeta (Namibia), Gabriel Setiloane and Steve Biko (Mbiti 1998:152). Their preoccupation was (and still is for some) with social justice and the relationship between power and oppression. They have made significant contributions in the area of social emancipation, by dismantling apartheid with its oppressive systems. They raised awareness of God’s preferential concern for the marginalised and the oppressed, following the theological method of Latin America, where liberation theology originated.

Mbiti concludes:

Liberation Theology was a clear voice in the struggle against apartheid, injustice, exploitation, and robbery of human dignity and rights. Since 1994, we can look back and see how the yokes of oppression, racism, injustice, and exploitation have slid into history, however slowly some of their effects will be healed. Theological development in Southern Africa has now to address itself to the new situation; one challenge is overcome, but many others have mushroomed (Mbiti 1998:153).
Mbiti’s last sentence in this observation from 1998, points to the importance of the present study. He maintained that, although there has been significant theological development in Southern Africa, none has yet addressed itself to new challenges. According to him, oppression has been overcome, but many other problems, including those pertaining to moral disorientation, have in fact increased (cf Mbiti 1998:153). Mbiti was careful not to assign these challenges to South Africa alone as this can be said for a large part of Africa today.

I focus on this area of moral disorientation to which Mbiti was referring as “the new challenge”. We have noted already that African traditional religions and philosophy did not address the problematic ethical theories that were influencing Africa, nor did Africa’s liberation theology, whose attention was focused on dismantling social injustice.

While using the African Christian heritage and wisdom tradition, together with a reworking of the theology of liberation, I seek to take further Mbiti’s challenge, and perhaps move forward in tackling the question of moral transformation, which these theologies were constrained to address. Hence the central question of this work: Is it possible to construct an African Christian theology of wisdom that would explicitly address the issue of personal and communal moral formation?

Why the specific reference to a “theology of wisdom”? The answer may be found in the illuminating analysis by Robert Schreiter’s *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985). Schreiter locates theology as wisdom within the main stream of his “sociology of theology”. The other three forms of theology are: theology as variations on a sacred text; theology as sure knowledge and theology as praxis (Schreiter 1985:80-93).

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8 Schreiter argues that generally any theology is a variation on a sacred text. It is manifested in the rich use “of metaphors and metonymy which permit an expansion of the meaning of positing contiguity within a metaphorical domain (for example, ‘Jesus is the lamb of God’ is expanded to include’ the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’” (Schreiter 1985:81). These forms theological discourse though belonging to the antiquity (first millennium) helped in the preservation of theology in commentaries, narratives and anthologies (see Schreiter 1985:81-82). Narratives and anthologies became the backbone of the commentaries in the medieval period. They survive today in their counterparts, the footnotes (cf Schreiter 1985:83).

9 Schreiter maintains that theology as sure knowledge was perhaps the most common form of theological reflection, particularly in Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism in the West today (Schreiter 1985:89). It is preferred by modern scholars because of its interdisciplinary nature. Its
Wisdom theology is also known as sapientia “[o]ne of the predominant forms of theology in Christianity, as well as in other great literate traditions” (Schreiter 1985:85). Its origins are located in the early Church fathers such as Augustine, and the reflections “growing out of the spiritual and mystical traditions” (Schreiter 1985:85). Like the other theologies, wisdom theology is preoccupied with the “meaning of texts and with experience” (Schreiter 1985:85). Schreiter argues that wisdom theology differs “principally in its intended scope, its preoccupations, and its logic” (Schreiter 1985:85). Let us look at each of these dimensions very briefly:

The scope of wisdom theology is quite literally, cosmic in nature. The meaning of texts is construed as encompassing the cosmos as it integrates the universe by faith “into a single meaningful whole,” including both the realms of seen and unseen realities. Wisdom theology affirms the interrelatedness of different aspects that form the whole, that each supplies meaning in “images of ascent and descent” (Schreiter 1985:85). Here Paul’s “images of ascent and descent” come to mind. They are images of a groaning creation that waits in eager expectation for its salvation (ascent) aided by the Holy Spirit from above (descent) who “intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (cf Rom 8: 18-27).11

Concerning wisdom theology’s preoccupation, Schreiter elucidates:

The preoccupations of wisdom theology often centre on psychology, that is, on the interiority of human experience. The human subject is seen as the prism through which one is to contemplate God and the universe. An intimate knowledge of human subjectivity, gained through a disciplined examination of one’s own inner life, leads to knowledge of the divinity (Schreiter 1985:85).

10 Here Schreiter observes that theology as praxis is the latest form of theological reflection. He elaborates: “As understood today, praxis is the ensemble of social relationships that include and determine the structures of social consciousness. Thus thought and theory are considered sets of relations within the larger network of social relationships. Theory represents a dialectical moment within practice, as does action. Theory’s task is to illumine the exact nature of those social relationships” (Schreiter 1985:91). As such theory names “the false and oppressive” social contexts and exposes them as the first step toward transforming them. Therefore theology as praxis finds its expressions in Africa’s liberation theology in its struggle against social injustice.

11 Similar images can be seen in John 3:16-17 and also in Philippians 2:1-11
The human being, the individual, is the reservoir of this wisdom. Aurelius Augustine (354 - 430), a renowned father of the Christian church, while a Bishop of Milan, expounded on the importance of wisdom as human endowment. He observed that humanity possessed this wisdom as the prism through which to contemplate God, that it was better for us to prefer knowledge of ourselves to the knowledge of the earthly and celestial things (cf Schreiter 1985:85). This, view, he maintained, did not mean that preoccupations with the human subject are ends in themselves, because through the knowledge of ourselves we “gain access to the all-embracing knowledge of the universe and the universe’s creator” (Schreiter 1985:85). This is because human beings are the highest form of creation in the visible sphere known to us.

This in turn shapes the logic of wisdom theology: Where theology is a variation on a sacred text functions with laws of association, wisdom theology finds its expression via laws of analogy expressed in types and anti-types and constituting an allegorical relation between the visible and the hidden. All these forms have an anagogical function: “leading us upward to theologia, the contemplation of God” (Schreiter 1985:86).

The assumption of this study is that wisdom theology is a prism best suited as the vehicle in constructing a theology of moral formation. This is because it is exemplified in its cosmic orientation, with emphasis on human experience. These experiences are expressed via analogical configurations which do not necessarily exclude contributions from other theologies, but are merely a choice for a dominant form.

Why an African wisdom theology? Apart from my own political and geographic location, the question arises: Why would wisdom theology be almost “naturally” at home in Africa? Part of the answer seems to be that most of the cultural conditions where wisdom theology is likely to develop (see Schreiter 1985:87) are consonant with the African heritage in general. One may mention the maintenance of rites of passage, a prizing of wisdom above learning and wealth, and the prevalence of a unified view of the world not yet relativised by pluralistic world views. Although one should be aware of a “pristine” or simplistic view of African societies as static,
“primitive” and “traditional”, there is adequate ground (in history and in the present situation) to at least point to trends that would support a link between predominant cultural conditions and forms of local wisdom theologies (see references in Schreiter 1985:87ff).

Let us take only the issue of rites of passage as example:
Most African cultures have maintained their rites of passage (even in urbanized settings) and these serve both as pathway of moral development and as focal points for calling on the wisdom of ancestors (or collective communal wisdom at least).

Concerning the pathways of development: We in Africa, use rites to define people’s roles and inculcate values and virtues progressively. These rites, marked by specific rituals, are linked to different stages of physical development. The rituals mark the end of one stage and the beginning of another. But the physical is transcended as the wisdom that the individual receives, includes the distinct roles, values, and norms expected of him/her in this new stage. There is a consonance with rites like birth, baptism, catechesis, confession and marriage in the Christian tradition and allows for a fruitful interaction between African traditional and Christian heritage.

Concerning the wisdom of the ancestors: This allows for a consonance between Judeo-Christian wisdom traditions (as expressed in Scripture but also in the church through the ages), that find their ultimate expression in Christ. The wisdom of the ancestors can now interact with the wisdom of Christ, the first ancestor (cf Schreiter 1985:87). Bujo has developed this view further, and has called Jesus Christ the “proto-ancestor” in an elaborate and convincing presentation (see Bujo 1990:107). Christ’s wisdom can be trusted and emulated in building the community, introducing a critical dimension into the relation between African wisdom and Christ. Because Christ is not just an ancestor among other ancestors, as Bujo explains:

Still on another level, Jesus goes beyond the traditional African ethos. A customary chief or traditional king had the task of guaranteeing the life of family and nation. But in certain circumstances he could display a horrifying authoritarianism. We see, at once, the difference in Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor. Contrary to black potentates, who in their fury could well put any member of community to death, this Proto-Ancestor did not come to condemn or to take life, but to call to conversion (Bujo 1990:106).
Jesus Christ achieved this because he is God who has become human (umuntu) to live a life in community and to enable the African Christian community (the church) to follow Him in a life of wisdom.

To return to the central question of this study posed above: If we accept that a theology of wisdom is the most appropriate to address issues of moral development, and if we accept that such a theology (or theologies) resonate with the cultural paradigms of Africa, the next question is: On which sources would an adequate African theology of wisdom draw? The answer to this question – perennial to any theology – in fact determines the structure of this study.

**The structure of this study**

The first chapter addresses the question: Why is Africa in need of a wisdom theology that addresses the issue of moral regeneration very specifically? This question is posed in the broader context of the African Renaissance debates currently promoted on our continent. The links between the Italian (European) and African Renaissance are developed to indicate that moral regeneration is a crucial part of the socio-political, intellectual and economic re-awakening or re-birth of our continent.

This chapter represents the “socio-historical” source of an African wisdom theology as without it the context and urgency of a moral theology will be insufficiently understood. It is therefore entitled: A contextual analysis: The European and African Renaissance.

The second chapter attempts to link the development of an African wisdom theology to the rise of virtue ethics as alternative ethical theory to the predominant deontological and utilitarian traditions. This is achieved through an analysis of Alisdair MacIntyre’s earlier work, *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory* (1981), which is set in the context of the work or thought of Iris Murdoch and Elizabeth Anscombe, the modern initiators of a virtue ethic. This chapter represents the “philosophical” source of an African wisdom theology as without it the theoretical framework in which such a theology addresses the question of moral formation, will
be missing. It is therefore entitled: A philosophical analysis: The rise of virtue ethics as alternative ethical theory.

The third chapter is devoted to two related “wisdom” themes: In the first part of this chapter the seven virtues (as traditionally presented) are briefly described with a view to highlight the virtue of wisdom as foundation and prism for all other virtues. In the second part of this chapter, the idea of wisdom is further developed via a portrayal of the four wisdom traditions that could assist in the development of an African wisdom theology: wisdom in the Hellenistic, Jewish, African and Christian (New Testament) traditions respectively. It should be noted: at this stage that human wisdom from these named traditions could be regarded as necessary as a divine entry point into understanding the moral nature of God. All traditions achieve this goal insofar as their quest is universal - that of finding the moral foundation for human living. Hellenism fails because it locates the moral value in the human nature, the Jewish tradition, though taking the debate further, gets stuck on sacrifices and rituals as the means by which humanity would realise the moral renewal. The African for one, the richness of its wisdom tradition is drowned in superstitions and fear of the unknown. In many ways all traditions find their remedy and point of commonality in Christ. Yet this does not mean their approval. Rather, Christ informs and modifies all traditions. In him, exclusively, they find their true fulfilment. On their own all wisdom traditions are insufficient.

This chapter represents the “sapiential” source of an African wisdom theology as without it the most important building blocks for such a theology would be absent. This chapter is therefore entitled: A sapiential analysis: Wisdom as foundation for virtue ethics in Africa.

The fourth and last chapter is an attempt to bring the previous sources together under a specific theological perspective. I draw on aspects of recent African theologians’ work, notably that of Kwame Gyekye and Benezet Bujo who attempt to engage with and bring together Western and African theological traditions. But what does such a “theological” perspective entail? It draws on Scripture and the Trinitarian Christian tradition to demonstrate how African wisdom (chapter 3), reinforced by the framework of virtue theory (chapter 2), and developed in the context of present-day
Africa (chapter 1) by an African student of theology (biographical introduction), have the potential to contribute to the Moral Renaissance of our continent.

This chapter represents the more overt “theological” source of an African wisdom theology as without it there would be nothing distinctively Christian about the whole enterprise. The chapter title is therefore closely aligned with the overall title of this study: A theological analysis: Toward an African virtue ethics?

The structure of this study is a complex inter-relationship of a variety of sources in a theological work, namely, personal experience, social and politico-economic context, philosophical reflection, African culture, Scripture and existing Christian theological paradigms. The question of methodology is not so much where one “starts” or “ends”, but rather how these sources are brought into some coherent inter-relationship. This study is an attempt to construct such an inter-related framework. Its weakness lies probably in its lack of specifics, but this allows for developing a wider view that is hopefully of some value for more specific and detailed work in future.

The reader should nevertheless realize that this study is not itself the material development of an African wisdom theology, but merely an attempt to point to the possible structure of such a theology. In a sense this study is a meta-theological enterprise, providing some guidelines to assist in the actual development of local wisdom theologies on our continent. This is at least one route to the moral re-orientation of the African continent.
The aim of this chapter is to provide a contextual analysis by linking up with the current debates about an African Renaissance. The reasons for this “entry point” into the African context are twofold: First, on a methodological level, the “reading of the signs of the time” is the task of any theology that wishes to address its context. The debate about an African Renaissance has spread over the continent and is a fruitful partner to engage with both the history and current concerns of our continent. Considerable energy is therefore spent on analysing the original Renaissance on European soil, namely Italy, and what factors worked for and against a general rebirth (renaissance) of society. That Renaissance, which brought so much advantage to Europe, had a mixed effect on Africa. On the one hand it led to the forces of colonization; on the other it does provide for an impulse to make an African rebirth possible. After looking at the factors that advance and inhibit such a Renaissance, the chapter closes with a short comparison of the two forms of Renaissance.

But the point of all this work is not merely historical or political: It will be shown that a Renaissance movement is a multi-faceted phenomenon achieved on the balance of positive and inhibiting powers. And a crucial dimension of such a rebirth is the issue of moral renewal or providing a moral orientation that may guide and support such a process. This is where an African Christian theology, sensitive to moral orientation of individual and society, may play an important role. The historical context that follows raises among others, moral challenges. Without the knowledge of this context, theologising about virtuous living would be lacking in its concrete moral realities. In a broader sense the historical reviews below offer an understanding of how Africa came to be what it is now; why Africa continues to be in dire straights; and the hope raised by a new breed of African leaders who have proposed the African Renaissance movement.
Let us turn to the Renaissance debate:
The employment of the term “Renaissance” in the development of an “African Renaissance” requires clarification, as the concept is borrowed from the European Renaissance of the 15th and 16th century. Therefore, we commence with a historical review of the European Renaissance to see what the term actually signifies.

It would be presumptuous to claim that this section is a holistic review of European Renaissance, since such a review would require a separate study of its own. The following limitations apply to this review: The review of European Renaissance will be focused on Italy\textsuperscript{12} as the historical locus of the European Renaissance. A limited presentation of the spread of the Italian Renaissance to the rest of Europe will be given to provide a transition and to highlight the effect of the European Renaissance on the newly “discovered” African continent.

1.1 Historical review of the Italian Renaissance

Scholars of European history such as J. Burckhardt (1958), P.J. Helm (1961), Hale (1966), J.F. Bernard (1970), S. J. Lee (1984), P. Burke (1987), and D. Hay & J. Law (1989), confirm that the Italian Renaissance developed into or influenced the European Renaissance. The arguments that similar developments could be located elsewhere on the European continent at that time, are always submerged by the enthusiasm with which the Italians embraced the “spirit of the new age” which they later named “a rebirth (\textit{rinascita})” (Helm 1961:1). The artists and historians of arts in Italy, in about 1550, coined the term “\textit{rinascita}”. This word became popular through its French translation, namely “\textit{renaissance}” (Hay and Law 1989:3-4). The term was then “used to characterise the culture of the fifteenth-century Italy and then that of all Western European civilisation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Hay and Law 1989:3-4). What was the spirit that gripped the hearts of the Italians, and later, all the Europeans?

\textsuperscript{12} The review of European Renaissance in Italy falls into two categories. The first covers those aspects that may be viewed as the embodiment of the Renaissance spirit. Here I include classical learning, the humanism movement, political organisation, and the revival of art. The second deals with those aspects that may be construed as constraints, or even contradictions, of the Renaissance spirit. These include wars, famines, diseases, and moral deterioration.
Helm, in defining “renaissance”, takes us to the mind of the Italians in the 14th and 15th centuries. The intellectuals of these centuries felt that they were in an unprecedented time of change. This time of change was characterised by “a reawakened interest in and admiration for some aspects of classical civilization” (Helm 1961:1). The term “rinascita” translated as “‘rebirth’ of art and letters” (Helm 1961:1). Bernard observes that the period named “renaissance”, which covered about two centuries (15th and 16th centuries) was described as an age of renewal, preceded by the “characteristics of the Middle Ages in Italy that had begun to decay” (Bernard 1970: 230).

The decay of the Middle Ages was evident in the “collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the loss of the prestige and the universally recognized authority of the papacy” (Bernard 1970:230). This marked the end of the church’s dominance, together with its religious significance for the wellbeing of human life. Along with the collapse of the Roman Empire came severe criticism of medieval scholasticism, which had been the “inflexible guide of every respectable intellect in Europe”. It had now become “the object of ridicule and the target of popular joke” (Bernard 1970:230).

Some historians do not sever the link between the medieval and the Renaissance period. For example, Goet refers to renaissance as a “rebirth”, a term used to describe the period in European civilisation immediately following the Middle Ages. Goet agrees with other historians that the Renaissance period was characterised by an increased concentration on classical learning (especially in art and languages), elevated value of a human being, discovery and exploration of new continents, admiration of Plato, and substitution of the Aristotelian understanding of the universe by that of Copernicus (cf Helm 1961:349). To this may be added a decline of the feudal system and ecclesial authority, the growth of commerce, and the application of potentially powerful innovations such as paper, printing, the mariner’s compass, and gunpowder (cf Goet 1990:1019). This period (1350-1600) was the concentration of forces of change. In fact, it was not until the 17th and 18th centuries that a distinction could be made between the Middle Ages and the 18th century’s “modern times” (cf Hay and Law 1989:285).
There are factors that favoured the development of the Renaissance in Italy. These included, firstly, the legacy of the crusades. From Italy, the centre of Christendom, the Italians were among the many Christians who heeded the Pope’s call to participate in the crusades in defence of the Christian sites and reclamation of the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Apart from the negative legacy of the crusades on Christendom, the Italians inherited connections with eastern regions, and acquired an adventurous spirit of which Burckhardt remarks:

The crusades had opened unknown distances to the European mind, and awakened in all the passion for travel and adventure… Even in the crusades the interest of the Italians was wider than that of other nations, since they already were a naval power and had commercial relations with the East (Burckhardt 1958:279).

Secondly, Italy’s geographical location was of great advantage. Located on the peninsula, Italy’s ports provided access points for trading with Europe’s hinterland. The flourishing trade gave rise to commercial city-states. Thirdly, the Italian Renaissance occurred at the time and was instrumental in the spread of the printing industry following Johannes Gutenberg invention (between 1424 and 1448) of the printing press. Printing enabled replication of works of art with minimum error (cf Helm 1961: 5, 18, 37). Burckhardt describes how forced copyists rejoiced at this German invention, notwithstanding the praises that were often offered to the beauty of their calligraphy. Printing was “soon applied in Italy to the multiplication, first of Latin and then, Greek authors, and for a long period nowhere but in Italy, yet it spread with, by no means, the rapidity which might have been expected from the general enthusiasm for the works” (Burckhardt 1958:204).14

Original printing is often attributed to the Egyptians, who are said to have engraved characters on precious stones. These were often used in impressing their signatures upon official documents. Their claims that the Romans too knew about print but did not popularise the idea, because the authorities held the view that the spread of intelligence leads to uprisings among the people. The Chinese invented printing of their own by 100 BC, a type which is still used in China today. Although there is dispute concerning who might have been the first to invent a printing press, between Johannes Gutenberg (German) and Laurens Coster (Dutch), historians have settled on the former as the inventor (cf White 1950:2942).

Helm has recorded printing press centres such as the movable metal type that enabled the humanists to multiply copies and criticism. One of these printing presses was established at Subiaco (1465), and Aldo Manuzio set up the Aldine Press in 1490. By 1515 most of the known Greek and Latin classics at the time had been printed. “The Italian presses used letters based on the Carolingian handwriting and this alphabet soon spread to northern Europe, driving out the Gothic black letter type, except in Germany” (Helm 1961:18). Notable is the Italian design still used in printing today.
The spirit of the Italian Renaissance and its developments attracted people to move in and out of Italy. Florence, one of the major Renaissance city-states, is particularly mentioned because of its popular influence on trade, banking, and diplomacy. Florence was also the location of the Platonic Academy and the residence of the ecclesiastical authority, the Pope. Traders came in for business; scholars from other city-states and from the north came in search of knowledge and new methods of learning in art and languages. Others came to pay tribute to the Pope for political and/or ecclesiastical missions. Yet others came, out of envy, to plunder and loot the “Renaissance goods” produced in the Italian city-states, by instigating wars. On returning to their city-states or other parts of Europe, all took something of the Renaissance spirit with them (cf. Hay and Law 1989:149-157; Burke 1986:242-250).

However, Italy of the renaissance period was far from being united. It was composed of generally independent city-states, where political and economic activity was concentrated. Daniel Waley has recorded 38 city-states in a historical gazette (Waley 1988:197-209). Waley’s map (Waley 1988:6-7) and that of Laven (Laven 1966:8-9) show up to 300 city-state and/or republics. There was a geographical concept of the area named Italia, though rivalries among kings, dukes, and wealthy families created power blocs which kept Italy fragmented in these city-states sometimes called republics. It was not until the 18th century, when this Italia spirit culminated in the unification of Italy, that the city-states/republics consolidated in order to build up a stronger, well-defended nation and politico-economically recognised country (cf Bernard 1970:370-384).

The period of the Italian Renaissance (15th - 16th century), marked a significant shift in the “whole social, political and intellectual structure of western Europe” (Helm 1961: xi). These two centuries lie between the end of the medieval period (1400) and the beginning of the modern era (1700). Three historical divisions place the Renaissance at the beginning of the modern era (1400). The first division was the Graeco-Roman period up to 410 (Helm 1961: 1). The second division was the period marked by the “death of Constantine in 337 to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453” (Helm 1961:1-2) as the Middle Ages preceding the Renaissance. The third division was the end of the Byzantine Empire, which was significant in the development of the Renaissance spirit. Many Greek scholars flocked into Italy,
including some Italians who had studied at Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. With this sense of emancipation came the feeling of being able to achieve whatever project they attempted. Out of this feeling grew an impression that the thousand years which lay between the Graeco-Roman period and the ushering in of the Renaissance had been an “unfortunate period of darkness, lasting for a thousand years, and characterized by superstition, despotism and deplorable hygiene” (Helm 1961:2). This historical trend developed into the 18th century age of reason (1700) and to the 19th century age of common sense (1800) (cf Helm 1961:2; Bernard 1970:230-297).

The view of most historians, such as Voltaire (1778), Gibbon (1788), Burckhardt (1860), J. C. Morison and Kegan Paul, writing in 1887, was that “modern times had rediscovered and improved on the virtues of the ancient world (Graeco-Roman) among which they included rationalism, good roads and liberty” (in Helm 1961:2). However, historians writing in the second half of the 20th century, such as D. Waley (1987), believe that this view was not entirely correct. There were indeed noted intellectual activities such as those of the renowned Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) (cf Helm 1961:354), and the architectural work of the huge Gothic cathedrals (1232-1300) (cf Bernard 1970:202), together with medieval nostalgia for unity and faith (cf Helm 1961:3). In fact, Hay and Law have remarked:

[I]t must be remembered that there would have been little chance of the new learning crossing the Alps if ... fresh attitudes of the Italians had not been enveloped in older traditions, conveyed by older institutional links in church and state which evolved only slowly (Hay and Law 1989:286).

Italians of the Renaissance period had a way of asserting their own spirit above that of others or of any other historical period. For example, whereas the medieval scholars had regarded their world to be on a higher plane than that of antiquity, Lee observes that the medieval scholar was:

…suffused with the glow of Christianity and solidly based on political institutions and social structures which were permanent because they had divine authorization. Antiquity, by contrast, had been insecure and unenlightened, certainly until the Christian faith had established itself in the Roman Empire (Lee 1978:2).
Lee goes on to describe the view of the Italian Renaissance spirit thus:

By the fifteenth century, however, humanist historians had permanently reversed the entire emphasis. The medieval world was now associated with a superstition and barbarism that choked the more positive achievement of antiquity (Lee 1978:2).

Some writers, such as Conrad Celtis, congratulated his fellow Germans on “having cast off your vile barbarity”, and Rabelais wrote: “Out of the thick Gothic night our eyes are opened to the glorious torch of the sun” (see Lee 1978:2). Some of these scholars belonged to the humanist movement that was to become the embodiment of the Renaissance spirit. Thus, the humanist movement started in Italy and spread into the rest of Europe, facilitating the spread of the Renaissance philosophy. The movement took up the project of re-writing history\(^\text{15}\) (historiography), such that the spirit of the Renaissance seemed to supersede that of the Middle Ages. The humanist movement named this period “a dawn of a new age”, “a rebirth” – a Renaissance.

1.1.1 Selected aspects of the Renaissance period

As indicated earlier, this discussion distinguishes two sets of aspects related to the Italian Renaissance, namely those which enhanced the Renaissance, and those which inhibited it. The first set was classical learning, the humanism movement, political organisation, and the revival of art.

1.1.1.1 Classical learning

Perhaps if a question were raised as to what particular aspect of the European renaissance was fundamental to the period, classical scholarship would rank first, from which the Renaissance spirit flowed. Although this was not the first time the word “renaissance” had been applied to concepts of scholarship in literature in the earlier years, “a revival of the ideals of Greek and Roman antiquity” which “occurred in the period 1350-1600” (Hay and Law 1989:285), was unprecedented. It all started with translations and scientific study of Latin and Greek texts. This deep admiration

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\(^{15}\) The process of re-writing history, otherwise known as “historiography” played a leading role in promoting the Renaissance spirit.
for Latin and Greek meant that these two languages were often studied, sometimes at
the expense of Italian, the common language of Italy. In some of the city-states,
people spoke Greek to the extent that one would have mistaken the location for
Athens. Salutati is commended for providing hospitality to one Jacopo, whose Greek
scholarship was a great asset to Florentines. He had had opportunity to study in
Constantinople (1395) before its fall. It is said that he could be one of the “first
Italians of his generation who collected Greek manuscripts” (in Martines 1963:310)
and brought them to Florence.

Soon other subjects such as science and politics were included in the new learning
methods. Here the Platonic approach was preferred to the waning Aristotelian system.
Throughout the Middle Ages, the Aristotelian approach to scholarship was admired,
partly because of its insistence on quality rather than quantity. According to his
critics, such as Ockham and Oresme, Aristotle was too methodical, with persistent
categorisation of items and the construction of qualitative hierarchies that tended to
make his world a static world of values (cf Laven 1966:180). Platonism, on the other
hand, was preferred because it produced inspiration and enthusiasm in science. For
Plato, the world was not static, but relational. Plotinus and Proclus further developed
Neo-Platonism as an approach to scholarship. They “popularised the view that there
was a structural simplicity underlying the universe and that this was intelligible in
mathematical terms” (cf Laven 1966:180). The availability of Greek texts and
enthusiasm for Greek studies made it all the more attractive to many scholars. Ficino
added to the enthusiasm by linking up “Plato’s scholarship with Christianity,” making
mathematical and scientific studies “more convincing ... respectable and more
acceptable” (Laven 1966:180-181).

Thus classical learning became the means by which the perfect person was “found”,
defined, and established. The perfect person would endeavour to have knowledge of
every aspect of life and the environment. “The mutual interaction of these gifts and
accomplishments resulted in the perfect man (person) in whom no one quality usurps
the place of the rest” (Burckhardt 1958:383). These methods of learning and enhanced
conceptualisation of a person were produced in illustrated instructional books that
served as models for learning. Europeans flocked to Italian schools for both
theoretical and practical knowledge “in every noble bodily exercise and in the manner and habits of a good society” (Burckhardt 1958:383).

As the term “classical” suggests, there was nothing new insofar as the knowledge was concerned. In fact, the emphasis was placed on re-reading classical texts. As Lee observes:

> Although classical works had some influence on the medieval thought, they had acquired an extensive superstructure which scholars from the fourteenth century onwards set about dismantling. Increasing emphasis was laid on understanding the classics in their original form, and this was inevitably accompanied by an insistence on grammatical precision and stylistic purity (Lee 1984:1).

Often scholars were “excessively concerned with detail and production of commentaries on classics rather than works of originality” (Lee 1984:1). It was this curiosity applied to all aspects of learning that was referred to as “the revival of learning” or “rebirth of knowledge”. Centres of learning were founded, one such institution being the Platonic Academy in Florence, established in 1439.

Out of this classical learning emerged a trend that seemed to rediscover the “person” as the most significant creature. Consequently, the human being became the dominant theme influencing the thinking of the Italian renaissance period. The basis of medieval pride had been their sense of unity in Christendom, solid social and political structures that seemed permanent because, so it was believed; they had been divinely instituted (cf Lee 1984:2). The humanist movement radically changed these views, as it challenged authority, especially the ecclesiastical one and static views on scientific matters, as well as theological interpretations of the cosmos (cf Lee 1984 1-4). As such, the humanist movement became the embodiment of the renaissance spirit, to which we shall now turn.

1.1.1.2 The rise of humanism

One of the historians of the Italian Renaissance, Bernard, has pointed out that one of the aspects of the Italian Renaissance was the rise of a “humanism” movement. Present in humanism were “all the ideals of the renaissance found worthy of pursuit:
optimism, individualism, hedonism, scepticism, and materialism”. Bernard goes on to observe, “it is accurate to say that humanism, and its emphasis on this world and on human values was the heart and soul of the Renaissance” (Bernard 1970:231).

The corollary to humanism, the “renaissance man” had to be the “universal man”, or \textit{uomo universale} (Italian). Leon Battist Alberti (1404 –72) described one of the concept of the \textit{uomo universale}, when he observed, “a man can do all things if he wills” (Geot 1990:1021; also Helm 1961:19), which followed the philosophical tenet of a Greek philosopher, Protogoras (445 BC), in his famous phrase “man is the measure of all things” (Lee 1978:2). The conclusion of Protogoras’ saying had been deduced from a premise that each individual is his or her own final authority. The revival of Protogoras’ premise by Alberti’s regarding the universal person had far-reaching effects in all fields of scholarship during the Renaissance period and beyond.

The pursuit of human excellence, potential, and satisfaction, positioned a person at the centre of the universe. It was believed a person was “limitless” in his/her capacities for development. It follows that people therefore tried to embrace all knowledge and develop their capacities as fully as possible, to meet the standard of a “universal man”. It was common to find a Renaissance man and woman\(^\text{16}\) seeking development in all areas of knowledge, with honours in physical and social sciences, social accomplishment, and works of art. One such person was Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), described as “a supreme incarnation of the universality of the human genius” (Carli 1963:20-21). Leonardo, da Vinci was an artist, sculptor, musician, engineer, inventor, and scientist. As \textit{uomo universale}, he demonstrated that the individual’s unlimited capacities could be utilised to their fullest.

The focus of these humanistic notions was on the “nature, achievements and potential of humanity rather than the power and mystery of the divinity” (Lee 1978:2). As such,\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{16}\) Attention was paid to the appearance of women, from maintenance of the colour of the skin and face care to particular costumes. As Burckhardt observes, “All tended to the formation of a convention type” (Burckhardt 1958:363). It is believed that women stood on an equal footing with men. Royalty and wealthy families exposed their sons and daughters to the same learning (Burckhardt 1958:389). Ippolita, the sister of Galeazzo Marrais, is said to have saluted Pope Pius II in high Latin at the Congress of Mantua (Burckhardt 1958:229). Vittoria Colonna was a celebrated poet in the footsteps of the Venetian, Cassandra Fedele. Others include Isabella of Bavaria, Margaret of Anjou, and Isabella of Castile – women who took their share of notoriety and glory (cf Burckhardt 1958:390).
the humanist concepts dominated the Renaissance period to the extent that one did not have to be a member of the humanist intellectual group in order to be humanist.

Artists expressed it in the elegance of their works, which depicted man in the most accurate dimensions; poets praised man in terms of his achievements and potential; while writers and historians manifested a radical change by a historiographical departure from their medieval counterparts who thought themselves higher than people in antiquity. Medieval man had risen above antiquity, so it seemed to the Renaissance historians, with a total submission to the divine, represented in the ecclesial authority. As for the humanists, they sought a balance between the classical and Christian influences, in their approach to history and writing (cf Helm 1961:19-22).

Some features of humanism are worth noting here. (i) Humanism took human nature in all its various manifestations and achievements as its subject. (ii) It stressed the unity and compatibility of the truth found in all philosophical and theological schools and systems, under a doctrine known as syncretism. (iii) Humanism put emphasis on the dignity of a person as an individual. (iv) The medieval ideal of penance as the highest and noblest form of human activity was replaced by the study of creation and the attempt to exert the mastery of man over nature by the humanists. (v) Humanism looked forward to the rebirth of the human spirit and wisdom which would be achieved through “consolidation of a new spiritual and intellectual outlook and the development of a new body of knowledge” (Geot 1990:1020).

The proponents of humanism included men like Dante, Petrarch, Gianozza Manetti, Lorenzo Valla, and Colaccio Salutati as its chief protagonists. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, many humanist scholars fled to Italy. This gave a boost to Italy, because they came with their books and manuscripts and the Greek tradition of scholarship (cf Geot 1990:1020). It must be noted, however, that humanism was not entirely born out of the Renaissance period. It had its beginnings in the closing years of the Middle Ages. Geot observes that the spirit of the Renaissance was expressed in an intellectual movement called “humanism”, which might have been the aftermath of the Middle Ages. Secular men of letters initiated this movement, which began and
achieved its fruition in Italy from the 15th century onwards (cf Geot 1990:1020). Lee confirms this historical presentation by maintaining that

“humanism was a basic source of inspiration for all the cultural changes of the Renaissance, heavily influencing literature, history, painting, sculpture and political ideas” (Lee 1984:1).

The extensive contacts of professors, ecclesiastical legates, diplomats, and traders from north of the Alps and within Italy helped in the spread of this humanist movement to the rest of Europe. Because it belonged to different intellectual and social contexts, humanism developed different variations corresponding to regional and national impressions (cf Lee 1984:2-3). Lee mentions some persons of importance in the spread of humanism. These included Lefevre d’Etaples and Bude in France, Agricola, Celtis, Reuchlin and von Hutten in Germany, Ximenes in Spain, Colet in England, and most significantly Erasmus” (Lee 1984:3)17. Erasmus’ contribution is best dealt with in limited selected detail under Christianity and the rise of moral crisis reviewed later in this study. I will now turn to two trends of humanism that sprang up during the Renaissance period, namely “secular” and “Christian” humanism.

1.1.1.2.1 Christian humanism

The argument runs that “the rediscovery of man (sic) did not mean the abandonment of God” (Lee 1984:3). The search for ultimate perfection still called for religious knowledge and skills. The medieval church had constructed concepts upon which the doctrinal system and political thought were built. This concept could be traced back to Aristotle’s assumption that “man is naturally a political and social animal”. The 13th century saw a further development of this concept by Thomas Aquinas, who offered “a hierarchical structure of authority and of the obligation involved in man’s relationship with God and with his ruler” (Lee 1984:4). This meant that the human being, who is essentially a political and social animal, derives his/her influence in

17 Erasmus, a Christian humanist had the opportunity to travel back and forth from Italy to other parts of Europe. And since he enjoyed acquaintances in high places, he used the opportunity to preach in cathedrals and participate in university debates and discussions with royalty (cf Helm 1961:30-36).
matters social and political from God, and by this token possesses the ability to relate to his/her social and political environment appropriately.

However, the system of philosophical reasoning that followed in the 14th century became more technical and devoid of inspiration, hence the return to “Neo-Platonism”, by overthrowing completely, the scholastic edifice. The protagonists here were Pico and Ficino, who through Neo-Platonism, encouraged people to see and understand more clearly the different aspects of form driven by the intellectual desire for beauty. Pico believed that “God the Father endowed man, from birth, with the seed of every possibility and every life” (cf Lee 1884:4) This was a departure from the traditional understanding of man, vitiated by original sin as a result of the fall. This line of theological thinking seems to have been promoted by the thoughts handed over from the Greek philosopher, Protagoras (445 BC), who advanced the doctrine that nothing is absolutely bad or good, false or true, and that each individual is therefore his/her own final authority. Pelagius, a British monastic teacher in Rome (400 AD), had embraced Protagoras’ teaching. His teachings were recovered in some of the monastic literature among the Greek religious communities (cf Helm 1961:17-18). He had taught with insistence on the adequacy of created human nature, which was essentially unimpaired by Adam’s fall. This human nature was capable of fulfilling the will of God. By baptism, the human being receives the merits of grace but not redemption from original sin. From henceforth, the Christian would be capable of pursuing holiness. The justification offered through Christ’s redeeming grace was received once and forever (cf Ferguson 1988:499-501). It was the recovery and rereading of Pelagius’ teachings that seem to have set the theological tone and basis for Christian humanism. Although this theological thinking developed in different ways, with different Christian leaders in Europe, its core implication remained the same for most Christian humanists throughout Europe.

Christian humanism was spread to the rest of Europe in the 16th century by people like Erasmus, Colet, and Lefevre d’Etaples, with the emphasis on biblical research and interpretation of Greek texts from religious communities, especially those emanating

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P18 Pelagius’ teachings were condemned by orthodox theologians, spearheaded by the African episcopate instructed by Augustine, as not taking sinfulness seriously enough and allowing humans to contribute to their own salvation C.O Buchanan has given a detailed expert in Ferguson (1988:499-501) regarding the development of Pelagianism.
from the monastic life of the Graeco-Roman period (cf Helm 1961:18). It was their belief that “classical learning, applied to biblical study, could provide a greater harmony between faith and intellect, reinforcing the effect of Neo-Platonism by a solid return to scriptural directive” (Lee 1984:4).

The stance of artists and architects carried the connection between God and man in their productions. Every work of art would be characterised by an intellectual desire for ideal beauty. As Lee observes, the emphasis was on man’s striving to see God, the source of all perfection. In Leonardo da Vinci’s Treatise on Painting, he said, “The good painter had two principal things to paint: that is man and the intention of his mind” (cf Lee 1984:4-5). The idealism of the artist was often communicated through religious themes. Some of the original religious themes include, scenes such as the Last Judgement by Michelangelo (1536) (Helm 1961:21-22); the Crucifixion by Masaccio (1426) (Carli 1962:1-3); the Baptism of Jesus by Piero Della Francesca, and a similar one by Andrea Del Verrochio and Leonardo da Vinci (plates 11 and 16) (Carli 1962: 11,16); and the Madonna enthroned with Child by Fra Angelico from 1435-1440 (Carli 1962:4-5). These paintings may be found elsewhere under other names, since the scenes painted were popular ones.

Worth noting is the apparent assertion of man in the “religious synthesis with humanism”. The painting of the creation of Adam, on the roof of the Sistine Chapel, shows Adam being created in God’s image, but God is an idealised version of man (Lee 1984:5). Personalities such as Cossa, Masaccio, Da Vinci, Raphael, Correggio, Giorgione, Titian, Veronese, Bellini, and Carlo Crivelli are associated with religious paintings during the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries as “creators” (cf Lee 1984:5). But most radical and consistent with promotion of the spirit of humanism was the prose produced by Pico della Mirandola in his Oration on the dignity of Man. In this production God speaks to Adam:

Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is yours alone nor any function peculiar to yourself have we given you, Adam, to the end that according to your longing and according to your judgement you may have and possess what abode, what form, what functions you yourself shall desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by us. You, constrained by no limits, in accordance with your own free will, in whose hand we have placed you, shall ordain for yourself the limits of
your nature. We have set you at the world’s centre that you may from there more easily observe whatever is in the world (see Shutte 2001:44-45).

Artists and architects also promoted the Christian humanist concept of church buildings. Medieval architecture, with its elongated structure, had as its prime function, to lead the faithful in an altar-focused service. The altar carried the magnificence of the divine presence. Only the view from the altar commanded a central and single focal point. The Renaissance church, however, had a circular shape with a central altar. Thus humans enjoyed the beauty that surrounded them with a somehow unfathomable feeling of being the central natural activity. Andrea Palladio offered another mystic significance of the Renaissance cathedral. The one circumference of the church meant that there was no beginning and there was no end. Each point was distinguishable from the other by the same equal distance from the centre, yet all parts participated in the shape of the whole. This shape demonstrated very well the concept of unity, infinite essence, uniformity, and the justice of God for all (cf Lee 1984:5; Hale 1966:127).

Out of the Christian humanist movement was born the spark of reformation. Lee remarks:

Humanism, therefore, made possible the rise of more fervent and extreme dissent and criticism. The result, in a metaphor common to the period, was that Erasmus’s egg, when hatched by Luther, produced a different breed of birds (Lee 1984:6).

A mixture of religious and nationalistic sentiments mocked the events that flowed out of this connection. The defiance of papal authority (Pope Hadrian VI –1522-23) by Martin Luther in 1522 was followed by the conquest of Rome by King Charles V of Germany in 1527 (cf Hay and Law 1989:124-125).

1.1.2.2  Secular humanism

Secular humanists sought to influence every sphere of political formation. They managed to involve themselves in nearly every sphere of civic life by filling most of the official government posts, as well as by business entrepreneurship.
The emphasis was on turning around the concept of the ascetic life that had dominated the mind of medieval man. For example, ascetic life formed the philosophy of monastic life cherished by all. Secular humanists departed from an ascetic concept that traditionally regarded poverty as a Christian virtue. They did this by enhancing the spirit of human potential, with the emphasis on defying poverty. The secular humanists believed that this ascetic concept with its emphasis on poverty had “stunted the complete development of the personality” (Lee 1984:6).

For the humanists, love of things human was pleasurable (hedonism). A humanist would exhibit an inclination toward a self-centred world in which an individual was unhindered in the pursuit of human excellence, potential, and satisfaction (cf Helm 1961:18). Such profound interest in a person and his/her nature, education, right conduct, and potentialities left little interest in God or belief in his omnipotence (cf Helm 1961:17).

This pursuit of self-centredness led to meticulous attention in differentiating one face from another in Fine Art productions. Helm in commenting on the meticulous attention to individual difference in the surrounding physical world, observed:

This examination of individual detail led also, perhaps inevitably, to an attitude of detachment from the thing observed – what T.S Eliot has termed a “dissociation of sensibility” (Helm 1961:17).

Perhaps the most formidable of all secular humanist views were those advanced by Machiavelli. From his contemporary time up to today, Machiavelli’s humanist treatises on political statecraft were considered as immoral. However, the more they challenged his political statecraft, the more they seemed to be the norm for those who found themselves in the exercise of political power. A summary presentation of Machiavelli’s own life and contribution to secular humanism may offer more insight into this movement.

In using Machiavelli’s views as an example of secular humanism, one should not forget that Machiavelli’s beginnings were in a Christian environment, and he did not
think of himself as a humanist. He was born in Florence in about 1469 during the so-called “golden age” of the reign of Lorenzo de Medici (1464-1492).

From about 1498 to 1527 when Machiavelli died, Italian politics were characterised by continuous internal political crises and foreign invasions (cf Hale 1961:20; Bull 1994:163). In the diplomatic service, he was exposed to high and delicate political and military matters. Out of these encounters he gained first-hand knowledge of the workings of political institutions and the psychology by which the leadership operated. These experiences were to enrich his writing career of unparalleled political exposition. His works, namely *The Prince* (1513-1514), the *Discourses* (1515-1519), and *The Art of War* (1519-1521) (cf Hale 1961:140-197; Bull 1994: 163-164), stand in a category of their own as political treatises.

*The Prince* (1513-1514) seemed to be in favour of despotism and fiercely at variance with traditionally accepted moral ideals. Read in its own desperate context, *The Prince* presented politics as an art independent from morality and religion, as far as means if not ends were concerned (Bull 1994:164). Or put in another way, rulers were to subscribe to the “doctrine that the result – in this case, the safety of the state – justifies the means” (Helm 1961:22). Anglo reminds us:

> The idea of this work (*The Prince*) did not however come suddenly to Machiavelli. His years of diplomatic activity, his close observation of power politics, his involvement in military organization and the final overthrow of the government he had served so unflaggingly, all went into the making of this book (Anglo 1969: 60; Italics mine).

Bull also maintains that unfortunately Machiavelli’s views developed “into permanent rules for political behaviour” (Bull 1994:164). However, his statements were often based “on how leaders do in fact behave rather than on consideration of how they ought to behave” (Bull 1994:164). Bull argues that, although it is popularly thought that Machiavelli influenced many who became dictators and political tyrants of later years, “their actions would probably have been the same without his authority” (Bull 1994:165). Helm notes about Machiavelli, that he did not influence “anyone – writer or statesman – before 1560” (Helm 1961:24). Machiavelli’s expressed attitude to
politics in *The Prince* became a manual for rulers generations after his death (cf Helm 1961:24).

Although we may accept that Machiavelli created these despotic views and approaches to politics out of his frustrations, at least he saw the developing pattern prevalent among the rulers of his time, including the Pope. Obviously, the move away from Christian morality was developing as a departure from the medieval understanding of supreme authority of the Church over political rulers. Politics of the day, so it was argued, forced political leaders to pursue a morality estranged from Christian principles, and Anglo notes that “it is, too, depressingly clear that those engaged in politics have had, and still have, a morality peculiarly their own” (Anglo 1969:268). Since there is no middle course, “politicians frequently find it necessary to eliminate their opponents either by force or fraud” (Anglo 1969:268).

If we agree that Machiavelli personally and in his self-understanding was not a “secular humanist” and the archetype of a political despot, there is no doubt that he committed the spirit of secular humanism to writing, hence giving it commendation to current and future readers of his works. His ideas may be considered part of the Renaissance movement in Italy. The Renaissance movement was further enhanced by the imagination of arts expressed in *Works of Art*. These magnificent *Works of Art*, stand even to date as an everlasting hallmark of the Italian Renaissance. Let us look at the nature and spirit behind these *Works of Art*.

**1.1.1.3 Works of art**

In dealing with *Works of Art* as an aspect of the Italian Renaissance, I will focus particularly on what made Renaissance art different from that of the previous period. Renaissance art can be so named insofar as it was used to express thoughts,

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19 Machiavelli himself met the end of his political career in the very manner he describes. He was retrenched on the 7 November 1512, and suffered numerous political machinations, such as house arrests and movement restrictions. Finally, in February 1513, “a stupid pair of young anti-Medici conspirators compiled a list of likely supporters and left it lying about” (Anglo 1969:31). Unfortunately the list included Machiavelli’s name. He was arrested and interrogated, but “he confessed nothing because he knew nothing”. Although his fine was minimal, the suspicion of the plot hung over him, and for this reason, it would be hard for him to win back the favour of the Medici. He died on 22 June 1527, a frustrated man, leaving his family “in direst poverty” (Sforza 1942:118).
aspirations, and longings of the human spirit, characteristics that were unique to this period. This unique and evocative spirit distinguished previous works of art from those of the Renaissance period. The sharp contrast was demonstrable in the Renaissance artists’ meticulous attention to detail. The dimensions of objects of study, their environmental surroundings set in well-measured perspectives, were among the qualities by which a piece of work would be thus classified. In Piero’s theoretical treatise he instructed as follows:

I therefore say there is need for perspective, which discerns all qualities in proportion in a truly scientific manner, demonstrating the decreasing and increasing of each quantity by means of lines (Valsecchi 1962: Plate 11).

This was an innovation of Italian artists. The artist would not hesitate to relocate the setting of, for example, the Baptism of Jesus, into Italian surroundings.20

The Italian artists’ discipline and stamina were unprecedented both in time and location in Europe. They would be absorbed in their production with the intent of a “creator”. In the case of a human picture or sculpture, the dimensions of the product had to be exact and in perspective with the environment (cf Carli 1963; Valsecchi 1962).

Burckhardt observes that “Works of Art” as we know them in modern terms, may be an anachronistic term for the Italian renaissance. However, the following would have fallen under the category of Works of Art”: Fine Art (ecclesiastical and secular), drama (religious and secular), music, and poetry. Burckhardt (1961), Cronin (1969), Meek (1974), Burke (1987), Valsecchi (1962), and Carli (1963) are examples of authors showing a keen interest in historical studies of the Renaissance Works of Art. Plays, novels, and paintings of festival processions reveal unique skills of the new age. Burke himself has used these sources to try to reconstruct the culture and society of the Renaissance period (cf Burke 1987: 124 – 141).

20 Valsecchi M, 1962: plate 11 shows the work of Piero Della Francesco: the Baptism of Jesus. The setting of this work is a diffused light, that of a clear morning, whose description, in the imagination of Piero, sets the baptism of Jesus in the artist’s native Tiber valley. Yet the departure from the conservative setting of the baptism of Jesus in River Jordan has not raised any objection to the genius and impact of this work.
Most of the artists would have remained undeveloped if it had not been for the generous patronage of public leaders. Among the patrons of Renaissance art was Pope Leo X (1513-1521). He employed Michelangelo and Raphael for his magnificent artistic enterprises. Leo X took after his father, Lorenzo di Medici, who had been a political leader in the Florentine city-state/republic. Enthusiasm for and love of art rose to its highest in Rome both during the pontificate of Pope Julius II (1503-1513) and Pope Leo X (1513-1521). Rome developed into a Renaissance capital as a result of these Works of Art.

A rather obscure Florentine painter by the name of Cennino Cennini produced a treatise on the art of painting (cf Laven 1966:220). Among the expectations of an artist would be the loftiness of spirit, the theoretical knowledge, the exercise of imagination, and a study of all techniques of painting if they wished to develop their painting talent to greatness. The dedication of Cennini’s treatise marked the extent to which art had achieved its sharpest formulation as a branch of knowledge (cf Laven 1966:220). Taking it further, Piero Della Francesca, a mathematician and painter, produced theoretical works providing a shift in the manner in which art was regarded. In one of his works, *De Prospectiva Pingendi*, art is removed from the realm of empiricism, and raised to the heights of pure mathematical speculation (cf Valsecchi 1962: Plate 11).

The spirit of Renaissance provided art with value, and increased human imagination with the images of God and creation and his position in the universe. Burckhardt observes that the perfection of a man was to be expressed in sport, music, dance, and language – especially Latin, Greek, and later Italian, the latter only in a limited way. Renaissance artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci, were celebrated as geniuses because of their knowledge of arts and sciences. Knowledge in Fine Art became one of the marks of a Renaissance person (cf Burckhardt 1958:383). Of paramount significance was the political scene, which provided security and patronage to Renaissance artists.

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21 Valsecchi notes that Piero Della Francesca laid the foundation for pictorial representation... as a means of constructing objects by synthesis and making their idealised volumes harmonise with smooth surfaces of clear colour (Valsecchi 1962: plate 11).
1.1.1.4 Political organization

There was a notable level of political organisation in Renaissance Italy. The most significant were the city-states or republics. By the beginning of the 13th century, there were two to three hundred city-states. Burke observes that, although most of these had lost their independence by the mid-15th century, the spirit of those that embraced the Renaissance had survived. They were known as “the Renaissance cities par excellence”, Florence and Venice serving as examples. As such, these two provide evidence of constitutional developments in the political formation of Italian Renaissance city-states (cf Burke 1986:209).

The Venetians, on one hand, had a developed constitution that allowed balance of power between three establishments, namely monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. These three power institutions formed a government through their representation—“the Doge representing the monarchy, the Senate aristocracy, and the Great Council, democracy” (cf Burke 1986:209). This constitutional arrangement accounted for stability and balance in Venetian politics (cf Burke 1986:209). Writers such as Pier Paolo Vergerio (1400) and Gasparo Contirini (1523-1531) confirm the presence, and offer appreciation, of the balance of power in the Venetian constitution (see Hay and Law 1989:264-265).

The Florentines, on the other hand, demonstrated an unstable political organisation. They changed their constitution as often as they did their leaders. This has been attributed in part to the young age of 14 years at which a citizen enjoyed political rights, compared to the Venetian constitution, where the age for political participation was 25. Florentines tried different forms of political systems, particularly during the two reigns of the famous Medici dynasty (1394-1440 and 1513-1521). The Medici dynasty, with the longest political rule in Florence, was not only responsible for these political changes, but also steered a way through all these political changes. It was through their engagement with such changes that Florentines had an opportunity to test different models of governance. In an interesting way, the spirit of the Renaissance was realised faster in Florence than in Venetia, which was relatively conservative and stable (cf Burke 1986:209-217).
For most of the city-states, a feeling of freedom brought by the Renaissance prompted a departure from patrimonial governments and ecclesiastical control. The formation of political institutions greatly improved during the Renaissance period. It is appropriate to say that political institutions became more effective during the renaissance period. The process of participative rule had already started in the closing years of the 11th century, with the formation of an Executive of Citizens, referred to as “law-worthy men - *boni homines*” (Waley 1969:32), who represented the community. When the *boni homines* became a permanent institution, it evolved into a commune.

Gradually the commune replaced the episcopal authority (hitherto in the hands of the Bishop on behalf of the Pope), as the most important jurisdictional power in the city-state. One became a citizen of the commune by having residential status in the commune or buying citizenship at a regulated value of 100 Lire. Later the right to citizenship came by birth. Strictness regarding admission to citizenship varied from one city-state to another, but most of them ruled against persons with criminal records entering their city-state. Membership, allowed one the right to vote, participation in the commercial life of the city, security of one’s person and property.

The commune also regulated relationships with other communes in the republic and other city-states outside the republic on behalf of its citizens. This political organisation called for the establishment of other government institutions such as the administration, the military, and the diplomatic departments. This process of forming new institutions gave momentum to the city-states and provided a sense of patriotism to the citizens. However, a real sense of nationalism did not develop until much later and then not as a result of institutional development but rather out of conflict and foreign invasions. Italy reached the fruition of her nationalism when all the city-states pursued unification in the 18th century (cf Waley 1969:32-68).

Bureaucracy and diplomacy separated matters of public office and private life. Committee-meeting procedures and taking of minutes were established. The practice of state budgeting was introduced, including the discipline of collecting, storing, and retrieval of information regarding the knowledge of expenditure and income on an annual basis. Demarcations in office responsibility and fixed salaries led to greater efficiency of what would then be referred to as “the Renaissance state” (cf Helm
1961:22-23; Burke 1987:214; Waley 1969:32). Burke warns that it would be exaggerated to understand the Renaissance state in the way we see present-day liberal democracy. The influence of the ruler remained very much a matter of loyalty affecting appointments and promotions. “The ruler could by-pass the system whenever he wished to grant a favour to a suitor” (cf Burke 1987:213-15).

Despite the weaknesses, the irreversible Renaissance spirit of a democratic and bureaucratic system of government had been born. It was to spread all over Europe, affecting the involvement of the church in politics and eventually uprooting the universal leadership of the Pope. Slowly but surely, the restructuring of the feudal power in matters of state administration would follow. Royalty could only retain ceremonial powers, while the running of the city-state remained a function of the elected government.

However, the Pope and royalty are remembered for their role as patrons of Renaissance artists. They used their political power and money to support and sponsor artists, hence turning art into the pride and great heritage of the European Renaissance. But it is clear that the massive shift in political power leading to more participative forms of government had its origin in the evolving Renaissance state.

1.1.2 Aspects that hampered and contradicted the Italian Renaissance spirit.

The cumulative effect of the above-mentioned four aspects of the Italian Renaissance, namely classical learning, the humanism movement, political organisation, and art, must not blind us to the ambiguities of history and the problems that Italian society faced. The Renaissance did not develop in a stable society void of problems that could hamper or even contradict its spirit. At least three “contradicting” forces may be pointed out – civil wars, famines and diseases, and declining public and personal moral life. To these we now turn.

1.1.2.1 Wars

The Italian wars dated between 1494 and 1529, were due to both internal and foreign conflict. Hollings argues that there was a claim that the Europe of the 15th and 16th
centuries had outgrown the war-mongering sentiment of the crusaders. Perhaps this could explain why the Italians did not like to take up military service, leaving it to the employment of mercenaries. However, the problem of the balance of power based on materialism and selfish gains provided the main motivation for wars often fought by mercenaries. Many lives and huge capital expenditures were often lost in wars, most of which were mere invasions by lovers of adventure and the desire for cheap success (cf. Hollings 1959:64; Hay and Law 1989:84-90). The main causes of these wars were selfish alliances made between an Italian city-state and an outside power. For example, the new French King Louis XII invaded Italy. He had inheritance claims on Milan and Naples. He succeeded in the defeat of the unpopular Duke of Milan, Lodovico Sforza. King Louis marched south and secured a share of Naples with the Spanish prince, Ferdinand of Aragon, under the Treaty of Granada (1500). Both these new rulers of the two Italian city-states were foreigners fighting on Italian soil. Between 1502 and 1504 Spanish alliances with some Italians led to the defeat of the French King. However, Naples remained under Spanish rule until 1713 (cf. Helm 1961:72).

Owing to wars, the defence of Italian city-states required detailed arrangements and contract negotiations. Because most of the city-state citizens did not like leaving their businesses for military adventure, mercenaries were often hired. Mercenary captains, known as the condottieri, negotiated the contracts and commanded the troops. Some historians have described these hired armies as “unscrupulous and unreliable, fighting or avoiding battle to secure their own advantage, bereft of any sense of loyalty or obligation to their employers of the moment” (Hay & Law 1989:84).

Their usefulness was encouraged by a lack of state patriotism on the part of the citizenry. Yet it is true that whenever they ran out of food supplies, they often turned to communities that suffered their plunder. Cases of rape and looting were common, especially when payment was not forthcoming. It was common for the mercenaries to change sides if the former state was no longer able to pay. An environment of conflict was for them a source of livelihood. There were some good mercenaries, such as the “Marcheschi”, the followers of the banner of St. Mark. They received bonuses for their good service. However, the management of a mercenary army being ad hoc
made it difficult to maintain a disciplined army over a sustained period (cf Hay & Law 1989:89).

Other forms of Italian defence included fortification and naval forces. These, too, proved expensive to establish, especially compensation for private properties and the building and later maintenance of fortresses. But no city-state could just wait passively while her neighbours were busy improving their fortresses. As the city-state expanded, citizens would demand security from the government. City-states like Florence had a series of fortifications depicting her progressive expansion. As for the navy, the motivation was that such an undertaking not only provided defence for the city-state, but also “brought honour and prospect of distinction and advancement” (Hay & Law 1989: 93).

In all these efforts, city-state defence was never at its optimum. Nor was it immune to weakness and invasion. Therefore, in the successive wars the system collapsed because of the fragmented nature of the city-states. Most of the city-states had lost their sovereignty by 1530. Between 1526 and 1529, Charles II of Germany invaded and defeated many Italian city-states including strong ones like Florence. These defeats brought to an end the pride of the Italian Renaissance and loss of the dual supreme authority of the papacy in Rome. This led to a move toward the unification of Italian city-states into one entity whose consolidated defence would ensure national security and would withstand mighty foreign aggressions. Italy would achieve this dream much later, outside the marked Renaissance period (under the unification of Italy in the 18th century). However, there were other difficulties to deal with, such as diseases and famine.

1.1.2.2 Diseases and famine as natural calamities

Of the scholars of the European Renaissance mentioned in this study, only Hay & Law give an account of famine and disease, which “were probably the most severe and abiding threats posed to the society of Renaissance Italy” (Hay & Law 1989:81). These two natural catastrophes, combined with wars, caused a heavy loss of life in 1528 and 1529. Generally, memories of the Black Death (the plague) lingered on in European communities from 1347-1348. Recurring outbreaks made the governments of the day think of ways in which such disasters could be prevented. Community recovery programmes had to be developed.
The problem of famine affected many sectors of government, including policies of immigration and the employment of foreigners, as well as the need to populate regions that had suffered loss of many lives. Policies were devised to attract professionals such as lawyers, doctors, skilled craftsmen, teachers, and even students. In some cases, tax concessions were offered to foreigners to a given city-state, who considered naturalisation or citizenship. Tax incentives were used to encourage imports, or raised to discourage exports of food. Government established central storage facilities of food to stop individuals from hoarding. To this extent, even in times of suffering, art as a major aspect of the spirit of renaissance was often used to express popular, critical, or sometimes radical views for or against the status quo. For example, one artist by the name Sano di Pietro (1406-81), produced a painting “showing the Madonna commending Siena to Pope Calixtus III, as mule… carrying grain from the Papal States, making their way to the city” (Hay & Law 1989:82).

Many governments, from India to England, suffered the severity of the plague and other diseases. Economic disruptions, high medical cost of emergency doctors, medicines, and wages for grave-diggers were often a big burden to the administration of the city-state. Pisa, as a city–state, had her government offices closed and the city vacated in 1464 owing to a combination of malaria and plague attacks. Among the efforts to combat the plague, the commune of Ferrara (1382) endeavoured in vain to stop its spread by restricting entry into her territories. Others adopted crude approaches such as the physical elimination of suspected carriers of the plague by burning them. Others still would confine suspected carriers of the plague. Following a famous early example of the isolation of victims of the plague by the Lazaretto of Venice established in 1423, other city-states such as Milan and Trent adopted a similar measure in combating the epidemic (cf Hay & Law 1989:83).

Because of high infection rates among mobile merchants and prostitutes, these people were singled out by the authorities as elements of the population that encouraged the spread of the plague. Movements were restricted in Venice 1490 and in Florence in 1504. In addition to the employment of more doctors, hospitals were upgraded and the population was educated to improve personal and community hygiene. Deep down in the inner being of the Italians was the knowledge and power of God beyond that of humanity. “[W]hen confidence faltered in man’s efforts to cope with such natural
disasters, secular authorities joined in the invocation of divine mercy” (Hay & Law 1998:83).

As in times of famine mentioned earlier, the spirit of the Renaissance was used to express the fears that had gripped the leaders following sustained attacks of the plague.

In 1458 the council of the Viterbo commissioned an altarpiece of the Madonna of mercy for its chapel, the councillors being portrayed gathered under the Virgin’s protective mantle (Hay & Law 1998:83).

However, all these efforts did not always work out successfully, nor were they an indication of the growing competence of the Renaissance state. Such calamities were beyond the knowledge and resources of the governments of the day. Flaws by government officials, coupled with inefficiency and inconsistency “plagued” the system. Some officials would grant food export licences contrary to the Papal decrees. In these times of crisis revealed the state’s narrowness of vision. “[T]he great Friulian noble, Antonio Savorgnan, established himself politically with a big following in Udine in 1504 by posing as a champion of the poor against racketeers in the sale of flour. In Venice (1523) the doge Andrea Gritti celebrated his election by distributing wheat from his private granaries”. In case of the plague, some officials in the commune of Bitonto employed a public doctor whose concession package was ridiculously expensive, and revealed what Hay and Law consider to be a flaw in the manner of conducting employment agreements. For example, alongside tax immunity and a free house, this same doctor had the right to quit the city if the plague broke out (cf Hay & Law 1989:84).

Hay and Law noted that, "the bulk of charity and relief was provided by the church, confraternities, guilds and individuals, though often with the encouragement of the state” (Hay & Law 1989: 84). The laity founded hospitals, some being encouraged by their bishops. These efforts saw the founding of the Innocetti of Florence in 1419 under the patronage of the Silk Weavers. Two lay confraternities demonstrated the efficiency of the hospice at Bigallo (1425). Anguillara court and proceeds from the sale of Cardinal Stefano Nardini’s property later in 1483 supported and maintained St.
Salvatore hospital. Individuals like Christopher Columbus offered a tenth of his personal revenue to reduce the level of taxation for basic foodstuffs. Once again, it was time for an artist to offer a memorial painting communicating the charitable sentiments of the day.

A fresco painted on the wall of the Luogo Pio della Carita of Milan in 1486 showed citizens distributing bread to the poor, while around 1520 the famous hospital of St. Maria del Ceppo in Pistoia commissioned a frieze in glazed terracotta depicting the seven acts of mercy (cf Hay & Law 1989:84).

With this constant return of the artists to the Christian tradition in their works of art, one wonders as to what was the state of Christianity and what influence did it have on the Renaissance society.

1.1.2.3 Christianity and the rise of moral crisis

Churches, monasteries, and the clerics were the symbols of morality in the medieval period. Religious observances were among the outward expressions of Christian presence in the Italian city-states. Papal authority, usually represented by a bishop, reinforced such symbols of religion. There were church services, and sermons were preached to the members of the public (see Burckhardt 1958:451). However, in spite of this flow of religious life, when understood against the background of the end of the Roman rule and the universal authority of the Papacy, the disintegration of the Roman Empire had cast a shadow on the authority of Christendom. Besides, the Italians were considered to be the least in holding high any religious morality in Europe. Nor did the Italians hold the Pope’s religious authority in high regard, a sentiment attributed perhaps to their nearness to Rome (cf Helm 1961:107-112).

Machiavelli, whose ideas were discussed earlier, made the most revealing comments on the morality of the Italian population and the moral character of the church leadership at the time. Burchhardt, a well-considered Italian Renaissance historian, reports on Machiavelli’s statement: “We Italians are irreligious and corrupt above others” (see Burckhardt 1958:427). Another comment offered during the same period suggested that, while the Italians responded naturally to religion and morality in their so-called undeveloped state, now that they were “developed”, they had “outgrown” the limits of morality and religion.
These views on moral deterioration were shared by many scholars at the time, to the extent that “the political ruin of the nation seemed inevitable; there were ... serious thinkers who saw a connection between this ruin and the prevalent immorality” (Burckhardt 1958:427). Antiquity had impressed on the people the ideal of morality as expressed in saints as the highest honour, an ideal to be pursued by every individual. However, in these latter years of the Renaissance, it was clear that holiness as a Christian ideal of life had been substituted by the historical cult of greatness. In any case, the growing generations had character models who, in spite of their faults and vices, were great heroes of success. This success was often measured in terms of intellectual, economic, and sometimes political power. This was a departure from the medieval measure of success that was based on religious saintliness. Against the background of this moral degeneration, Burckhardt observes:

…it cannot be denied that Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century found itself in the midst of grave moral crisis, out of which the best men saw hardly any escape (Burckhardt 1958:427).

In many ways, the church leadership had to be blamed for moral deterioration, as Machiavelli concluded: “because the church and her representatives set us the worst examples” (see Burckhardt 1958:427). This wisdom from Burckhardt is worth noting.

The gifted men of the day thought to find it (moral force) in the sentiment of honour. This is that enigmatic mixture of conscience and egoism which often survives in the modern man after he has lost, whether by his own fault or not, faith, love, and hope. This sense of honour is compatible with much selfishness and great vices, and may be the victim of astonishing illusion; yet, nevertheless, all the noble elements that are left in the wreck of a character may gather round it, and from this fountain may draw new strength (Burckhardt 1958:428).

Some of the noted moral problems included gambling, an unparalleled spirit of retribution, and populist meting out of justice. These problems increased as one moved further from city centres, where the plaintiff was also the judge of his own assailant. Prostitution was common among unmarried women, while murders resulted from reprisals against men who were commonly unfaithful. Sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea were common, as many pursued the spirit of
hedonism. Individualism created an overt spirit of insubordination of the populace toward the police. Premeditated murders, some often involving a third party, occurred in a greater proportion than elsewhere and ever before in Europe. Crime was so rampant that it had “acquired almost a personal existence of its own” (Burckhardt 1958:434-437).

Moral decadence was evident in people of every social class. Depravity was common in most of the popes, the emperors, bishops, clergy and the laity, rich and poor alike, confirming Machiavelli’s observation regarding the church leadership of the time as being weak models of morality. Ironically, the church’s representative sold indulgences for absolution of sin, while they needed absolution themselves. This was the contradiction that set the likes of Martin Luther to call for reformation (1522). However, there were calls for moral change. Two personalities, Savonarola and Erasmus, are worth mentioning with regard to their quest for moral transformation.

Savonarola, a Dominican friar from Ferrara, was among the few preachers whose sermons - mostly political - challenged churchgoers in the cathedral in Florence. In prophetic pronouncements, he “foretold that a sword should come upon the earth to reform the church and without delay” (Hollings 1959:87). His prophecies came true when Emperor Charles V overran Rome and brought punishment to the papacy. In his preaching career, he “applied his intimate knowledge of the bible to everyday problems” (Hollings 1959:87). The combination of his intellect and a fiery eloquence naturally helped him to “keep the attention of the critical and fickle Florentine public year after year without falling in estimation” (Hollings 1959:88). As a politician, he took an even more radical approach to moral transformation. He sought to transform the Medici constitution, gearing it toward a moral reform of the population. He had personal influence over the friars Puritan Movement in Florence, which instituted the ritual of the “‘Burning of the Vanities’ (great public bonfires), in which a clearance was made of many articles of luxury or fashion – false hair, cards, charms, masks, scents, undesirable books and pictures” (Hollings 1959:88-89; italics SBN).

During Savonarola’s career in Florence, there was noticeable outward change in the population, which was also interpreted as a reflection of inward transformation. However, his descent into the political strife in Florence soon brought him into
factional conflict. Some of his loss of popularity arose from his support of the French, and the puritan rule, which he imposed, on the Florentines during his political leadership. Because of his critical sermons to the Papacy, he was tried by the Papal commissioners for his utterance that a “pope who errs, does not represent the church”. Savonarola was excommunicated in 1497 and burnt in 1498 in the same square where, the year before, the people had, on his instructions, burnt their ‘vanities’” (Helm 1961:72).

Savonarola’s use of political power to restore morality, and his unpopular political alliance with France, cost him his prophetic role and eventually his life. The Pope took advantage of his miscalculations and since he did not have the support of his city any more. Hollings concludes: “His place is among those who are given a power beyond their fellows, to love righteousness and hate iniquity. It was this force in him that called forth the devotion of his followers; that attracted to him men of the world and level-headed politicians; that has for ever enshrined his memory in the city that he loved” (Hollings 1959:90).

Erasmus (1466 –1536) was an even greater moral teacher. His wide influence was rated alongside that of St. Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth and Voltaire of the eighteenth centuries. Erasmus, a man of humble beginnings, struggled through a scholarly life of poverty, to become one of the most influential thinkers of his time and beyond his lifetime. He was influenced by the Brethren of Common Life, whose emphasis was placed “on simplicity of thought, behaviour and worship and on essentials rather than on outward ceremonial or hair-splitting argument” (Helm 1961:31). One of the examples of their teaching is given by Helm from the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a’ Kempis (1380-1471) when he rhetorically asked, “of what advantage is it to dispute profoundly about the doctrine of the Trinity, if by your lack of humility you are all the while displeasing the Trinity?” (Helm 1961:31). Erasmus adopted this style of teaching and preaching, and became popular as a thinker of his time and a reference for later years.

Erasmus had studied Greek and Latin, and used his skill to teach and translate texts. He challenged the emphasis on symbolism in ritualistic worship of the relics of the saints at the expense of the mind and gospel tenet communicated and lived by the
Erasmus also supported Martin Luther’s reformation stance, although he considered him to be “rude” in his approach. However, his rationale was that Luther was on the side of the truth and therefore needed support, or else everyone, including the truth, would be silenced forever. In a satire, Erasmus comments:

"Luther has been sent into the world by the genius of discord. Every corner is disturbed by him. All admit that the corruption of the church requires a drastic medicine. But drugs wrongly given, make the sick man worse (1521)." (Helm 1961:34).

Helm, in his thorough analysis of Erasmus’ writings, observes that these writings progressively “instigated” Luther leading to the event when Luther attached his thesis to the cathedral door. It is argued by Helm that it was Erasmus who produced the Reformation (cf Helm 1961:30–40). Erasmus insisted on translation of the Scriptures so that people might have a clear knowledge of Christ and follow him. In his satirical writing and preaching, he exposed the immorality of the church leadership, poor teaching, and over-emphasis on rituals rather than moral change. It was out of this period that Martin Luther arose. Erasmus had cautiously approved of Luther’s truthful utterances when he said:

"Luther has said many things excellently well. I could wish that he would be less rude in his manner. He would have strong support behind him, and might do real good. But at any rate, unless we stand by him when he is right no one hereafter will dare to speak the truth (Helm 1961:34)."
Phillips concludes:

Erasmus’ importance lies in his immense contemporary influence; in his satirical writings, which certainly played their part in drawing men’s attention to abuses in the church and so helped to produce the reformation – however much he might protest that this was not his intention; in his letters, with their eyes for the significant detail; in his “massive erudition”, displayed in his work as an editor of texts- He remains aware of the context, the historical circumstances, and the time and place of each text that he examined (in Helm 1961:36).

According to Burckhardt, the morality of the Italians could only be considered to be alive with their consciousness of God that had hitherto been translated in divine-led government. For the Italian, this divine government was one under the papacy, based on their belief in God, maintained in Christendom. The outward symbol of this Christendom was the Church, represented by the Pope, his bishops and priests. When the Church representatives became corrupt, some Christians tried to keep their faith in spite of everything. However, a lasting contradiction between a principle and its outward expression could not be sustained. It was an even heavier responsibility upon the Church in its decaying years to uphold the absolute truth by the “most violent means a doctrine which she had distorted to serve her own aggrandizement” (Burckhardt 1958:444). Therefore it was the Church which levelled mortal blows against the conscience and the intellect of nations, and drove multitudes of the noblest spirits, whom she had inwardly estranged, into the arms of unbelief and despair (cf Burckhardt 1958:444). As the Renaissance spread all over Europe, so did the moral deterioration, leaving the people with a superficial and merely outward form of Christianity.

1.1.3 From an Italian to a European Renaissance

Do we have evidence of the Renaissance spirit elsewhere in Europe? Some aspects of renaissance outside Italy could be located elsewhere in Europe such as “the literature and poetry of Chaucer (c1340-1400)” (Helm 1961:25). Interest in humanity and critical observation and love of nature had its enthusiasts. Comparisons between Italy’s power-politics, the extent of luxury, even cruelty in those wielding power and the “Court of the Duke of Burgundy” (Helm 1961:25) show that similar political impression in the mentioned aspects were prevalent elsewhere in Europe. Art and
painting were indeed being practised north of Italy. However, as mentioned earlier, Italians drew greater inspiration from the spirit of the renaissance than people anywhere else in Europe.

Humanism was the philosophy of the renaissance period. If the north flocked into Italy, this is what they came for – to have a share of classical learning, whose mixture with paganism would free human minds from what was considered to be Christian paternalism. In many ways, there was a desire to be freed from the oppressive religious and political rule of the Christian church. “To contemporary Europe north of the Alps, the first and greatest impact of the Italian renaissance was not artistic but intellectual – the ‘New Learning’ as they called it” (Helm 1961:26). There was a sense in which this process was an exchange of ideas. The medium found for this enterprise was education. Italian scholars moved northwards and European visitors came into Italy. Along with their knowledge many books, which had been produced by humanists, were circulated (See Hay 1961:197).

The Brethren of the Common Life impacted on the spread of the Italian renaissance through the “new, secular, pietistic movement” (Helm 1961:26). They influenced men like Erasmus, mentioned above, through biblical scholarship. Although they were not humanists, it was their movement that developed into some “patterns of German humanism” (Helm 1961:27). Elsewhere in Europe, aspects of Italian renaissance “were felt late, and usually in such a modified form that national characteristics prevailed over Italian ones” (Helm 1961:27).

Following below are brief outlines of personalities and events associated with the spread of the Italian renaissance to some parts of Europe.

Cardinal Jimenez (1437-1517) founded a university at Alcala in Spain. Here Greek and Oriental languages were studied. The Cardinal is said to have used this opportunity of Renaissance scholarship for endeavours in Catholic reform (cf Helm 1961:28).

Lefevre d’ Etaples (1450-1536), a Frenchman, returned to France from Italy in 1493. He wrote a commentary on St. Paul and translated the gospels into French. As a
result, France produced some renowned Renaissance writers, for example Philippe de Commines (1447-1511) and Rabelais (1495-1553) (Helm 1961:28).

John Colet (1466-1519) returned to England from Italy in 1496, having studied in Italy for a couple of years. He lectured in Oxford on St. Paul’s Epistles in a ‘modern’ (renaissance) humanist manner. He founded St. Paul’s School in London (1510) and equipped it with Latin grammar (cf Helm 1961:28). With John Colet were men like Linacre, Lily, and Pole, who out of thirty, while on diplomatic duties, had the opportunity to frequent Italy for knowledge (Hay 1961:201).

A German artist, Drer (1471-1528), once visited Venice in 1494, returned later (1555-1556), and was in Italy for eighteen months. His notebook and art work bear witness of the Italian influence he experienced during these visits. He is responsible for spreading Renaissance art in northern Europe (cf Helm 1961:29; Hay 1961:200). Generally, Germany seemed to be more responsive to the Italian renaissance than France or England. Many Germans came from Augsburg and Nurnberg to Italy, looking for new education and literary programmes. It was this new cultural movement of the early 16th century, with its patriotic spirit, that was expressed in the Reformation (Hay 1961:198). Another noted scholar was Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), a humanist trained by the Brethren of Common Life at Deventer. He was a lawyer and later a Papal Legate in Germany (Helm 1961:29).

These scholars are but a few examples of people who experienced the direct influence of the Italian Renaissance from the Italian institutions of learning, and subsequently aided in spreading the renaissance spirit all over Europe.

Successive internal and foreign wars that culminated in the sack of Rome (1527) dealt a closing blow to the early Italian city-states. The war situation aided the spread of the renaissance on one hand, while awakening the Italians’ spirit on the other hand. Hay notes that

before 1494 and after there were many political refugees in and around the French court as a result of French concern with Italian affairs; and in the train of retreating French armies came scholars and artists who might not otherwise have lived in France (Hay 1961:199).
The attack of the combined brutal armies of Germany and Spain in the imperial expansionist wars of Emperor Charles V of Germany (1516-1558) (see Hollings 1959: 81; Cronin 1969:76-95) plundered the city-states. They were joined by the Italian soldiery looting works of art and a wealth of accumulated writings that had made Italian city-states the envy of Europe. The invasion by the Spanish and German soldiers was to be a turning point in Italian history. Cecilia observes:

It was the fate of the second Medici Pope to experience the full horrors of foreign invasion, when for three days, in May 1527, Rome was plundered by greedy and fanatical German and Spanish soldiers. The sack of Rome marked the end of the Italian renaissance. Some of the leading figures of the age… had been dead for several years; now scholars, arts were dispersed, and irreparable loss was suffered through the destruction of books, manuscripts, bronzes, marbles and other treasures (Cecilia 1960:163-164).

As a result of these defeats, there was widespread disillusionment among most Italians, as they felt helpless in the face of the overpowering invaders. The confidence of the humanists was shattered, and they realized that man could not, after all, accomplish or preserve anything that he wanted. The armies that conquered them had shown them that national military power determined the destiny of the weak city-states.

Four general causes stand out as leading to the demise of the Italian city-states.

(i) While the spirit of renaissance prevailed, it was the state of moral decadence that was responsible for the collapse of the Italian city-states by the second half of the 15th century.

There was ecclesiastical intolerance toward intellectual freedom following the Reformation events connected with Martin Luther (1522). The intellectual milieu started to shift from Italy to different national centres in Europe.

(ii) The ethos of the Italian renaissance had remained in the domain of the city-state elite, while the city-state hinterlands – the contados - were never reached by the renaissance spirit.
There was a general lack of committed sense of patriotism among the Italian elitists. Although many people knew themselves to be Italians, they nevertheless concentrated on business in these fragmented city-states. They left matters of city-state defence to mercenaries fighting internal wars – city-states against each other. Such rivalries often led to the seeking of foreign alliances, which in turn took advantage of the military weakness of the city-states’ defence systems.

The trade centre shifted from Italy to the Atlantic, and took away the economic life-line that had put Italy in the limelight of economic development.

Although the spirit of renaissance was drastically reduced, its impact was irreversible. It had marked a transition from medieval to modern civilisation. There were major developments in economics, arts, political thought, and science. As regards economics, the Renaissance period “saw the emergence of commercial capitalism and partial control of economic affairs by the state through a series of empirical decisions, later known collectively as Mercantilism”. (Helm 1961:317). These developments in commercial volume and discipline led to faster economic growth within the context of the transitory nature of this period. Although there had been an economic depression in the greater part of the 16th century, later, an unbroken line of development ensued, running to the middle of the 18th century (cf Helm 1961:317-8). The main features noted during this period were surplus capital, international financiers, and larger units of both agriculture and industry. The spirit of the renaissance had seen the expansion of cities of international exchange, especially the German ones, which boosted trade to international proportions.

The Renaissance provided the transition from “medieval” to “modern” Europe with all its achievements in art, literature, science, politics, and economic development. But it unfortunately also put Europe in a position of dominance which would have far-reaching effects on the African continent. This will be examined in the next section.


1.1.4 The European Renaissance and its effect on Africa

Economic developments during the European Renaissance became the impetus behind the search for new lands. This is how Europeans “found” Africa, especially the lands beyond the Sahara Desert. An increased sense of materialism, motivated by mercantile economics, and the stamina and adventurous spirit of the Renaissance man broke the fears and superstitions that were associated with the vast sea-waters. The inventions and innovations of the renaissance period provided the needed competent heavy seagoing vessels and manoeuvring equipment, and gunpowder provided confidence and military superiority in the face of any attackers. This resulted in Europe’s “discovery” of Sub-Saharan Africa.

This “discovery” of Africa by Europe was to become crucial to the social and politico-economic development of the African continent. Myths were developed which dehumanised the black Africans, to justify their treatment as commercial goods in the infamous slave trade. This trade strengthened the economic foundation benefiting countries, especially of England (cf Davidson 334-335). Over a period of four centuries (16th to 19th), Africa lost over 24 million people through the slave trade. Although research efforts have been made to quantify the final numbers of black people lost from Africa, the worst effect of the slave trade is seen not so much in terms of numbers as in the development of racial polarisation between Europeans and Blacks. Hull has argued that the slave trade, among other negative effects on human relations in the world, created racial prejudice (cf Hull 1972:90-99). The distortion of Africans’ identity carried on into the colonial era from 1884 to the 1950s as a token of “civilisation”. The result was political subjugation and economic exploitation.

This expansionist trend was sparked off by the Portuguese in the 15th century when, in 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in the Bahamas. Many historians such as Davidson (1994:337-342); Hull (1972:92); Freund (1984:51), researching the question of the slave trade in Africa, agree that slavery had existed earlier in Africa. They also confirm that evidence is available indicating the presence of slave trade between African chiefs and the Arabs before 1444. Arabs had, for about a century, penetrated Africa and dealt in slave trade with the African chiefs. However, the distortion of the Africans’ identity and the systematic economic exploitation were
sponsored by Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) through huge expeditions organised to hunt slaves in Africa’s interior. This trend was continued for well over four centuries (Asiwaju and Crowder 1978:1-20; Freund 1984:39-58; Davidson 1994:318-342). This is what later developed into the Atlantic trade. Ironically, the motivation for these expeditions was an effort to break the Islamic monopoly of slave trade in Africa. So the Christians in Europe were organised for a kind of last crusade against Moslems (cf Fage 1933:15). Prince Henry instructed his human-hunters to go deep and break the Arab slave trade domination in the heart of Africa. A dehumanising description and treatment of black human beings by Europeans, as Fage put it,

for these black people of the Tropics – stayed sunk in primitive barbarism, the most backward of the major races of men. To more fortunate and forward folk in the other continents they seemed at first contact to be little above animals. But in one thing, it seemed from the outset, they excelled - in physical strength. They could work, or be made to work with a whip, both hard and long (Fage 1933:11).

However, within this description is embedded an escape from a proper recognition of another human being, save for a utility description. Davidson confirms this in his argument:

To justify the enslavement of the Africans, in short, it was culturally necessary to believe, or be able to believe, that Africans were inherently and naturally less human, were beings of a somehow subhuman, nonhuman nature (Davidson 1994:320).

This was to become the cultural bias in the context of the slave trade, modern imperialism, and the evils of racism in Africa. This, Davidson maintains, was a departure from the ancient xenophobia or the superstitious ‘fear of the dark’ (Davidson 1994:320). If this is the case, then Europeans of the renaissance period stand in contrast to the Renaissance spirit, during which the dignity of the individual was being asserted.

The conquest of the Americas, Brazil, and the Caribbean Islands by Christopher Columbus (1492-1501) increased the demand for slaves, to provide the needed labour to plough the land. Obtaining slaves from Africa would provide this labour. Prince
Henry’s success superseded the efforts of the Venetians and Genoans of the Italian city-states, whose trade had been limited to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and eastwards by land. The sea adventurers were driven by the motivation to find markets for some European goods and to look for supplies for industries in Europe. The establishment of mercantilism did not favour poor Africa, for it was based on maximising profit for the Europeans. Some mercantile principles included “collecting as much gold and silver for the state: have a favourable balance of trade, sell more to strangers than what you consume of theirs in value” (Helm 1961:330-334). Self-sufficiency was the key in all essentials and manufacturing industries. Creation of markets for manufactured goods led to increased state naval developments for protection of merchant ships and later transportation of military weapons in colonial expansionist wars (cf Helm 1961:331).

The result of Europe’s “discovery” of Africa became more than a labour resource for the Americas. The relationship between Europe and Africa became one in which Africa was socially suppressed, politically colonised, manipulated, and economically exploited (cf Nkrumah 1963:15-19, 102; Harbeson and Rothechild 1995:23, 49-52; Davidson 1994:12-13, 53, 81, 100-101, 263-264). The fact that the early effects of the European renaissance on Africa were clearly dehumanising makes one even more curious as to the origin and intentions of the developments of an “African Renaissance”.

1.2 Historical review of the African Renaissance

The development of an African renaissance will be dealt with under three historical themes: the Pan-African Movement; the Harlem Renaissance; and the African struggle for political freedom.

Does the African Renaissance have a history of which a review is possible? Was the term “African Renaissance” 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). 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. We shall return to these, starting with the Pan-African Movement of 1900 in America.

1.2.1 Pan-African Movement, 1900

The roots of Africa’s revival can be traced as far back as the beginnings of the “Pan-African” Movement in 1900. The term was coined from a Greek word *Pan* which means *all*. As such, “Pan-African” meant “all-Africa”. Originally the concerns of this movement had developed among black communities of African descent in North America and the Caribbean islands. They shared common suffering caused by racial segregation against Afro-Americans, although this was long after they had acquired emancipation following the Civil Rights movement (cf Davidson 1994:32).

This glimpse of awakening against racial suppression of their black identity led to a popular movement called “Back to Africa” by Africans in diaspora, led by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s. Once in Africa, so he urged his listeners, they would feel the unsuppressed sense of belonging, and could pursue unhindered self-determination. However, they had lost not only the African culture but also the language. They did not know of any specific location to which they could return. Earlier, two areas had been established and allocated to free slave returnees to Africa. These were Sierra Leone in 1787 by British philanthropists and Liberia in 1827 by USA (cf Asiwaju et al. 1978:92-116; Freund 1984:66-77). Even in these two countries the Africans were far from experiencing self-determination (see Wilson 1994:59). Garvey and his ‘back to Africa’ movement will be discussed later under the “Harlem Renaissance” (1920-1930).

The Africans in diaspora, as they came to be known in later years (cf Asiwaju et al. 1978:92-116), continued to pursue the ideals of the ‘Pan-African’ or ‘Pan-Black’ movement, which included building up a ‘defence’ for Africans in Africa. The first Pan-African meeting was held in London in 1900. Its initial membership and objective had everything to do with the revival of Africa. It demonstrated a nostalgic spirit of a people with an African ancestry who, though freed from slavery, continued to experience racial segregation. As such, they were united in their colour and
sufferings in relation to the conditions of Africans under colonial rule (cf Davidson 1994:32).

The 1900 Pan-African agenda bore a fundamental element in defence of Africans, when they protested against Queen Victoria concerning the treatment of Africans in colonial South Africa and Rhodesia. Of the 32 delegates who attended this forum, four came directly from Africa. In their proceedings, they highlighted Africa’s achievements and also demanded political and economic equality. The Lagos Standard Newspaper, run by Africans, hailed this 1900 Pan-African congress as “an event in the history of the race movement which for its importance and probable results, is perhaps without parallel” (Davidson 1994:32-33).

Subsequent forums were held in 1919 (London), 1921 (Brussels), 1923 (London and Lisbon), and 1927 (New York). By this time, the Pan-African idea had taken on a new form. Africans in Africa would take the lead, while Afro-Americans would provide moral support and solidarity. One leading writer, Kobina Sekyi (1892-1956), expressed this development when he wrote that any sound plan for African progress must be controlled and directed from Africa by Africans (see Davidson 1994:33). This movement, which started off as “Pan-black” or “Pan-Negro”, grew up into the “Pan-African idea”, which was affirmed in the congress of 1945, held in Manchester, England. Here leading African nationalists raised their demands, which included independence for Africa.

Names associated with this Pan-African movement include: Liberian diplomat Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912); a Jamaican, Marcus Moziah 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.

The Pan-African spirit sparked off revolutionary forces for national freedom in British, French, and Portuguese colonies in Africa. At first, movements were limited to the elite, who had received education through missionary schools or from Western institutions abroad. But slowly, nationalistic movements reached the workers, farms, and the ordinary people at grassroots (cf Davidson 1994:89-91). This spirit of self-determination was irreversible, reaching its final goal in 1994, when South Africa became the last African country (54th) to attain political freedom and a democratically elected non-racist government for all Africans. Having achieved this objective, it seemed appropriate to announce the long-awaited economic development, a subject to which we shall return later.

1.2.2 The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance injected some momentum into the development of the Pan-African movement. This movement demonstrated that African people could rise above dehumanising pressures and reveal their human potential to the world. This moment came in the 1920s and 1930s in what was termed the “Harlem Renaissance”. This was a time of the flowering of Afro-American Art, Letters, and Dance. Its achievements were registered in literature, thought, painting and music compositions. This movement also expressed strong elements of Black Nationalism, highlighted by

However, the African leaders found themselves and their nations in dire contradiction to political and economic development. These included poverty, diseases, widespread illiteracy, and rampant political and armed civil conflicts on the continent. This is the context that seems to negate the development of the African Renaissance.
a spirit of racial consciousness. This led to increased militancy and vigorous agitation by a newly formed “National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People” (NAACP), a movement that joined the mainstream of Civil Rights organisations.

The term Harlem “Renaissance” could be a misnomer, since the movement was more of a “birth” than a “rebirth”. For never before had black Americans produced so much literary, artistic, and scholarly material at the same time. The quality of its development can be traced along the footsteps of poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar, novelist James Weldon, Johnson, the essay writer. W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey, who were among the adopted sons of the Harlem Renaissance and who made significant contributions to developing its links with the African continent.

Garvey, mentioned earlier, 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).

Garvey’s Harlem renaissance career reached its peak in August 1920, when he presided over an international convention in New York. The blacks who had come from many parts of the world elected Garvey, who “was named provisional President of Africa and given a vague mandate to free Africa from white domination” (Cronon 1994:583). It is not mentioned anywhere whether Garvey ever visited Africa. However, he had great influence over African leaders such as Nkwame Nkrumah, later the president of Ghana and the proponent of African Unity in the struggle for politico-economic self-determination. To this important aspect of this study we shall now turn.
1.2.3 The striving for political self-determination

The achievement of political freedom for Africa was the first goal of the Pan-African movement. The forerunners of this view had argued that this would open up Africa’s potential for overall social and politico-economic self-determination. Nkrumah, in furthering this view, advocated political parties whose programmes would aim at achieving ‘Freedom first’ for all African countries. They coined a slogan ‘Seek ye first the political kingdom’. Without political independence, they argued, “none of our plans for social and economic development could be put into effect” (Nkrumah 1963:50).

Nkrumah’s insistence on political ‘freedom first’ was not without opposition. Leopold Seder Senghor, the proponent of the Negritude Movement, was initially apolitical. Senghor’s approach influenced some African thinkers, who pursued identity and cultural emancipation as their first step toward political freedom. Senghor’s argument was based on the fact that the Africans did not have a feasible political culture, because it had been eroded by assimilation through colonial conditioning. He therefore advocated cultural development, through which the African would recover his dignity and identity. In other words, the African was no longer “African”. For the assimilated African, or better still, the distorted African, thought like a European, and sought after European “goods”, as such being neither African nor European. The most distorted identities were those of the middle class Africans aspiring to become African political leaders.

Senghor thus coined a slogan “seek ye first the ‘cultural’ kingdom” (see Hymans 1971:96-99), by which the African character could possibly be recovered. As revolutionary forces mounted for African nationalism, Senghor (1953-4) was busy urging French territories overseas to remain under French Union as French republics in Africa (cf Hymans 1871:160) for the sake of their politico-economic development. The trail for those seeking a political kingdom remained strong, to the extent that Senghor himself contested and won elections to be the first President of Senegal (1960-1970). Most former French colonies in Africa however remained under French economic mentorship.
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 Nkwame 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. Below we shall turn to the objectives of this challenge, for the revival of the African continent.

1.2.4 Objectives of the African Renaissance

The objectives of the developing African Renaissance were tentative, because of the emerging capacity of African countries to engage each other. This engagement has led to the discovery of one another and the need to complement each other in pursuit of social and politico-economic development for the whole of Africa. This can be
achieved if Africans rediscover who they are and stand united to achieve the objectives of Renaissance.

Whereas the objectives of the development of an African Renaissance seem to be many and varied, they can be summed up as one major quest for the recovery of the distorted identity of Africans, and the assertion of African people in their self-determination and participation in the social and politico-economic life of the global village. It is also important to include the quest for an Africa Union as expression of a continent’s solidarity.

1.2.5 African unity

The achievement of African unity perhaps forms the prime objective that marks, or would mark, 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 countries. 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 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).

23 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.
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).

Such a goal would be achieved through the union of African states, grounded in “the pan-African doctrine drawn from the bitter experiences of modern-day Africa worldwide” (Makgoba 1999:9). This intellectual legacy of pan-Africanist thinkers should be enriched and implemented by “the actors of the African Renaissance” (Makgoba 1999:9). 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.

1.2.5.1 Economic integration

The second objective arises from the first one: Africa’s unity, which overcomes artificial racial, national, or ethnic conflict, would create 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).
More than three decades after Nkrumah’s observation, African leaders have failed to achieve the unity of the African continent. Consequently, many countries fell prey to the manipulating hand of the former colonial powers. The post independence economies in Africa were characterised by neo-colonialism. Two divergent economic ideological blocs prompted this force, namely the Western capitalist and the Eastern communist blocs. The Western bloc, which comprised Africa’s former colonial masters, renewed their interest in Africa. Their alliance was a means of resisting communist influence, and was a setback for Africa’s development. The moral leadership of the African leaders was in a dilemma. While seeking alliances with a power that would support the interests of Africa as a political strategy, many leaders fell prey to the devious schemes of Euro-Western foreign policies. As a result, African leaders who demonstrated a departure from the Western capitalist inclinations were out-manoeuvred through intra-state military alliances (cf Gordon et al. 1996:131-158; Davidson 1978:304-325). It was this political force, later known as the Cold War, which set African leaders against each other, as the ideological differences drove them apart (cf Nkrumah 1963:177; Makgoba 1999:54-56). The end of the Cold War (1989) demonstrated that Euro-Western alliances were only strategic, as they withdrew their financial support from their long time allies such as that given to Mubutu by the USA.

Sadly, intra-state armed political conflicts, supported by external forces under the guise of the Cold War, created a lot of suffering among African people. Ultimately, social and politico-economic developments stalled. Africa’s already impoverished situation worsened. Unfortunately, even when Euro-Western ideological strategy ended with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, bitter political factions have remained in many African countries. Some of them, like the “Democratic Republic” of Congo and Somalia, have never claimed state control of their people within their established national borders. Would these be the “negations” which Magubane said would motivate us rather than discourage us in the development of an “African Renaissance”? Perhaps this and other African problematic situations call for integrated effort, a prerequisite for economic development. By so doing, African leaders would have achieved the fulfilment of the first objective, namely, African unity.
Makgoba reiterated some of the benefits of this 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 an 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 the 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”.

### 1.2.5.2 The role of the intellectuals in Africa’s rebirth

Mahmood Mamdani regards intellectual rebirth as “an urgent need”, given the extent of mental colonisation. An intellectual reawakening is imperative, both as an objective and driving force, for the development of an “African Renaissance” (Mamdani 1999:129). “African Renaissance” points to a new sense of self – a new way of looking at history and one’s place in it. The awakening is located at the point of our realisation that we were born of in a different historical period. This realisation calls for a rethinking and a rewriting of our history. In so doing, we redefine our place in history, and give ourselves a sense of self-worth and a renewed sense of urgency for our socio-political determination (cf Mamdani 1999:130).

Mamdani goes on to acknowledge that the intelligentsia are central to the process of identity formation, because purportedly institutions reproduce and change identities. He observes that, unfortunately in the development of this African Renaissance, we seem to have the political entity operating at the presidential level, and less awareness, let alone active engagement with Africa’s rebirth among Africans in the rural communities on the African continent. Mamdani maintains that we also need cultural and academic input, but we should not restrict the activity to the elite, since this omission would limit the progress of the revival of the continent.
Mbeki has often alluded to the importance of Africa’s intelligentsia supporting Mamdani’s point of view. Mbeki maintains:

"The enormous brain power which our continent possesses must become a vital instrument in helping us to secure our equitable space within a world affected by a rapid process of globalisation and from which we cannot escape (Mbeki 1999: xxi)."

Mbeki is convinced that a great burden rests on the shoulders of Africa’s intelligentsia, for Africa to realise the objectives of an African Renaissance. Mbeki goes on to detail briefly the tools of the intelligentsia as

"Education, organization and energisation of the new African patriots who, because to them yesterday is a foreign country, join in the struggle to bring about an African Renaissance (Mbeki 1999: xxii)."

Mamdani wonders whether the continent has the necessary “intelligentsia to drive forward an African Renaissance” (Mamdani 1999:130). Mbeki, who acknowledges that Africa needs intellectual movements to drive the African Renaissance, raises this question also. Unfortunately, the effect of ‘brain drain’ on the continent limits intellectual contribution to the development of such a rebirth (cf Mbeki 1999: xxii; Serote 1999:354).

The performance of the intelligentsia was remarkable in the past in Africa’s realisation of independence, and is perhaps more needed now than ever before as a driving force in the development of an African Renaissance. Davidson recalls that it was the intelligentsia of the 1900s who “looked closely into the colonial system ... studied these systems ... (and) found out how these systems worked ... (then they) began to ask themselves what could be done to change them” (Davidson 1994:30). Consequently, these elites formed revolutionary movements for Africa’s independence. A realisation that the past successes were made possible by a committed intelligentsia is both a challenge and a motivation for the present intellectuals as they map their way forward.

H. S. Wilson records how, in the 1930s, the “new breed of African scholars identified strongly with the movement for African independence” (Wilson 1994:108). A
paradigm shift occurred from a preoccupation with colonial structures to processes of nation building. Most of these were “missionary-educated ‘Westernised’ or modernised elites”. Although Davidson and others criticise missionary-led education as colonial, at the same time they acknowledge the principle of learning in which the Africans of the colonial era were educated. They had their ‘eyes opened’ and took “the lead in the growing trend of independent thought (Davidson1994:88). As early as 1912, the results of missionary education had given rise to one of the first political movements on the African continent. This was the African Native National Congress, with the missionary-educated elites such as John Tengu Jabave, John Dube, Pixley Seme, and Solomon Plaatje of South Africa. (cf Davidson 1994:37-38)

Africans in diaspora, particularly in America, reflected on the works of a black artist of the Harlem Renaissance, in which Black achievements were highlighted. This inspiration was later connected with the “cultural birth experience by Black-French intellectuals in Paris, such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, influenced by Aime Cesaire in the 1930s, the founders of the “negritude” movement. The Harlem Renaissance in New York (1920-1930s) inspired people like Marcus Garvey in his grandiloquent “Back-to-Africa” sermons. Garvey had a great influence on the political thinking of Nkwame Nkrumah, as mentioned earlier. It was in the spirit of these people that the roots of Black Nationalism were founded. It later gave rise to notable African leaders such as Azikiwe of Nigeria, Nkrumah of Ghana, Akiki Nyabongo of Uganda, and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya (cf Asiwaju et al 1978:74).

For South Africa, the list of African giants of national struggle for emancipation and the subsequent call to an African Renaissance spirit included people like Pixley Ka Isaka Seme. Alongside Pixley are John Dube and Walter Rubusana, founders of one of the oldest political parties on the continent – the South African Native National Congress in 1912 (cf Oaskes 1988:288-289). Included among these great men is a man of incomparable intellectual competence, Solomon Tshekisho Plaatjies an intellectual who “spoke eight languages, edited three newspapers and wrote several

24 Pixley Seme, an attorney, had been educated in Colombia University in USA and later in Jesus College, Oxford. With him were three other lawyers, all foreign-educated, Alfred Mangena, Richard Msimang and George Montsioa. They held an inaugural conference to launch a national congress (1911) that would map the course of history in South Africa (cf Oaskes 1988:288). This was one of the preliminary meetings that led to the first meeting of the South African National Native Congress at Bloemfontein on the 8th January 1912 (Oaskes 1988:289).
books, including “Native Life in South Africa” (Oakes 1988:290). Their spirit gave birth to the African National Congress, which became the first democratically elected government in South Africa 82 years later (1912-1994).

1.2.5.3 Revival of African identity and culture

In South Africa, black inferiority had been pushed to its extreme as the racist government (1948-1994) entrenched laws that denied basic human rights to the black people. This was the cradle of the “Black Consciousness Movement”, as a reaction against entrenched racist policies based on an inferior regard for Africans or black people. The apartheid policies in South Africa were aimed at suppressing the African identity. Their appalling impact was achieved through the implementation of the Segregation Acts. I will single out the Bantu Education Act (1949), which resonated with the racist myths mentioned earlier.

The racist education policies in South Africa were developed by Hendrik Verwoerd (1949) and later by M. C. Botha (1970s). These Acts were part of what stirred up the Black Consciousness Movement. The National Party had simply reiterated the identity distortions of the black Africans first stated in the 15th century by political anthropologists and authors. Following in these footsteps, Verwoerd observed that the ‘native’ was different from his white counterpart, and therefore had to be taught differently (see Oakes 1988:379). Christian mission schools that were regarded as liberal, since they taught the Africans in rational disciplines, had to be phased out. The Nationalist Party regarded the African as having an “untrained mind” to which Verwoerd added later that the “Africans had to be measured by different standards: ‘The school’ he said, ‘must equip the Bantu to meet the demands which the economic life... will impose on them’” (Oakes 1988:379). As a political tool, “Bantu Education” was used to shatter the morale and potential of black South Africans. Education, supposed to be a means of social, politico-economic emancipation and development, was instead used to suppress human advancement.

A statement by Biko could have been said of most Africans elsewhere on the continent. He perceived that Africans had suffered from a double-sided oppression in colonial times, and in the South African apartheid era in particular. Externally,
Africans were victims of exclusion without political and economic power, or social and financial justice. Internally, black people, Biko maintained, “we were conditioned to feel inferior to and afraid of the whites” (Ferguson et al. 1988:102-103). Black Consciousness articulated that “political freedom lies in overcoming the inward alienation which enslaves the blacks”, and as such “mental emancipation” was “a precondition to political emancipation” (Ferguson et al. 1988: 103). Biko defined “Black Consciousness “...in essence the realisation by the Blackman (sic) of the need to rally together with his brothers (sic) around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin” (Ferguson 1988:103).

Being African was the spiritual aim of some of the students in mission schools and those who had studied abroad. They challenged the system that was designed to entrench a mentality of inferiority in the Africans. Black Consciousness was thus a “new African way of looking at the world”; “a new sense of pride in millions of Africans: blackness became something to be proud of, to be defiant about and worth fighting for” (Oakes 1988:441).

Black Consciousness injected a new spirit into the revolutionary forces, thereby revitalising some African countries that were losing hope fighting for their independence (1970s). Its prominence ranked alongside the rise of “Black power” of the USA (1920s) and the Negritude movement mentioned above under Leopold Sedar Senghor in the 1930s to the 1960s.

Consistent with the spirit of recovery of Africans’ identity and culture, Thabo Mbeki reiterates this spirit of reviving African identity and culture. He says that this is not just a way of asserting what has never been, but to revive Africanness that has always been the nature of black people in Africa. Thabo Mbeki, at the launch of South Africa’s democratic constitution on 8th May 1996, declared, “I am an African”, which he went on to interpret as:

> [A]n unambiguous identity, an African identity; a people with a particular history, a people from a particular civilisation, a people who are unique in their socialisation and their way of interpreting the world; a people distinct but interdependent with other peoples; a people with originality; a people that gave birth to humanity, language, science, technology, philosophy, wisdom, and so forth (Mbeki 1999: iv-v).
Mbeki takes further the struggle of recovery of identity. For him, the African identity is of theoretical “otherness”. The African must assert himself/herself and prove to the global community that he/she can determine his/her destiny. The African reserves the right to define him/herself. It may be consistent to conclude that Mbeki’s statement constitutes the rebirth of Senghor and Biko’s thoughts of an African emergence out of oppression. The perceived shackles of inferiority attached to the blackness of his/her skin are assumed to have fallen off. This process of the revival of the African identity is continued in the search and revival of the African culture, with a hope of recapturing what Africans were before the European era.

The revival of the African culture will have to grapple with the present challenges, with regard to identity and politico-economic self-determination in a global village. Efforts to revive the African past culture should keep the present challenges in mind. African culture might have been the basis and foundation of Graeco-Roman civilisation and later on the European renaissance. However, it may be necessary to accept that recipients of any civilisation do improve on what they have received, to make it adapt to their context. Whereas it may be true that world civilisation originated from Africa, it is also true that it has probably lost the African character. Rebirth of African culture should not be a process of recapturing what Africans were before the coming of the Europeans, but rather a display of an ingenuity that maintains the African character but seeks to improve and better the current level of world civilisation. This is a challenge that is yet to be realised, as many African people reconstruct and revive the past African culture against the forces of global change.

There is nostalgia for African culture before the Europeans found the continent and its people (15th century). Proponents of the revival of African culture, such as Mbulelo Mzamani, recall the rise and fall of African civilisations before the European civilisation. Mzamani maintains that the Greek philosophy, religion, and literature “would have been inconceivable without the Egyptian civilisation” (Mzamani 1999:177). One of the figures of the time associated with the Egyptian Pharaoh Zoser, was Imhotep “the wise”, considered to be one of the “world’s first multi-genius[es] and real father of medicine” (Mzamani 1999:177). He was the Pharaoh’s chief
counsellor and physician as well as the “architect of the world’s earliest stone building, the famous step pyramid of Sakkara near the ancient city of Memphis” (Mzamani 1999:173-183). Davidson confirms the recognition of the contribution of African civilisation to mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and philosophy to classical Greece in his discussion of Bernal’s models of historiography. In what Bernal calls the ‘Ancient Model’, it was accepted

as self-evident that European civilisation, launched from classical Greece in the sixth century B.C., was essentially and inseparably, though not exclusively, the product of older civilisations, above all those of Egypt and Phoenicia. This ‘Ancient Model’ as Bernal is careful to insist, gave full credit to the moral and intellectual achievements of classical Greece, but it still saw these as initially derived from Egypt, and to a lesser extent from the classic Phoenician civilisation (Davidson 1994:321).

One of the projects marking the revival of African culture is the historiographical paradigm through which the European deception about Africa is being opened up. Archaeological records have confirmed that Africa’s civilisation laid the foundation for the European Renaissance “which Eurocentric historians celebrate with scarcely a mention of its catalysts, the African and Arab men (sic) of learning” (Mzamani 1999:179).

Mzamani traces the glory of Africa in the civilisations of Egypt, Ethiopia, Ife and Benin, the Chad basin, the Songhay Empire of Ghana, Zimbabwe (Monomotapa) and the Bakuba kingdom in the Congo on the Equator. All these civilisations thrived until the “Moroccan occupation from the late sixteenth century” (1591) when “wrack and ruin became the order of the day” (Mzamane 1999:181; Davidson 1994:146). Moroccans in West Africa and the Arabs in parts of North and Eastern Africa destroyed the accumulated knowledge and wisdom. The Europeans, who monopolised the slave trade from 1444 for over four hundred years and later colonised the rest of Africa, nearly wiped out Africa’s former civilisation (cf Mzamane 1999:181-183).

Bernal is an American historian, author of Black Athena (1960), in which he deals with the complicated subject of racism. He correlates sources, and presents what he has called the “Ancient Model” in which the Greeks acknowledged the source of their civilisation. Then he introduces the “Aryan Model” in which the Europeans explained away the origin of Africa’s civilisation. They did so by asserting that Egypt was not part of Africa. The Aryan Model of history dominated the colonial era (cf Davidson 1994:318-333).
Since the end of colonialism, African countries have been making efforts to revive some aspects of the African culture, because more than five centuries lie between the present culture and the glories of the African civilisation at the end of the fifteenth century. It is difficult, if not impossible, to revive this former African culture. There is no longer what one can term “pure” African culture. What remains are unique distinguishing features in artefacts produced for the European tourist market (cf Maquet & Rayfield 1972:5-15).


[D]oes insistence on an African difference, even if it is not a discredited complex of values, traits, and practices, not amount to promoting a pure and unitary African essence in disregard of the obvious diversity of Africanities and in a world of hybrid cultures and identities? (Owomoyela 1996: ix)

Owomoyela’s overall approach toward African culture is one that accommodates the differences between the African and the Western cultures. He, however, decries the fact that the accommodation of the Western culture by Africans has meant the demise of the African languages, bearing in mind that a people’s language is one of the fundamental cultural features distinguishing one group of people from another. The “dead end”, as Obi Wali predicted, is noted in the dilemma of the rebirth of the African continent (African Renaissance) whose “literature which, although purporting to be African, is written in non-African languages” (see Owomoyela: 1996:3). Yet there is recognition that “language ... distinguishes one culture from another” (Owomoyela 1996:5). Through language, a people think, communicate and develop as a distinct community. Owomoyele goes on to contend that a people’s identity is tied up with their culture, but for the African, the blackness of their skin is another general distinguishing feature. Culture changes but the blackness of the skin shall remain. Therefore, the use of another language such as English is a contradiction of who Africans are. He makes a strong suggestion for a common African language (cf Owomoyela 1996:12-13).
The possibility of this endeavour was alluded to in the claims of Negritude as a means of recapturing Africanness. The diversity of cultures, languages, and dialects in Africa pose a communication barrier between African peoples themselves and create conflicts by which neo-colonial forces advance the ‘Afro-pessimism’ ideology. The situation was made worse by colonial influences that introduced three other languages which are regarded as “official” for conducting public business (cf Maquet & Rayfield 1972:5-15). However, knowing other people’s language paved the way for Africans to know and understand the machinations of the European attitudes against the African people. On a positive note, languages are bridges by which relationships are built and maintained in the global community. This positive presentation should not diminish the importance of a common African language that will accompany the blackness of the Africans’ identity in the global village as a distinct people. Identity and cultural renewal are the vehicles of politico-economic development and self-determination.

The pursuit of these qualities is critical to the development of an “African Renaissance”. But this high spirit of the development of an African Renaissance is not without contradictions. Some of them are so complex that they amount to a negation of a continent renewing itself. These negations have the capacity to inhibit and retard the renewal unless they are adequately addressed in the context of the African Renaissance. Like we did under the Italian Renaissance, we now briefly look at these inhibiting factors:

1.2.6 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 on its own as well as in relation to other factors. An addendum on the pandemic is attached at the end of this study.

26 Britain introduced English; France French, and Portugal Portuguese in their different colonies. Because language is a vehicle for cultural influences, African people are divided not only by their own local and dialectical variations but also by these three European languages. In a global village, this becomes an advantage for Africa, unintended by the colonialists, most of whom do not know any of the local African languages.
1.2.6.1 HIV/AIDS as complex moral challenge

The development of an African Renaissance is one of the positive movements African leaders have recently revived. Among other objectives, African Renaissance is intended to create a civil society in the context of the newly established African Union. A civil society is to be created through the revival of the identity of the African people whose identity was distorted through European myths, colonialism, and economic exploitation (cf Mazrui 1967:230-242). These myths dehumanised the African people. This led to some Africans suffering from a feeling of inferiority, when comparing themselves in terms of overall development to their white counterparts, and a mentality that was often followed by a striving to be like the Whites (cf Oakes 1988:443).

The years that followed the attainment of "independence" by some African countries after 195727 were characterised by poor leadership, which fell prey to the economic ideologies of the Western capitalistic bloc. Effectively, Euro-Western world continues to control Africa’s economy, and has often been indirectly involved in the political armed conflicts, especially through the sale of military equipment. Poverty, disease, ignorance, and political conflicts embody the suffering, which characterises the identity of the African people, while economic development, a long life span, enlightenment, and political stability characterise the identity of Europeans.

HIV/AIDS exacerbates the situation that is already threatened by economic exclusion from the developments of the global economy. Because of continued mismanagement of state politico-economic development, grants are now hard to obtain due to “donor fatigue”. The HIV/AIDS pandemic should serve as a wake-up call to African leaders regarding the need for an integrated plan in which the African people will take responsibility for their own holistic development. Moral transformation should seriously be considered for the role it would play in eradicating moral deficiencies among public leadership and indeed in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Such moral

27 In 1957, Ghana became Independent from British imperialism. Though it was not the first African country to receive its independence, Nkwame Nkrumah, its first president and an advocate of African Union, demonstrated a unique force of leadership on the continent. Nkrumah articulated the need for African Unity, with renewed enthusiasm. However, the years that followed were characterised by political intrigue, military coups, gross government mismanagement bedevilled by economic depravity.
regeneration is anticipated by this study if the exemplars of African Renaissance embrace and popularise the call for virtuous living.

The closing years of the 20th century brought a “new breed” of leaders such as Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (1986); Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria; Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal; Thabo Mbeki of South Africa (1999); Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria (2000) and others, with a revived spirit of African patriotism. These are in the forefront of the development of an African Renaissance. However, the achievement of a renaissance calls for a leadership determined to deal with the negations of the development of an African Renaissance. Will the renewal of Africa include the willingness of leaders to commit themselves to the moral transformation as an imperative for the development of an African Renaissance? Do these leaders have the will to influence moral change amongst their political ranks? Will they be willing and determined to give up self-enrichment schemes and share in the solidarity of suffering with the masses whom they lead?

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.

1.2.6.2 Africans’ identity and HIV/AIDS

One of the aspects of the development of an African Renaissance is the renewal of the identity of black African people. I have described above how myths paved the way for the justification of slavery and colonial imperialism, culminating into the underlying
evil of racism. These tragedies led to the distortion of the identity of black Africans. A “dark continent” struggling with poverty, diseases, illiteracy, and armed political conflicts, now has the worst HIV/AIDS statistics in the world. The myths of slave trade and colonial subjugation find their justification in the fact that African leaders have not proved any better at eradicating these dehumanising aspects. The prevalence of HIV and AIDS distorts the African further, as it casts a shadow on his/her moral responsibility.

Consider the following arguments. Some scholars argue that HIV/AIDS originated from Africa. The contact with a monkey’s blood by an African hunter in the Congo forests is a possible scenario through which the virus found the opportunity to cross the species barrier into human beings. If one of these “primitive” African practices is responsible for the HIV epidemic, then the perception will have succeeded in making Africa’s struggle for identity renewal more difficult. Africa is already identified with HIV and AIDS, justifiably, since Africa has the highest HIV prevalence in the world.

The distorting myths of the past produced a basis for the exploitation of the African people. Moreover, they had a further negative result - that of the prejudices associated with racism. The apartheid ideology isolated Africans under separate development in South Africa. Should the origin of the HIV/AIDS epidemic be associated with

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28 Already theories have been put forward to the effect that the HIV virus might have broken through the primate-mammal barrier in the Congo (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:6). Whiteside and Sunter dismiss the possibility that either Americans or Russians might have chemically produced HIV. They maintain that this is ideological propaganda (cf Geisler 1994). However, they pursue a theory that the HIV virus might have crossed the species barrier into humans. Their argument is scientifically convincing (cf Whiteside and Sunter 2000:4-5)

29 Without labouring the issue, the spread of HIV/AIDS seems to be flowing from Africa’s shores to the interior rather than the opposite. Surely if it had begun in the Congo forests, this place should have been the epicentre of the epidemic. The view that HIV/AIDS was developed from a series of laboratory and human tests in Africa has been discussed above by interacting with the material presented by Geisler’s shortened version of a litigious and voluminous book on AIDS, Origin, Spread and Healing (1994).

30 Before 1994, the South African racist government, which based its policies on the myth of white supremacy, pursued the apartheid system through a range of policies (cf Oakes 1988:420-476). Although the apartheid system was abolished in 1994, efforts to transform people’s attitudes should not be given up yet. After all the evidence from the 1900s with the achievement of civil rights by African Americans, the White supremacy versus African inferiority polarisation is still prevalent in both whites and blacks worldwide (cf World Conference on Racism and other Forms of Human Discrimination,
Africa, the resultant isolation would increase the suffering of African people. The possibility of Africa’s exclusion is already evident in the trends manifested by current development of economic globalisation³¹.

1.2.6.3 HIV/AIDS and politico-economic development

There is sufficient evidence that the focus of African Renaissance, at least from the point of view of African leadership, is a politico-economic one. This focus is spelled out in the objectives of NEPAD as conditions for sustainable development. They are: peace, security, democracy, and political governance. Given a commitment and political will, this would amount to political regeneration. On the economic front, NEPAD seeks to achieve economic and corporate governance, with a focus on public finance management; regional cooperation and integration; establishment of priority sectors; infrastructure; information and communication technology; human development, with a focus on health, education and skills development. These would require mobilising resources and promoting diversification of production and exports, with a focus on market access for African exports to industrialised countries. In turn, this would increase savings and capital inflows via further debt relief, increased private capital, and better management of public revenue and expenditure. Paragraphs 63 and 64 gives an overview of the vision of the architects of NEPAD:

Although there are other urgent priorities, those selected here would have a catalytic effect for intervention in other priority areas in future. While growth rates are important, they are not by themselves sufficient to enable African countries achieve the goal of poverty reduction. The challenge for Africa, therefore, is to develop the capacity to sustain growth at levels required to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable development. This, in turn depends on other factors such as infrastructure, capital accumulation, human capital, institutions, structural diversification, competitiveness, health, and good stewardship of the environment (NEPAD Document October 2001:9).

³¹ With the impending exclusion which is advancing through the global economy, it is easy to brand the African continent as a diseased one, and the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS would make this brand-name stick. Already there are some strict regulations requiring HIV/AIDS testing before awarding an entry visa into a particular country. People from countries with a high incidence of HIV, such as Africa, would suffer most under these laws, since it is always easy to locate an African because of the colour of his/her skin.
I have noted elsewhere that HIV/AIDS rate infection is standing at about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone. Statistics show that HIV prevalence is higher in the age-group 15-45 years. This is the most economically active age group of any African country. This group is also a potential leadership source. Yet, this is the group with the most victims of HIV/AIDS. NEPAD’s capacity and its human capital and institutional development programmes are dependent on healthy people on the continent, particularly in this age bracket. There is bound to be a leadership gap in all public and private sectors, mostly due to HIV/AIDS-related deaths, notwithstanding other factors, such as the “brain drain”\textsuperscript{32}. To this end, HIV/AIDS would appear to negate the development of an African Renaissance, as it aggravates a situation that is already dire.

The key point in politico-economic development is the creation of “a better life for all”. This catch-phrase was first mentioned by Nkrumah (1963) and reiterated by Mbeki (2001) in all the NEPAD documents (cf Mbeki’ Speech 31.10. 2001:1-9; iafrica.com 26.2.2002:1-4). Politicians are the leaders in this effort. However, African leaders have been accused of non-delivery owing to corruption, nepotism, and general inefficiency (cf Davidson 1994; Russell 2000). Moral transformation is required in this area. At a press briefing by Goodwill Ambassador Harry Belafonte, on 26 June 2001, he gave a revised “global image of Africa,” one that was “rooted in the gross distortions”. He said that from these distortions flowed fatalistic modern media reporting, “perpetuating the notion that pouring resources into Africa was a wasted investment” (Belafonte 2001:1). He wisely made the point in an attitude of encouragement and a hope of redressing the past European misgivings. However, the “waste of investments” in Africa by Western governments and corporations is not a result of European distortions of Africans in the films and racist myths, but of the failure of African moral leadership failure (cf Russell 2000). The NEPAD document reiterates these moral leadership failures on the continent in paragraph 34b. In this document, they recognise that failure of political and economic leadership in many

\textsuperscript{32} NEPAD is very much aware of Africa’s problem of brain drain, and has a built-in strategy to reverse this trend. Paragraph 124 of the NEPAD document offers objective for this strategy. “To reverse the brain drain and turn it into a “brain gain” for Africa. To build and retain within the continent critical human capacities for Africa’s development. To develop strategies for utilising the scientific and technological know-how and skills of Africans in the diaspora for the development of Africa” (NEPAD Document October 2001:18).
African countries impedes effective mobilisation and utilisation of scarce resources into productive areas of activity. Paragraph 42 maintains that for a variety of reasons, both internal and external, including questionable leadership and ownership by Africans themselves, development programmes of a continental magnitude have not been successful (NEPAD Document 2001:7). Moral failure could be regarded as the main deterrent of Africa’s politico-economic development. We agree, for a moment, that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is aided by degenerative morality. It would follow that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a serious threat to the development of an African Renaissance. This is because in the HIV/AIDS pandemic are all the negations of African rebirth. Here they are both magnified and compounded. The response of African leaders to this pandemic could be indicative of a “new political will” for the renewal of the continent. The urgency presented by the HIV/AIDS epidemic calls for moral virtue response. What, then, is the leaders’ response to HIV/AIDS and the imperative of moral virtue as one of the components of Africa’s renewal? I will draw my examples from the South African situation to highlight the problem at stake.

Whiteside and Sunter argue that the impact of HIV/AIDS on South Africa’s politic-economic development has yet to unfold. They give eight points in support of their argument:

(i) South Africa is experiencing a high HIV infection rate (estimated 4.7 million persons – See Vermaak 2001:1), which is yet to develop into AIDS.

(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. The age group 15-45 registers

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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).
the highest infection rate, and yet they are the most economically active group.

(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).34

(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.

There is sufficient indication of an economic trend caused by HIV/AIDS. The trend is that illness and subsequent death related to HIV/AIDS has affected and will affect “productive people” and consequently a “fall in productivity” of the nation (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:85). Commensurate with the preceding observation, is the diversion of resources from savings (and eventually investment) into the care of the sick (cf Whiteside and Sunter 2000:85)35. This state of affairs has increased as HIV/AIDS therapies come on the market. In the bid to prevent the HIV infection from progressing into AIDS by means of expensive drugs, four issues remain a matter of concern on both local and international levels. Firstly, that there is going to be an

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34 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.

35 Some oral interviews in my pastoral work and personal family experience revealed that financial strain is a very sensitive matter, since no one can tell you how much money or property they own. However, many people are spending all they have on treatment. By the time they die, there is virtually no money left in the home. This is why in some cases there are increasing numbers of orphans, whose parents have died of AIDS, without any financial support left behind by these parents.
ever-increasing capital expenditure for individuals and governments to keep HIV-positive people on HIV-related therapies.\footnote{The Treatment Action Plan (TAP) is already brooding into a state and civil society conflict in South Africa (2003). Whereas the constitutional court ruled the rollout plan in favour of the people living with AIDS, the former has not done so. A nationwide strike is looming to pressure the government into the TAP soon.}

Secondly, when the lives of people living with HIV are prolonged, due to the provision of antiretroviral drugs, without a corresponding sexual behavioural change, then they have more time in which to pass on the virus. UNAIDS epidemic update has noted:

> Altogether, in the course of the year 2000, 30,000 adults and children are estimated to have acquired HIV in Western Europe and 45,000 in North America. Overall HIV prevalence has risen slightly in both regions, mainly because antiretroviral therapy is keeping HIV-positive people alive longer (UNAIDS December 2000:6).

This issue of prolonging lives of HIV-infected people was by raised by UNAIDS as a matter of concern. It is tantamount to the abuse of the provision that delays their death. Without consideration of moral transformation, the effort is not worth the cost. In fact, it becomes counter-productive. The hailed condom option does not seem to work. This is shown in the increase of HIV pregnant women and HIV-positive babies. Moreover, new cases continue to be reported every year. This means that HIV-infected people continue to have unprotected sex.

Thirdly, the toxicity of the antiretroviral therapies is often overlooked, since the therapies actually revive the AIDS patient to the extent that the person may even test HIV negative. However, closer observations have begun to show complications among those taking antiretroviral therapies for over five years. Death due to antiretroviral toxicity is a disastrous prospect that looms in the future.

Fourthly, those who are economically active, the breadwinners, continue to be infected and fall sick and eventually die, having depleted the family financial resources before their death; leaving orphaned children, and sick partners and friends. How this particular individual’s situation will affect the national economy is still a
wait-and-see scenario. A study done in 1991 by the South African government on the impact of HIV/AIDS at institutional level offered the following observation:

The study suggested that the major initial impact would be on the public health service. In longer term, the epidemic was expected to pose a threat to ongoing economic growth, with some sectors being more seriously affected than others (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:87).

Whiteside and Sunter (2000) concluded that the epidemic was sustainable within the capacity of the South African economy from 1991 to 2006. Nevertheless, the problem was considered to be a “desperately serious one for the society” (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:87). The Department of Finance released a Budget Review in 2000. In this review were included HIV/AIDS population projections. Although it was stated that HIV/AIDS impact on the “future population growth and labour force was difficult to predict, as in the case of economic and social impact” (Whiteside and Sunter 2000:88), population growth was expected to slow down close to zero percent by 2010. The working-age population would decline from 2% in 2000 to under 0,5% in 2008 (cf Whiteside and Sunter 2000:88). There would be loss of skilled and professional personnel at all levels; political and economic leadership would decline considerably; health service resources would be depleted, as would social security support and a diminishing tax base. These predictions call for an integrated government plan in the fight against HIV/AIDS. So far, government’s response has been very poor, and sometimes worrying. This is why moral transformation is critically necessary to reverse the effects of moral deterioration. This study proposes that moral decline is one of the major causes of the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. There is general depravity evident in the corruption scandals of some public leaders, and the same depravity is responsible for the deterioration in sexual morality. Naming the problem of sexual morality does not mean that one is not compassionate toward those who are infected with HIV/AIDS. If we keep silent about the problem of immorality, we shall not succeed in stamping out HIV, since its main mode of transmission is open sexual relationships. Not to accept a sexual transformation in the face of the HIV epidemic is to negate all the efforts that are sacrificially offered to fight it.

In summary, we have seen that the failure to eradicate or reduce poverty, diseases, and ignorance including armed political conflict, aid the spread of HIV with ripple
effects. Throughout this study I shall aim at showing how the necessary moral transformation requires the willingness and political commitment of a moral leadership as its necessary solution.

We noted earlier that the displacement of people by civil war breaks that family and community support system. As a result, young people become vulnerable to sexual abuse ranging from rape to sex as a means of survival. Besides, when a state is preoccupied with armed political conflict, there is no time to make the consolidated strategy that the fight against HIV/AIDS demands.

Since these conditions exist on the continent, the HIV/AIDS epidemic finds favourable conditions in which to thrive. Because of poverty, patients usually cannot access early diagnosis of HIV infection and have no nutritious foods to boost their immune system. With the rampant nature of other diseases, people’s immune systems are generally weak and prone to infections of all sorts. Since some of these diseases are also opportunistic to HIV, a sick person infected with HIV will probably die sooner than one infected while enjoying good health. Poverty-stricken patients caught up in the stressful horrors of African political armed conflicts, such as the Rwandan 1994 genocide, are highly susceptible to any infection, and most of all to HIV. In all, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has aggravated Africa’s dire situation that is already bad enough.

On the national level of most African states, military spending continues to soar compared to budgets for poverty alleviation, disease control, or education. The pandemic nature of HIV/AIDS, with its debilitating effect on human health and the depleting of financial resources from individuals’ savings, will soon begin to have a diminishing effect on the national tax base, while there are many sick people and orphans to care for.

Poor leadership and governance, misuse of government revenue, crisis management of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and famines have served to highlight instances of moral leadership failure. Should a situation of depravity continue, most African government leaders, who are usually counted on to play a crucial role, will not be able to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, nor will they succeed in reducing dehumanising causes of
poverty, control diseases, and reduce ignorance and illiteracy, let alone eradicate political armed conflicts on the continent. Leaders are moral models. If they exemplify good moral virtues, they will be emulated by their successive generations. Should the moral status quo persist, the future of a “Pax Africana”, the continent’s dream, will never be realised. The will and commitment of Africa’s political leadership are critically needed for a visible practical and moral value input, not only for the fight against HIV/AIDS epidemic, but also for a sustained holistic moral revival of the African continent.

With increased awareness of HIV/AIDS, the communities should aim at achieving a “one-on-one” sensitisation. By “sensitisation”, I mean having sufficient awareness about the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the capacity to reflect and evaluate the current information on HIV epidemic; and understanding oneself as affected in one way or another. This would result into sharing the responsibility in caring for the sick; taking care of orphans, since no one would regard oneself as being outside the problem. This is the central motif in my call for the ethics of virtue, since they appeal to a heightened sense of responsibility and being sacrificially available in answering the call to the needs of other people.

The sensitisation process could copy the mode in which HIV spreads. This might be called “out-competing the virus”. By intimate interaction, the virus crosses over from one victim to another, on a “one-on-one” basis. Through sensitisation based on “one-on-one”, a holistic approach may make a motivated fight against HIV by enhancing awareness, prevention and intervention methods, and going beyond to building a community of morally responsible people.

1.2.6.4 Poverty

Let me start by highlighting the misguided yet working definition of poverty. It is a popular one used by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Dr. Remenyi, an Australian economist, presented a paper to the Oxford Conference on Christian Faith and Economics (1990). His revelations have been cited in toto by Beisner in his paper entitled Poverty: A Problem in Need of a Definition. Beisner has expressed the contradictions carried in the relative definition of poverty. He has found significance
in the measure used by governments to determine the poverty level of citizens of a
given nation, and at which level they may need relief assistance. This measure is
based on the Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP) as the poverty threshold.
Since this definition is the most common one which African nations have been forced
to use to determine levels of poverty by the World Bank and the International
Monetary Fund (IMF), let us look at it here.

To be poor, in an economic sense, one merely has to have a sufficiently low
income relative to the national average. In this study, the standard below
which one is regarded as poor is defined as an annual income less than one
half of the national [gross domestic product] per head. On this basis, it is
evident that to be poor is the norm in most developing countries. This fact is
critical if we are to target development to benefit the poor. If one further
defines the poor as those who belong to households with an annual income of
half the national GDP per capita or less, we define as poor between one half
and three quarters of the households of developing countries. In other words,
the poor are where the bulk of the people are (see Beisner 1995:1).

Dr. Remenyi illustrates with a lengthy comparative analysis of poverty levels based
on relative definitions of poverty. Here are some examples to illustrate the point. The
GDP per capita of Hong Kong is $3,115 per year. Anyone from Hong Kong whose
annual income is below $3,115 is eligible for poverty relief. In comparison, a citizen
of Bangladesh is not poor unless his annual income falls below $75. This means that
the poor person in Hong Kong is in fact 41 times richer than his/her counterpart in
Bangladesh. A Kenyan is declared poor and eligible for relief if his/her annual income
falls below $145, Zambia $195, Uganda and Tanzania $200, Egypt $305, and Ivory
$1,883, South Africa $2,768 and Botswana $3,423, the country in Africa with the
highest GDP per capita per year. Such is the superficial measure used by the IMF to
determine poverty levels in Africa. Countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia,
Ivory Coast and Kenya have a GDP of less than $365. This means that the poorest
person in these countries lives on less than $1 a day. Yet we know, as Dr. Remenyi
points out, that GDP is the most unrealistic measure for Africa’s poor. South Africa’s
GDP would be the most suitable example; it stands at $2,768, implying that that is the
general income expenditure per head per year. If this were a correct measure for
poverty levels, why do 18 million South Africans live for under $1 per day? This
means that their actual annual expenditure is approximately $365, and not $2,768.
African leaders should find other ways in which to determine the levels of poverty. If they continue to use this method, they will never reduce poverty, let alone eradicate it. Maybe an additional way of assessing the poverty level of a country should be developed since this one really misguides planners for poverty alleviation programmes. This is why Simpson and Weiner have suggested a different definition that enables us to identify the poor for action in the development of an African Renaissance.

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 study 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 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.
1.2.6.5 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-Arresto, 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).37 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 undiscovered 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 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

37 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome confirms Fernandez-Armesto prediction.
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 Ebora 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.

1.2.6.6 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.38

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).

38 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.
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’.\(^{39}\) (cf Pan African movement 1900).

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 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,

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\(^{39}\) 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.
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 landmark 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.

1.2.6.7 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).

These factional wars persist, the latest one (during the course of this study) being that of the Ivory Coast (2002-2003), once a stable nation among the troubled politics of West Africa, which is now being devoured by a savage war between two opposing forces, each seeking absolute power to control the nation. Meanwhile all national priorities are shelved. This is a common occurrence in Africa’s troubled states. Resources are channelled into the purchase of military hardware for civil wars. In some countries, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been shelved. Depending on the state of national conflict an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign is not a priority compared to the magnitude of civil war. Where there is no national state control, an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign is simply not feasible. Apart from Ethiopia and Eritrea, who are
engaged in a border conflict war, many African nations have been wrecked by civil wars for many years. Somalia demonstrated the worst internal conflict, with virtually no formal government in control. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Angola are but a few African countries where internal armed conflict has contributed to the country’s national impoverishment.

HIV/AIDS entrenches itself in politically troubled nations because unstable communities lose the family and community social fabric with its moral supportive system. Besides, the government’s resources are wasted in senseless wars which take momentary priority. No form of monitoring, primary health care, awareness campaigns and research can take place to combat HIV/AIDS, a disease which epitomises Africa’s misery. In addition to the above, Africa has its own share of natural disasters. These include famine, floods, and volcano eruptions. The African, ignorant of why he/she is suffering, on the run because of political conflict, infected and affected with/by HIV/AIDS, will also starve because of famine, drown in the floods, burn during volcanic activity or be internally displaced by all three disasters.

**1.2.6.8 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 (Akpata-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) Diseases such HIV/AIDS have left many previously able-bodied sections of the population either sick or dead. This leaves the elderly and the younger without anyone to till the land. This situation is going to persist, since the HIV/AIDS epidemic has not abated.

(iv) 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.

1.2.7 A summary of the development of an African Renaissance

In analysing the historical developments of an African Renaissance, the following questions were raised. Could there be any historical link between European renaissance and African renaissance? What was the nature of this link? What prompted African leaders such as Mandela to make a call for an African Renaissance?

The momentous event of Mandela’s speech (13 June 1994 in Tunisia) marked the apex of the achievements of the African giants of yesteryear. It marked the entry of South Africa, as the last of the African countries to receive independence for black people, into the forum for the Organisation of African Unity. Mandela’s statements concerning an African Renaissance, given at this summit, were a renaming of the old spirit of the Pan-Africanists (1900) and the dreams of the Harlem Renaissance in New York (1920-1930). This awakening of the African people had as its objective to obtain the freedom of black people wherever they may be and the independence of the African states from colonial imperialism. Nkwnae Nkrumah’s objective (1960s) had
been realised. The epoch for the overall social and politico-economic development had now come. A possible end of the Organisation of African Unity, started in 1963, was now in view.

This study has confirmed that there was a definite historical link between the European Renaissance and Africa. This link has had and continues to have a critical influence on the identity of African people. Europe had continued to dominate the politics and economy of the African continent. Africa’s claim of politico-economic control is marginal to the claims of self-determination. Could these notions be the underlying *raison d’être* that prompts the development of an African Renaissance?

As early as 1444, people of European origin, influenced by the European Renaissance, made contact with African people (cf Davidson 1994:334342; Freund 1984:39-58; Magubane 1999:18). These contacts took them beyond the Saharan desert. Europeans had long been in contact with the Africans along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (cf Davidson 1994:47; Asiwaju et al. 1978:2; Mamdani 1999:128). The study noted that Europeans’ contact with Africa resulted in the distortion of Africans’ identity. This distortion set the trend by which Africans were culturally suppressed, economically exploited, and politically subjugated. This trend started with enslavement (cf Fage 1933:11). The study noted that whereas slavery was not new in Africa, what was fundamentally different was the distortion and suppression of African people and the scale of depopulation geared by commercial interests.

The end of the slave trade, at least in the British colonies (1807), prepared the ground for the colonisation (1884) of Africa (cf Gordon et al. 1996:43-45; Freund 1984:59-136). This period ushered in a wave of economic exploitation whose magnitude threatened the survival of the continent. Under globalisation, developed countries are beginning to apply exclusionist economic policies in which no further resources are to be offered to Africa for social politico-economic development (cf Harbeson and Rothchild 1995:41-66; Griggs 1998:7-9; MAP document July 2001).

These policies go hand-in-hand with the suppression of African cultures. Cultures were destroyed during the depopulation of Africa through slave trade, and suppression continued during the era of colonialism through assimilation, European civilisation
and Christianity. Certainly, the means used, had some positive handout aspects, such as education, health services, and development in the knowledge of the Christian God. Some political historians call these positive aspects “handouts” because they were intended to blind some African political opportunists while serving the interests of the Europeans for better politico-economic control and exploitation. They were “handouts” insofar as they did not give Africans the opportunity to exercise their full potential in politico-economic development. Instead, they were used negatively to reject and displace all that was African. Education was not used for the orientation of African chiefs, but for their suppression and elimination from the leadership and government. The health service did not build on the existing ways of African survival, but branded all and sundry as “witchcraft”. Political control disregarded the existing people groupings; instead, artificial boundaries that separated families and same people groupings were harshly constructed.

The African knowledge and worship of God was never considered as complementary to the Africans’ reception of Christianity; instead this understanding was criticised, giving rise to crises of faith on the continent. European and African historians confirm that African languages, art, moral value systems, and religion, in their integral nature were branded “pagan” and suppressed almost to extinction (cf Freund 1984:154-159; Owomoyela 1996:3-15).

If one construes a close link between a clear self-identity and sound moral orientation, it is clear that a destruction of the former will have disastrous effects on the latter. This is part of the sad explanation for societal disorientation of many African communities.

Before we make a final conclusion, let us draw the broad lines of the previous sections into a comparative analysis of how the “advancing” and “inhibiting” factors of the two renaissance movements hang together.
1.3 Comparative analysis of “enhancing versus inhibiting aspects” in the European and African Renaissances

The historical gap, the social and politico-economic developments that mark the period between the European and the African Renaissance renders any attempt to compare the two difficult, but not impossible. My focus will be that of comparing the motivating spirit in the two renaissances. I will concentrate on the principal relational points that characterise the two movements. In this summary, I am careful not to judge the success or possibility of failure of the African Renaissance on the basis of the European Renaissance. My awareness is guided by the fact that the two renaissances are separated by different historical contexts and geographical locations. The aspects dealt with are classical learning, the humanist movement, revival of works of art, political organization, wars, diseases and famines, and Christian morality.

1.3.1 Revival of classical learning and the role of intellectuals

Classical learning formed and translated the concepts that characterised the European Renaissance. Scholars returning to Italy after the fall of the Byzantine Empire (1453) brought with them scholarly material from the monasteries, which became the basis of the rebirth of knowledge. In fact, this was the origin of the name “renaissance”. The reinterpretation of classical knowledge brought about historical emphases, which sought to overshadow the achievement of the medieval period. Consequently, the latter period was renamed “the Dark Ages” of European history (cf Burckhardt 1958:383; Lee 1984:1; Laven 1966:149-171).

In comparison, African Renaissance, if seen from the Africans in diaspora, was also driven by a group of learned persons who started the process of the revival of the African continent from 1900. The African scholars both in diaspora and those studying abroad took up European education through missionary schools or Western institutions. However, having become educated and still resident in Europe or America, they discovered that they were still regarded as inferior. They began to dismantle the misguided racial myths by which socialisation with the blacks was conducted. They learned and began to understand the politico-economic ideologies by which the African had been dehumanised, subjugated, and exploited.
Soon they felt that their very existence and identity were tied up with the political self-determination of the African people on their African continent. They started rewriting African history. Theirs was not merely a superficial reinterpretation, but a historiographic correcting of European distortions of Africa and the identity of the African in particular. Whereas Europe borrowed knowledge from the Graeco-Roman civilisation to boost her knowledge, the task of the African scholars was that of recovering African identity, culture, and self-determination which had been distorted by colonial imperialism. The intellectuals of the European Renaissance advanced their thinking, progressing into the modern era. African intellectuals, for their part, progressed from a heteronomous to an autonomous view of what “Africa” means (cf Makgoba 1999: xiii-xxi, 125-134; Harbeson and Rothchild 1995:3-19).

1.3.2 The focus of the humanist movement

For the European Renaissance, the humanist movement was the vehicle in which the advancement of the individual was embodied. The humanist ideals of the European Renaissance included the pursuit of optimism, individualism, love of pleasure, scepticism, and materialism. The human being was regarded as the crown of creation, and could do anything that he (sic) conceived in his (sic) mind. For the person was the measure of all things. The inspiration arising from the humanist movement drove people toward the attainment of the universal man, the “ideal person” of the European Renaissance. There was a renewed focus on the dignity and potential of a person. This humanist movement was widespread and manifested in all aspects of life. Humanism thrived beyond the two hundred years usually designated for the development of European Renaissance (cf Bernard 1970:231; Lee 1984:1-6; Geot 1990:1020; Carli 1963:20-21; Hale 1966:15-16).

In the development of an African Renaissance, there is no mention of a “humanist movement” in the same philosophical sense as in Europe. However, the focus of an African Renaissance is centred on the re-humanising of Africa. There were external forces that contributed to the current situation in Africa. These include the prolonged and depopulating years of slavery of Africans, colonial imperialism, and more recently the exclusionist global economic policies. The proponents of African
Renaissance are focusing on the improvement of the social and politico-economic standards of the African people. African Renaissance focuses on the ills that threaten the very existence of the African person. As such, all energy is directed toward eradicating dehumanising poverty, disease, illiteracy, and armed political conflicts as problems whose cause could also be a result of Western political and economic influences through the years. The awareness of these dangers is still limited to Africa’s political elite, because the concept of an African Renaissance has not trickled down to the general population in South Africa or the African continent. This is not different from the disparity in the awareness of the humanist movement in Renaissance city-states in Italy and its outlying hinterlands – the *contado* (cf Hay and Law 1989:14-15, 47-57).

For South Africa, the rate of murders, rape, and crime with aggravating bodily harm would suggest that there is a diminishing regard for human dignity. Murders and crime in general were common in Renaissance Italy. Moral deterioration, especially in the political and religious leadership, contributed to the demise of the Italian city-states in the first half of the 16th century. It would seem therefore that the development of an African Renaissance would recover human dignity through social and politico-economic self-determination. What we may pursue in Africa’s Renaissance is appropriately called an “*ubuntu*” (humane) concept, the revival of which would bring about moral transformation. The *ubuntu* concept differs sharply from the humanism movement that is a description of a people’s cultural development and has exposed humanity to self-destruction and the demise of the community.

The *ubuntu* concept describes the anticipated Renaissance person through a moral transformation - a rebirth. The *ubuntu* authenticates the moral transformation of the leader. The masses find authentic moral role models in their leaders. In this study, the *ubuntu* philosophy reinforced by African wisdom is synthesised with Christian wisdom in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, to produce a proposition for a *ubuntu*-centred moral leadership development.
1.3.3 A revival in works of art

Renaissance art has been described as the means by which thoughts, aspirations and human longings were expressed. The meticulous attention to detail, and unprecedented stamina, marked a distinctive departure from previous Works of Art. Art was the master expression of everything, and it provided the avenue for the inexhaustible imaginations of the Renaissance artists. Kings and Popes ranked highest among patrons of Renaissance art, and sponsored many magnificent artistic enterprises. Among the Works of Art were plays and drama, music, poetry and Fine Art (cf Hay and Law 1989:285-334; Burke 1986:43-176; Hale 1966:96-106).

Little is mentioned specifically with regard to works of art in African Renaissance discourse so far. However, we have noted that there were many expressions of poetry, dance, and music in the revival of Africa. Most of these were associated with the Harlem Renaissance by Afro-Americans and later Africans like Senghor, who were educated in Europe or America. The artists of the first half of the 20th century did express the aspirations of the African people, lamenting nostalgically over the ruins of Africa. Most of the current artwork produced find their way into the international markets because of a huge demand. Indeed, putting aside market-driven interests, these items with their distinct African touch are surely an expression of Africa’s Renaissance.

There is deep love of art, creativity and stamina expressed in performance such as poetry, proverbs, dance, music and drama. The Western world has acquired a taste for African art. African art is described as “strange expression of the deep non-rational region of man’s mind... whether understood or misunderstood, African art has had considerable influence on Western painters and sculptors over the last half-century” (Maquet 1972:130). The South African government has established special focused Ministries such as that of Arts and Culture, whose objective, among others, is to promote African arts. One specific area of interest to this study is South Africa’s National Research Foundation with a subsidiary called “Indigenous Knowledge Systems”. Stable states have awakened to a revival of art, which is often driven by people at the grassroots, most of whom have not had formal education. Sponsorship is still limited in comparison to the demand of many and diverse initiatives.
There is also a possibility that most artists are driven by the need to survive, rather than by an exclusive love of art alone, which is reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance (cf Hymans 1971:xiii, 3-5; Hull 1972:81-82). Traditional dance and music from Africa have found welcoming audiences in the West, with slight alterations of their material to adapt to the time and space requirements of European and American audiences. African authentic movements and sounds are carefully preserved as unique characteristics of Africanicity (cf Maquet 1972:130). Maquet’s observations are dated 1972. Since then, more forms of art have been developed and accepted. The development of an African Renaissance has accelerated the gains in this regard.

1.3.4 Political reorganisation

We have discussed above how the Italian states, Florence and Venetia, were forerunners of models of constitutional governments. The size and population of these states were much smaller than present African states. There was homogeneity of interests which made it easy for people to sign up as members a city-state in order to have their interests protected. African countries are more heterogeneous in interests, calling for a genius to manage a people of different languages and cultures exposed to external influences and economic disparities, all in one country. Whereas Italian states and Europe created Italy for Italians, Germany for Germans, and Britain for the English largely on the dominant basis of a common language, African countries were constructed by dividing people of the same language and culture. This led to the African “nations” being made up of different people, which is a contradiction in terms.

President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda has given an explanation of the terms “country”, “nation” and “state”. His presentation is revealing, and may set the focus of African Renaissance in the event of political reorganisation. He explains that a “country” is a sovereign political unit recognised by the international community, under one national government. A “nation” is “a people who are homogeneous, culturally, linguistically, or historically, whether they are organised in one country or not” (Museveni 2003:13-14). He gives examples such as the Slav nation, Arab nation or Jewish nation, who are nations of people though dispersed in many countries. With
regard to a “state”, Museveni offers that it is “the package of pillars of power and authority that enable the exercise of control over any one country” (Museveni 2003:14). The powers and authority of a state are invested in the police, the army, prisons, judiciary, civil service, the executive, parliament, and the organs which regulate the professions and the economy. Every country needs state machinery. Museveni remarks that for historical reasons, countries such as Somalia and the “Democratic Republic” of Congo may not be referred to as states because of their lack of state control over the whole country. Although the cause of such a situation might be seen to be internal armed political conflict, a phenomenon that I will discuss shortly, there is always external influence on the destabilisation of these African countries.

Italian city-states were generally a construction by Italians, not foreigners. African countries were a construct of colonial imperialism. Even the state machinery was never the choice of Africans. This external pressure has continued, and will have a far-reaching impact on African states’ self-determination in the event of globalised economic control.

After many years of political turmoil, Italian city-states were unified in the topical historical event of the re-unification of Italy in 1800. The Organisation of African Unity, which led to Africa Union (Durban, July 2001), was similar to the re-unification of Italy. However, it was not the same, because African States, especially the instruments of political and economic control, are still under the control of individual states. Some efforts have been made toward the consolidation of economic and political interests at regional level. We hope that the recently inaugurated African Parliament will gather authority so as to influence and regulate state power. State power is still individually controlled by each individual African state. The process of democratisation of the continent is in progress, though much is still desired. There are cases of ruling political parties’ pressure to revise national constitutions in order to increase their term in office. Uganda is a case in point. It has taken internal and external pressure to force the party in power to relent. In all, political reorganisation could be moving in the right direction, if it were not for the problem or the paradox of armed political conflicts.
1.3.5 The paradox of wars

We have noted that wars were interwoven into the politico-economic and social cultural life of the Italian Renaissance. They functioned with mercenaries, often hired at great costs to defend the city-state. Defence mechanisms appropriate to their time were constantly improved to provide adequate security for the citizens. However, the size of the city-states and rivalries among them provided the necessary weakness to permit the advantage of expansionist powers in Europe. By the first half of the 16th century, most Italian city-states had succumbed to the military might of foreign emperors. Despite all these wars, the spirit of Renaissance was never completely destroyed. The European Renaissance was not invented through fighting wars, but rather its spirit simply thrived amidst what was a contradictory state of affairs. For the Renaissance did not exist in the material things produced, but resided in the indestructible spirit of every human mind and heart. Suffice it to say that war, both internal and foreign invasions, weakened city-states and contributed to their demise (cf Hay et al. 1989:89; Helm 1963:69-80; Laven 1966:130-148; Hale 1961:192-207).

Africa has suffered numerous wars since the time of her resistance to imperial subjugation, colonial occupation, and the struggle for her own independence. There followed a period of civil wars due to internal power-hungry conflict, some of which were externally motivated and supported. Political and armed civil wars form a formidable negation to the development of an African Renaissance. Magubane has argued that wars form the reasons why African Renaissance becomes a necessity. Should we regard wars in Africa as Africa’s rebirth labour pains? We recall, however, that persistent wars during the Italian Renaissance led to the conquest of the Italian city-states by foreign powers. Will self-determination be realised during African Renaissance amidst persistent civil wars? The broken hearts and fractured minds are yet to be mended by this ‘humane’ concept before they can discover the human potential that has always been present (Russell 2000; Makgoba 1999:37; Museveni 1997).

1.3.6 The counter-effects of disease and famine

The plague, socially transmitted diseases, and famines were recorded as Europe’s devastating calamities during the Renaissance period (1350–1530). The plague
(1347–1530) alone is said to have killed one third of the population across the stretch from India to England. Carried from home to home by infected rats, it could cause death within hours. The spread of the plague was due to unhygienic and squalid living conditions, and control had to follow rigid sanitary measures by civic authorities. When the infection and death rose beyond human capacity, some city-states would be forced to close. Others adapted very stringent methods such as isolation camps for the sick and dying in the case of the plague. Government policies relating to taxation, migration, and employment were often changed to accommodate the challenges of the epidemic. The government, the business groups, and the church worked together to handle the crisis. They taught and maintained hygiene standards as one of the control measures. There were always those in political power who took advantage of the situation. They would use their position to accumulate foodstuffs in case of famine. Then they would use these foodstuffs to bribe hungry voters for political gain (cf Hay & Law 1989:81-84; Laing 1950:2864).

Perhaps the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other sexually transmitted infectious diseases present a potentially equivalent scenario for comparison to the plague, which occurred several times in the Renaissance periods. Other socially transmitted diseases of Renaissance Europe can be associated with HIV/AIDS. The plague may differ in the mode of transmission, infection, and the short period when the infection became fatal. The plague was a pandemic which caused widespread suffering. HIV/AIDS is the plague of modern times, and as much a community disease as was the plague. The two differ in their mode of transmission, but both require community response to combat it. Ultimately AIDS does not kill, but the opportunistic infections do, because of the immune deficiency of the infected person. The death of parents leaves orphans as heads of households, or grandparents become parents the second time around. The plague killed whole families, and communities in its wake left no orphans or grandparents. To this extent, the plague was more difficult to handle than HIV/AIDS. The latter can be treated almost as a chronic disease and its spread controlled, once a test has been done. While the plague killed indiscriminately, HIV/AIDS infection depends, for the most victims, on particular sexual behaviour.

There are success stories in some parts of Africa, such as Uganda and Senegal, whose HIV/AIDS infection control programmes are having good results. However, these
successes come after the devastating effect of the epidemic creating thousands of orphans and the loss of much of the politically and economically active population. Nevertheless, these models of control and awareness education, resulting in a significant fall in the rate of infection, offer a glimmer of hope in the fight against the epidemic (see UNAID 2001). This success indicates that human beings are capable of applying the virtue of self-control, whether it be abstinence or the use of condoms.

During the Black Death there was a clean-up exercise carried out to kill the rats that were the vectors spreading the deadly bacteria. In some ways, HIV/AIDS also requires consolidated effort, since we have become a global village. Most governments in Africa have some or all the contingent control programmes in place. There is hope from scientific research, medical interventions to stave off the onset of AIDS, legal provisions, and industrial policies to protect the infected, to awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with the epidemic. Despite all these, the death toll from HIV/AIDS has continued to rise (UNAIDS 2001; Kretzschmar & Hulley 1998:16 Gordon & Gordon 1996 185-187; Davidson 1994:261; Stott 1984:351-355). More than these technical interventions, moral transformation might be the missing component in the fight to reduce and eventually eradicate HIV infection.

There are no notable cases of famine in South Africa. However, there are annual food shortages to starvation point in Africa north of the Limpopo River and south of the Sahara desert. Although some are attributed to internal political conflict, resulting in population displacements and disruption of agricultural activities, famine is common because of droughts as a natural calamity, or recently because of increasing changes in weather patterns. This is not an issue being addressed in the current African Renaissance discourse. As in the case of HIV/AIDS, South Africa’s approach to Africa’s problems is a holistic one – creating a good life for all. This approach is attested in the objectives of NEPAD (October 2001).

I will use the leadership challenges presented by the HIV/AIDS epidemic to test moral leadership performance in this one scenario, in which most of Africa’s problems are combined.
1.3.7 The shift in Christianity and morality

We have noted that, although Christianity seemed to be present in Italy and indeed Europe at large, and although church establishment and attendance at Sunday services were common, there was no reciprocal correspondence to moral practice in the society. This was the case in Italy more than anywhere else in Europe during the Renaissance period. Religious decadence and moral degeneration were widespread. Machiavelli commented that moral deterioration was due to absence of models of morality in society, and in church leadership as well. The cult of greatness and success had replaced the medieval pursuit of holiness. It is said that crime was so rampant that it had almost acquired a personal existence of its own. People of all walks of life had been caught up in this immoral web, from religious leaders to politicians, and up to the last person on the streets. The argument was that the Italian society had developed and had now outgrown the limits of morality and religion. Success in politics, commercial enterprises and intellectual careers replaced the pursuit of moral values that had characterised the medieval period.

Thus, it was claimed that the inevitable political demise of the Italian city-states would be blamed partly on the moral decadence of the people. Some notable Christian humanists and preachers, such as Savonarola and Erasmus, tried to correct this situation with marginal success. We recall that out of this moral deterioration in the church leadership was born the Reformation, led by Martin Luther (1517). It also was noted that those who sought to change the status quo were met with blunt retaliation from the church leadership. Punishments were meted out in form of excommunications and executions (cf Burckhardt 1958:427-437; Helm 1961:32; 34; 72; 107-112; Hollings 1959:87-89).

It should be noted that European Renaissance never intended moral renewal. The nationalist forces and intellectualism produced the Reformation. As a result, the Christian hegemony lost its ecclesial authority and could not be maintained as the custodian of morality. This trend of institutional authority over moral values with regard to human conduct and moral formation had enormous global influence. The development and spread of the Italian Renaissance to the rest of Europe bore equal potential for lack of moral cohesion and even moral deterioration.
Barney Pityana and Lesiba Teffo have made a contribution to African Renaissance discourse concerning the renewal of African moral values (Pityana 1999:137; Teffo 1999: 149). President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, among other aspects of moral renewal, has called for an end to corruption in both public leadership and the private sector (Sangweni and Balia 1998:3-12; Mbeki 1999: xiii-xxi; MAP document July 2001). There is evidence of moral deterioration in South Africa and Africa in general. Could this be a result of many years of European social and politico-economic influence on Africa? The South African government has adopted a pluralist approach to religion as part of a political global trend, except in Islamic countries. However, up to 80% of the South African population claim to belong to the Christian faith. Although Christianity is generally considered to be an imported religion, there is sufficient information to show that it has been indigenised as an African religion. Besides, Africans have always been notoriously religious in matters of morality (cf Mbiti 1969). Most of them would use the Christian canon as their source for moral input (Mouton 1995:179-183), because it correlates with African traditional ways of relating to God and to other people in the notion of ubuntu (see last chapter).

The church and Christian teachings can play, and are playing, a role in moral transformation in Africa. But as the African continent is subject to modernist forces of growing individualism, crude materialism, and loss of traditional societal cohesion based on clear authority and roles, the impact of the Christian faith on society will be much more complex than earlier. Africa is a mix of pre-modern, modern and even post-modern communities (sometimes within kilometres of one another). And - as Schreiter pointed out - wisdom theologies find it difficult to get a foothold in growing pluralistic societies. This already points one to rather look in the direction of local theologies that draw on perspectives from the wisdom traditions in Africa and the Judeo-Christian traditions in the building of virtuous communities.

1.4 Conclusion

It was earlier indicated that this study would draw on a contextual analysis as a source for reflection on moral renewal. To understand the African continent and the dire need
for moral leadership, an analysis of the renaissance idea has been made. This analysis has yielded the following results.

The Italian Renaissance was sparked off by the returning scholars after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. The revival of classical learning which characterised the European Renaissance was in fact the Graeco-Roman heritage which had been dormant for over a thousand years (400-1400). It was the revival of the Graeco-Roman civilisation from which arose the impetus of the Italian Renaissance. There were specific aspects by which the Italian Renaissance was identified. These were classical learning, the humanist movement, and revival of the arts. Political organisation also improved tremendously, although its development could not be limited to this period alone.

The study revealed a link between the European Renaissance and an African Renaissance. It was through the development of the European Renaissance that the Europeans “discovered” Africa, around 1444. The imperial exploitation which followed led to the evil of the slave trade, and ushered in the colonial era during which Africans were dehumanised, exploited, and colonised. Africa’s struggle to regain her identity and self-determination is precisely a struggle of Africa’s rebirth after the European suppression born out of the European Renaissance.

This chapter looked beyond the current situation/context of the developing African Renaissance towards its origin. The development of an African Renaissance has shown that it started as far back as 1900 in the Harlem Renaissance movement in New York, USA, by the descendants of the freed African slaves.

The reason for the usage of the term “renaissance” by African leaders seems to be two-fold. Firstly, “African Renaissance” is a rhetorical phrase used to motivate Africans towards social and politico-economic revival. Secondly, the term is used to gather support from industrialised nations since it presupposes that Africa is following in the European footsteps of development. Contrary to Mbeki of South Africa, some scholars such as Katongole, and heads of states such as Museveni, are opposed to this dependence and point to the ambiguities inherent to the use of the renaissance idea itself. Harbeson and Rothschild in their book *Africa in World Politics: Post-cold war*
challenges (1995: 1-13) and Katongole in his article: “African Renaissance” The Challenge of Narrative Theology in Africa: Which story/whose renaissance? (1998) have argued that African leaders are now in a dilemma. They say that, without any other options, the African leaders are riding on the rhetoric of an African Renaissance as a metanarrative. There seems to be greater pressure from the requirement of the World Bank, IMF and industrialised countries before Africa can get economic support. Katongole, in particular, analyses the objectives of the African renaissance and indicates that they are for the African elite in political power, and that such objectives lack the capacity to trickle down to the marginalised masses.

However, Russell (2000), and the NEPAD document (October 2001), both point to a set of new leaders who seem to be determined to move their countries toward social and politico-economic development. There is both a realisation of the inevitability of the effects of globalisation of the economy and an awareness of Africa’s leadership problems. A moral crisis is one of the serious issues of which the leadership in Africa is aware. This is no different from the European Renaissance, which also experienced gross moral deterioration. Corruption among public and private leaders contributes to, and is responsible for, some aspects which negate the development of an African Renaissance.

While it may be true that the accumulated effects of European colonisation and economic strategy are in part responsible for Africa’s lingering poverty, diseases, illiteracy, and political armed conflicts, African leaders may not blame it all on the historical past and on the Europeans in particular. The review of the development of an African Renaissance revealed that some leaders (Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusengoni Obasanjo of Nigeria) are weary of moral leadership failure in their ranks that contributes to the negations of Africa’s rebirth. African leadership failures have been attributed to poor policy formulation, ineffective governance, and unproductive economic control. Internal power struggles have weakened state leadership, creating armed political conflicts in most of the African states. This scenario favoured the sinister interplay of international economic and ideological struggle between the capitalist West and the communist East, during the three-decade-long Cold War. With major changes taking place on the global economic scene, Africans are now caught
between a rock and a hard place (Harbeson and Rothchild 1995) that is, isolation by the global economy and abandonment to the negations of African Renaissance.

We noted that the African intelligentsia have played an important role in the development of an African Renaissance through the process of a revised historiography. The result has been a correction of misguided myths, and a rediscovery of some aspects of Africa’s own social historical past. However, more is needed especially in terms of integrating the good from African and Euro-Western sources. This study – while aware and critical of the ambiguities involved – is in itself an intellectual attempt to regain moral orientation by a creative integration of useful sources in the proposition for an African virtue ethics.

The inhibiting or constraining factors discussed above pose a formidable challenge to the realization of Africa’s rebirth. These challenges are multi-faceted, but the contention of this study is that the moral dimension of such a renaissance is of the utmost importance. One may even ask whether the moral framework/paradigm of a community or political leadership group is not the one crucial factor that makes commitment and action in all the others possible.

That is why talk of “a moral regeneration movement”, “moral renewal of Africa”, and “RDP of the soul” (Mandela) are to be carefully put in context of the wider process of rebirth. All these terms speak of a need for moral transformation. This calls for clarification of what is meant by “moral renewal” and how such a renewal is to be practically led. From the perspective of this study, it requires careful attention to what contribution philosophical and theological thinking on the subject could make, and how our Afro-Christian resources could be re-interpreted and utilised to assist in the process of moral orientation.

If we are satisfied that the moral challenge has been sufficiently clarified from the analysis of the Renaissance movements above, we can now turn to the philosophical analysis of ethical thinking on the subject. This is the task undertaken in the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

A Philosophical Analysis: The Rise of Virtue Ethics as Alternative Ethical Theory

In the previous chapter, we dealt with the contextual analysis of both the European and African Renaissance. The multi-faceted idea of a renaissance includes the importance of a moral rebirth. But to move beyond mere rhetoric of “moral regeneration”, a careful analysis is needed on the ethical theories underlying moral developments and informing moral decisions. It is the contention of this study that the problematic moral situation has its roots in the global ethical theories which Africa shares with the rest of the world.

What follows in this section will provide an understanding of those ethical theories responsible for the current moral dilemma, namely the deontological and the utilitarian ethical theories. A brief discussion on how these theories have affected Africa and its leadership in particular will follow. These problematic moral theories serve as a background to a discussion of a third ethical theory, namely virtue ethics, which might provide an alternative solution to the current moral dilemma.

Two scholars who took the initial lead in postulating this moral dilemma and suggesting a remedy, namely Iris Murdoch and Elizabeth Anscombe, are briefly considered. The developments taken up by Alasdair MacIntyre in this section then demonstrate his interest in the subject and the fundamental contribution which he has made to the current popularity and influence of Virtue Ethics.

We shall focus on those aspects that are critical to moral revival in Africa, namely the traditional concept of belief in God, the recovery of the individual (umuntu with ubuntu), and the renewal of the community.

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40 This word has two spellings. The Xhosa spell it as “umntu” and up north in central Africa the Banyarwanda and Baganda spell it as “umuntu”. The word “umuntu” is in fact a combination of two words: “The word ‘umu’ shares an identical ontological feature with the word ‘ubu’”. Among the Bapedi the word “umu” is instead “mo” and “ntu” is “tho”. “umu” and “mo” are specific in their reference to a “be–ing” of “ntu” which means a thing. The combination “umu-ntu” is the “specific concrete manifestation of “umuntu” (cf Ramose 2002:324). In this study I shall use the full word “umuntu”
2.1 A critical review of two dominant ethical theories

In the last half-century, some scholars in moral philosophy and theology indicated a lack of correspondence between moral theory and moral practice. Since then many scholars in ethics have focused their attention on responding to this moral dilemma. The argument maintained that, whereas there was success with regard to scientific advancement, deterioration in moral practice (in most people and at all levels of society) was a matter of concern (cf. Anscombe 1958; Murdoch 1970; MacIntyre 1981, Van der Ven 1998). Louise Kretzschmar, a South African ethicist, alludes to this view with respect to the South African situation that called for moral transformation:

“Whilst great strides are being made in terms of democracy, economic recovery, psychological enrichment and many more, even a cursory examination will reveal far too many examples of corruption, the misuse of power, incompetence, greed and ineffective administration” (Kretzschmar 2002:41).

However, before any moral change can take place, a moral theory is necessary, to replace the current problematic ones. Following current thinking, I shall later propose Virtue Ethics as such an alternative moral theory. The two prevailing moral theories responsible for the current moral dilemma, and by implication influencing the “rise of Virtue Ethics”, are deontology and utilitarianism. I shall briefly analyse their shortcomings, starting with deontology.

2.1.1 Deontological ethical theory

Deontology covers ethical theories that regard actions as being right or wrong in themselves, regardless of the value of their consequences (cf. Scarre 1998:439). I shall refer to Immanuel Kant, whose defence of duty ethics is well articulated. I offer further views by other scholars on this (deontological ethics) debate later in this study.

Kant’s moral theories are “grounded in the bedrock, logically consistent, a priori rational principle” (Scarre 1998:615). According to Scarre, Kant advances six characteristics of deontological ethical theory.
Moral law requires that genuine moral living be expressed in a rational dedication to do one’s duty for duty’s sake alone. A moral action will qualify if it is undertaken independent of consequences, whatever they may be (cf Scarre 1998:615).

The moral agent’s action should be motivated by good intentions only. The intentions are invested in the “good will” which is the “only thing that is good without qualification” (Scarre 1998:616). Kant argued:

We can conceive two principia pathologia of morality, the one aiming at the satisfaction of all our inclinations, the other at the satisfaction of one particular inclination, the inclination of morality. The aim of the first would be merely physical feeling; the second would be based on an intellectual inclination (Kant 1924:37).

Kant maintained that “an intellectual inclination is a contradiction in terms; for a feeling for objects of the understanding is in itself an absurdity, so that a moral feeling resulting from an intellectual inclination is also an absurdity and is, therefore, impossible” (Kant 1924:37).

The “good will” of the moral agent is based on maxims. These maxims are general truths which humans as unique beings are endowed with. This gives the moral agent the “capacity to make genuine moral decisions grounded in a rationally governed, autonomous will obedient to moral laws, irrespective of natural desires or inclinations” (Scarre 1998:616).

Kant establishes categorical imperatives as evaluators of genuine maxims of moral worth. As a rule, the maxim must pass the test of being grounded in a priori principles for its objectivity and rational foundation. Three categorical imperatives are reiterated: (a) Universalisability: Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time “will” that it should become a universal law. (b) Means/ends: Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time an end; (c) Autonomy: Act so that you treat the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal law (cf Scarre 1998:617).
Human nature should be constantly checked through a rational methodology to determine whether the maxims that the moral agent acts upon are in fact absolute moral rules (cf Scarre 1998:617).

Kant makes a distinction between perfect and imperfect duties. These arise from situations where duties seem to conflict. Here a decision has to be made as to which of the two conflicting duties must be fulfilled. Perfect duties, on the one hand, are also called “negative duties” and are associated with the moral requirement not to cause harm. Imperfect duties, on the other, are referred to as “positive duties” and they prudentially bring about a positive consequence to a situation (cf Scarre 1998:618).

Scarre raises four points in criticism of Kant’s deontology. The first one is that Kant makes an inference of human freedom from a premise of moral responsibility. To this end, freedom of the human will is assumed without proof. Secondly, it is not possible that moral motivations can be purely rational activities of the will arising from “an impersonally calculable logical consistency” (Scarre 1998:619). Thirdly, formation of maxims has no regulatory criteria. Moreover, anyone can construct a maxim that passes some of Kant’s evaluative categorical imperatives. Fourthly, Kant’s absolute moral truth ends in a dilemma where two maxims of moral absolutes conflict. The execution of one is by implication a negation of another, all in one situation (cf Scarre 1998:619; also cf Rader 1964:136163).

We note a transition from deontological ethics to utilitarianism through Kant’s notion of the “good will”. Happiness crowns the good will in virtue (see Rader 1964:145). Kant always defines this happiness broadly as “the maximum of pleasure … maximum satisfaction of a man’s (sic) needs and inclinations” (Rader 1964:145). The satisfaction of a person’s needs and inclinations became the basis of the utilitarian ethical theory, only to be further developed later. Because of its consequentialist stance, it was rejected by Kant albeit with amendments. His amendments included his attestation that indeed a good man would not ignore consequences, since “to act intelligently a person must have in mind the intended effects of his duty to do so, but his (sic) duty is determined by universal moral law rather than the specific consequences of an act” (Rader 1964:145).
2.1.2 Utilitarianism ethical theory

A family of ethical theories are defined as “utilitarianism” where moral actions are considered right or wrong, if they respectively promote or diminish human well-being. The classic form of utilitarianism defined by J. S. Mill states that actions are right as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. Promoting happiness and minimizing pain (see Scarre 1998:439) are the qualifications of happiness. Alfred Marshall, one of the popular utilitarians, argues that utility is correlative to desire or want of right actions which should be those that “fully satisfy people’s desires or preferences” (see Scarre 1998:439). They (utilitarians) will always insist on the consideration of consequences of an action to be sure that it promotes happiness and diminishes pain. Scholars such as Jeremy Bentham (1781) have constantly promoted the utilitarian ethical theories to the level of a movement rather than a scientific enterprise. Jeremy Bentham himself concedes to this effect in the Preface of his book *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1948). This how he puts his observation:

An introduction to a work which takes for its subject the totality of any science, ought to contain all such matters, and such matters only, as belong in common to every particular branch of that science, or at least to more branches of it than one. Compared with its present title the present work fails in both ways of being conformed to that rule (Bentham 1948: xxv).41

Scarre advanced four main features as expressions of the utilitarian ethical theory:

(i) The welfarist feature is the first one in which right actions become those that maximise pleasure while minimising the pain of the moral agent. While using his/her rationale, the moral agent must as a matter of duty appropriate those right actions in the lives of other persons. Bentham argued for the quantity of the pleasure as the determinant feature of the value of an action. Mill made a distinction between qualitatively “higher” and “lower” pleasures based on the activities that produce them. On the higher scale was intellectual pleasure, for

41 Laurence J. Lafleur, who wrote the introduction in Bentham’s book *An introduction to: The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1948) affirms the observation above that Bentham’s arguments amounts to a movement when he observed: “It may happen that a reader will be attracted to Bentham’s doctrine by seeing what Bentham makes of it, but no effort is made by him to convince the reader of the validity of the greatest happiness principle” (in Bentham 1948: xv).
example, and sensational pleasure on the lower one. The former are to be encouraged and the lower controlled. We recall that the process of determining the quantity of the pleasure rests in the rational judgment of the autonomous utilitarian moral agent. This is Kant’s idea of “legislating for oneself”. This means that the conception of pleasure or otherwise is based on the preference of the autonomous individual. Anscombe calls this “absurd as if in these days, when majority votes command great respect, one were to call each reflective decision a man-made vote resulting in a majority, which as a matter of proportion is overwhelming, for it is always 1-0” (Anscombe 1958:2).

(ii) The consequentialist, often-named “act-utilitarian” embraces those actions considered to be right if they reasonably produce “at least as much utility as any alternative feasible act” (Scarre 1998:440). Recent “act-utilitarian” has tended to move away from appraising actions based on their “individual propensity to increase utility”. Instead, they prefer actions that conform to utility that enhances rules, motives, or virtues. Hence the concept of “rule-utilitarian”, which embraces actions considered to be right insofar as their “general observance could reasonably be expected to promote utility at least as effectively as any alternative feasible rule” (cf Scarre 1998:440). Rader sums it up in this way: “Acts are to be tested by rules and rules by consequences” (Rader 1964:171).

(iii) The aggregative approach as the third feature is described as “a method of reducing moral judgment to mathematical calculation” (Scarre 1998:441). It is a way of standardising utility and its distribution. Aggregation helps in determining the rightness or wrongness of how much and for what reason one person or groups of people in social positions should be remunerated. Although utilitarians such as Harsanyi advocated for “average per capita utility as a more plausible maximand”, it has never been the income per person in reality. There has always been a morally wrong impression of public utilisation of the total national revenue.

However, a way of calibrating individual utility has to be established. Some utilitarians, such as Brandt in his book *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (1979) have gone ahead to develop a calculus, though difficulties still exist. For example, to what extent is it possible to calibrate utility in a subjective
sense of a person’s conception of his/her own well-being. This question is followed by the fact that social policies will be made based on particular judgments. Such judgments regarding other people’s utility are sometimes, if not always, wrong. Yet comparisons of such judgments are all we have as rational moral rulings about social policies and arrangements (cf Scarre 1998:442).

(iv) The maximising of utility for the greatest number is the fourth feature in the broader utilitarian ethical theory. Here an action is deemed right if it promotes the welfare of the greatest number. It is hoped that such utility action will have the consequence of social utility of that community. However, Scarre cautions that since it is impossible to please all the people all the time, social policy-makers need to be careful in the distribution of scarce resources. Consideration is given to the method of aggregation used to arrive at who should receive welfare and who should foot the bill. This maximising of utility is questionable, because of its conflicting desires in relation to shared utilities, determination of the priorities, allocation of resources, and the management of shared environment (cf Scarre 1998:442).

It is largely the criticisms raised against these two ethical theories that have been the basis for the rise of a third moral theory – namely Virtue Ethics. Let us look at how this came about in the last half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

The rise of Virtue Ethics seems to have started in mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century when the manifestation of emerging moral practice was presumed (to be) out of step with the moral theories from which practice proceeds. Major differences were seen in the relationship of the assumed moral agent who applied moral theories that were outside him/her (imposed from without) and the pursuit of inclinations that were inhibited by compliance to external rules. Moral agents go for the autonomous individual and his/her freedoms. Everyone in pursuit of pleasure and personal success desires autonomy. Moreover, they avoid duty for duty’s sake. At any given opportunity no one wishes to take responsibility for an action or to contemplate the consequences, especially where such consequences are not pleasure-enhancing.
The determining factor for all these manifestations seems to be a force internal to every human being. Could this be the means by which moral judgments have been acclimatised? Hence the rise of Virtue Ethics which focuses not on duties and rules as determinants of rightness or the wrongness of an action, but the goodness of an individual as a moral agent. As such, Virtue Ethics could possibly overcome the conflict between theory and practice.42

Two scholars whose outspoken submissions formed the basis for the rise of Virtue Ethics were Iris Murdoch and Elizabeth Anscombe, albeit in different ways. Their arguments, which challenged the moral theories discussed above, are worth recapitulating below.

2.2 Two important forerunners of virtue ethics

Iris Murdoch and G.E.M Anscombe, both writing in the 1950s, observed that moral philosophy based only on the autonomous rational nature of the individual in the broader utilitarian moral theory, and duty/obligation-based ethics in the general deontological moral theory, could not bring about the anticipated “good” in the moral ethos of the society. Both Murdoch and Anscombe, fall in the broader spectrum of moral philosophers who offered their objection to the popular trend in moral theories.

Since their presentations, moral philosophers and theologians such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre have developed their own moral arguments apparent in the moral thoughts of these two scholars with a level of their own contributions. What follows, are brief views advanced by Murdoch, alongside important reflections in the

42 Other terms used in reference to Virtue Ethics are “agent-centred” morality as augmented by Robert Vosloo in his apt questions: “Who am I/are we?” or “Who should I/we be?”, in his article Back to Virtue (1997) ; “ethics of being”, such as in the contribution of Martin E. Marty in his book: Being Good and Doing Good (1984) and “ethics of responsibility” ably discussed by William Schweiker in his book Responsibility and Christian Ethics (1995).

43 For Murdoch, we might be closer to solving the rival moral theories if we (i) know what to do, as moral agents, because of logic (ii) know what to do because of human nature and (iii) know what we can choose to do. Murdoch has not escaped from a scientific natural regard of man. She knows philosophy needs to go back to the beginning, which to me would be return to Theo-centric morality, but for her it will be the spiritual strength of a person. And this is crux of the matter, has humanity succeeded to resolve its moral problems on its own?

44 Anscombe’s evaluation of the modern moral theories goes beyond that of Murdoch. Though she does not necessarily recommend a Theo-centric ethics, she does mention the abandonment of God the law-giver. If philosophy always goes back to the beginning then Anscombe’s caution should be taken seriously. Anscombe grounds moral being in human psychology (emotion) and not just the intellect, and in this way link moral thinking to human agency.
work of Maria Antonaccio, who reviewed the contributions of both Murdoch and Charles Taylor.

2.2.1 Iris Murdoch

Iris Murdoch, a moral thinker writing during the 1950s until recently, is perhaps among those moral philosophers who have influenced the moral status quo following the concept of the moral agent-centred Virtue Ethics. This line of moral thinking includes scholars such as Charles Taylor and Mark D. Chapman, who wished to rectify the foregone moral theories by supporting the perspective that human ability is sufficient for a moral agent.

Iris Murdoch pursued the defence of the individual and his/her autonomy as a moral agent in her works that have been quoted by many other scholars in moral philosophy both for and against the prevailing moral state. Since the 1950s, her publications, especially The Sovereignty of Good (1970), have attracted a wide readership among many moral philosophers and theologians. These include “Stanley Hauerwas, Charles Taylor, Susan Wolf, Martha Nussbaum and William Schweiker who have made use of central insights from her thoughts in advancing their own constructive agendas with regard to moral thought” (Antonaccio 2001:1; my italics).

Murdoch’s moral insights, like those of Anscombe’s article Modern Moral Philosophy (1958) received less attention in the 1950s. However, since the 1980s, scholars in moral philosophy have realised that Murdoch’s submissions anticipated the contemporary agenda of Virtue Ethics. Murdoch’s contribution to moral thought focused on strengthening the autonomy and freedom of the individual as “self-legislating”. Ultimately, Murdoch’s influence could be regarded as the most entrenched in the current moral thought, since her insights strengthened not only the rationality, freedom, and ability of an individual, but also the human metaphysical aspect. Murdoch’s metaphysical concept compensates for the necessity of God and as such serves as the psychological component of her moral stance (cf Antonaccio 2001:312; also Chapman 385, 387,390), an element that was absent in the other moral theories, namely deontological and utilitarianism.
Charles Taylor, one of the contemporary moral philosophers, has cited Murdoch most extensively. This is not surprising since Murdoch was Taylor’s lecturer at Oxford University. Much of Murdoch’s work has therefore come to the contemporary moral debate through Taylor. Let us deal with three of Murdoch’s insights that constitute her summary. These include secular moral contribution, both in philosophy and religious ethics. Although her submissions seem to be an opposing theory to that of the proponents of divinely linked Virtue Ethics, they are nevertheless direct motivation to the rise of Virtue Ethics.

Firstly, Murdoch extended “the domain of ethics beyond a narrow focus on obligatory action (“morality” strictly speaking)” (in Antonaccio 2001:313). Here she extensively influenced recent thinkers such as Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum in emphasising the importance of going beyond obligatory action and responding to propositions such as the move from “what it is right to do” to the new authentic Virtue Ethics concept of “what it is good to be” (in Antonaccio 2001:313). Murdoch puts it this way:

Ethics should not be merely an analysis of ordinary mediocre conduct, it should be a hypothesis about good conduct and about how this can be achieved. How can we make ourselves better? is a question moral philosophers should attempt to answer (Murdoch 1970:78).

By this statement, she might be the initiator of the transition from the narrow “corral” of morality to the wider field of ethics. She also set

the priority of the right or the good in ethics, ongoing discussions of the nature of the self in liberal political theory, and corresponding debates in religious ethics regarding the constitution of moral identity and the nature of practical reasoning (Antonaccio 2001:313).

Her arguments concerning the metaphysical nature of morality leave her in the secular moral camp. This is a position that marginalises the concept of God, as an external source of telos, a motivation in the human moral scheme.45 She does not take a historical approach either, as she maintains here below:

45 Murdoch’s view is essentially Kantian. Kant contends that theological ethics “was necessarily heteronomous because the person was bound by a foreign will, the will of God” (see Schweiker
This is to say that there is, in my view no God in the traditional sense of that term; and the traditional sense is perhaps the only sense. Equally the various metaphysical substitutes for God – Reason, Science, History – are false deities (Murdoch 1970:79).

Secondly, Murdoch retrieved the notion that consciousness is “the fundamental mode or the form of moral being” with the corresponding claim that consciousness is inherently evaluative in nature (Antonaccio 2001:313). This notion of consciousness is inseparable from some idea of the good as “the object of our love or allegiance” and “the privileged focus of attention or will” (Antonaccio 2001:314). It is argued by Taylor that “Murdoch reinstated an older Platonic (and Augustinian) insight that what we do is conditioned by what we love and by the direction of our attention” (in Antonaccio 2001:314).

She further argued “that such vision, although deeply suppressed in modernity, may still be available to us through the language of ‘personal resonance’ if not in a vision of ontic logos” (in Antonaccio 2001:314). It was observed that although modernity displays an “inarticulacy” concerning “higher goods and their bearing on moral identity” Taylor insisted “selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (in Antonaccio 2001:314). To this end, Murdoch asserted that since human beings are constituted by their own “self-understanding” a human being is a creature that makes pictures of himself/herself and then comes to resemble those pictures. Murdoch had now developed the basis of “ethics of vision” affirmed in the following argumentation:

Because of this, “it is not possible in principle to translate propositions about men (sic) making decisions and formulating viewpoints into the neutral languages of natural science. …. Rather … moral philosophy must take into account the peculiar capacity of human beings to reflect on themselves, to imagine who they are and who they might become by forming and revising….” (Antonaccio 2001:314).

1995:82). Murdoch argues that there might be “many patterns and purposes with life”, but otherwise human life is something that is “self-contained” with “no exterior point of telos” (Murdoch 1970:79). Paul Tillich brings in the concept of “theonomy” as the law of essential nature that is not self-imposed (autonomy) by human beings. Rather, in developing the Christian view, Tillich argues that “true freedom is theonomous; the moral law of God” which is in fact “imposed on us by another, foreign will or power” (see Schweiker 1995:82). This conception saves us from the disintegration effect caused by our heteronomous moral nature, and it is obligatory as the will of God (see Schweiker 1995:83).
their ideas about themselves in relation to certain evaluative ‘pictures’ (or ideas of the good) (Antonaccio 2001:315).

Three issues are of concern in Murdoch’s argument.

First, the very conception of certain evaluative pictures or the idea of “the good” does not occur in an individual automatically. It has an origin in the tradition of moral values that has long defined and upgraded such pictures. Since Murdoch has rejected tradition, we may agree with her claim of the idea of the good, in which individuals have the freedom to make values. However, the values made are regulated by the common purpose (*telos*). She nonetheless earns credit for her concept of ethics of vision. The futuristic vision of what the individual anticipates to become can serve as a motivation for moral character in the present. Moreover, pictures of what one hopes to become are always defined by tradition, or the analysis of it, which is the carrier of human experiences.

Secondly, the etymology of the word “consciousness” in the work of Birch and Rasmussen disagrees that consciousness could be successfully used as contributory in an individualistic moral stance. This is because the word “conscience” from which Murdoch’s concept of “ethics of vision” comes, is developed from the words *Com–scire* which is a community-founded concept. Birch and Rasmussen maintain:

> While we often depict conscience as the individual’s “still small voice” within, the etymological meaning betrays its true source, *Com–scire* means ‘knowing in relation’ or ‘knowing together’. Conscience is an expression of character, which is formed only in community (Birch and Rasmussen 1989:18).

Consciousness could be the metaphysical ability of the individual to respond to the needs of others in relation to his/hers. The good as an indefinable space of freedom is an opportunity we share with others. We should therefore visualise ourselves with others in this mysterious good. It cannot be simply awareness of one’s idea of the good in isolation, rather as evaluative pictures for the common good. Murdoch and Taylor do not seem to be aware of the etymological root of “conscience” that turns out to be community-founded.
Thirdly, Murdoch affirmed “a reflexive relation between consciousness and language in the face of contemporary claims for the primacy of language over consciousness” (see Antonaccio 2001:313). As a staunch defender of the autonomy of the individual, “she worried that the tendency to dissolve consciousness into language would concurrently degrade the status of the individual as a responsible moral agent” (see Antonaccio 2001:316).\(^4\) Just as we need to retrieve agent-centred Virtue Ethics, so do we need a language that describes such human experience. Murdoch’s point is taken most especially when it applies to the importance of story-telling as a means to rediscover and reflect on the self’s moral path. Note that the individual who composes the story is central to the narrative and not the other way round. Does this reflexive approach to morality place Murdoch in the existentialist camp?

Although Murdoch is not an outspoken existentialist, her attitude remains ambivalent. For example, she espoused the insights of philosophers of existentialism such as Jean-Paul Sartre, “underlying liberal assumptions about the value of the individual and of that individual’s freedom, even though she believed that Sartre’s philosophy failed to provide the conceptual resource necessary to support those values” (see Antonaccio 2001:318). It is noted that Murdoch was drawn to this existentialist morality and political passion that accompanied the “… ‘ethics of resistance’ against political and social tyranny” (Antonaccio 2001:318). Murdoch observed in her book *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1987) that Sartre had a “vision” of “the heroic consciousness, the individual self, inalienably and ineluctably free, challengingly confronting the given, in the form of existing society, history, tradition, and other people” (see Antonaccio 2001:318). This “vision” was dominant in most of Europe following World War II and caused Murdoch to be “preoccupied with the problem of freedom as it pertained to the irreducibility of the individual and its refusal to be submerged in any form of totality” (Antonaccio 2001:318). These contextual influences led to Murdoch’s rejection of community-based morality that might rationally suffocate the individual’s conscience. Of course, she did not realise that this rejection was a result

\(^4\) The paradigm shift in language from being mediatory between persons to creating persons is a feature of the postmodern era and is sometimes called the “linguistic turn”. Benhabib (1992) has argued that the focus is no longer on the epistemic subject or on the private contents of its consciousness, but on the public, signifying activities of collection of subjects (Benhabib 1992:208). Murdoch and Taylor maintain that such consideration of language reduces the individual to an “effect” rather than a participant who creates language and experiences. The individual is effectively decentred and subjected to the linguistic system (see Antonaccio 2001:316).
of a community’s negative influence. If the community were composed of good people, their influence on her would have been positive. By analysing her community, she was able to situate herself and her moral inclinations as an exercise of her freedom apart, but nonetheless, within community. This paradoxical self-awareness “apart from” and “within a community” is fundamental to humanity and more particularly to Africa. In this creative tension both the community and the individual compete or exchange moments/periods of dominance.

Murdoch followed the trend of the Enlightenment project and gave expression to the current moral stance through the works of others such as Charles Taylor. Her deeply entrenched agent-centred Virtue Ethics has indeed found a safe but not morally advancing lodge in the individual’s freedoms and rights. This stance leads to the pursuit of a morality based on the agent’s consciousness. The conceptualisation of the emotional and spiritual components has resulted in the displacement of God47 in moral discourse and practice. Human beings now think that they have matured and that it is within their ability to achieve a peaceful world by depending, each, on their own individual conscience to be good (cf Chapman 1998:385). This is precisely the theoretical conclusion that has not been realised in current moral practice.

The disregard of God’s “external” help and community support in morally aiding the individual makes it difficult for her contribution to be of high relevance in a morally degenerating society of our time. Her presentation of an autonomous individualistic goodness cannot help in reviving morality since what is good and right is always in relationship to other people’s notions of good and right (cf Maclntyre 1981:205; also cf Chapman 1998:379-393). The “other” who influences my response is indeed outside me, so is the community composed of many “other” persons. I am subject to the moral system created by this community. This is also the entry point of God, as perceived by the community in which I am expected to be a moral participant.

47 Murdoch does not necessarily reject God. But for the sake of the philosophical conclusion, from what humanity can empirically deduce of a human being, all there is, is “self-enclosed and purposeless” with nothing outside it or external influences that can make it better (cf Murdoch 1970:79).
Murdoch’s moral thought remained hospitable to the insights of the Western theological trend of Euro-Western individualism. Such theological inclinations often negate any conception of communitarian aspects essential to African and Christian moral theology generally, not to mention Murdoch’s displacement of God in *moral matters* (cf Antonaccio 2001:311; italics SBN).

I concur with Antonaccio’s conclusion that Murdoch’s submissions, together with all those who have adapted her stance to advance this individual-human-based morality, have at the same time demonstrated “that any theory of the good must acknowledge the reality of the apparent absence of the good in many (perhaps most) human lives” (Antonaccio 2001:329). Reason, a mark of human maturity as Chapman concludes elsewhere, has limits too.

And to acknowledge this, according to Kant, is to approach the condition of human maturity. The demolition of all absolutist heteronymous authorities, and their replacement with a system based on the finite and limited authority of the self-legislating human being thus marked human adulthood. Maturity was thus a recognition that the human being was responsible for constructing meaning, for shaping reality, and yet, perhaps paradoxically, any such shaping sought for ends which ultimately lay beyond the limits of human reason (Chapman 1998:385).

Perhaps the subtle nature of Murdoch’s contribution is one discerned by Hauerwas, whose reaction is noted by Antonaccio as, “Hauerwas has distanced himself from Murdoch’s thought. This is not surprising, given their vastly different metaphysical, philosophical and religious commitments” (Antonaccio 2001:312). The two, Hauerwas and Murdoch, are at complete variance with regard to how we should anticipate our moral formation project. We have noted earlier on that Murdoch entrenches human nature. She is quoted by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright in *The Hauerwas Reader* (2001) thus:

For purposes of analysis moral philosophy should remain at the level of the differences, taking the forms of life as given, and not trying to get behind them to a single form (in Berkman and Cartwright 2001:165).

Here Murdoch moves even further to not only “reject God” in moral discourse but also the individual who is a responsible moral agent in a virtuous community.
Christian formation as metaphors and stories are discarded in favour of how human nature in changing circumstances may and would be directed to respond. As for Hauerwas our moral formation should and must be best on a common moral vision. He argues:

an adequate construal of the self requires a moral vision that always involves the employment of our lives through metaphors and stories. Moral principles are inadequate for such a task because the moral task involves describing the world (and humanity for that matter) not merely as it is, but also how it ought to be seen and intended (Berkman and Cartwright 2001:165).

Hauerwas’ contribution seeks to promote the gains of the Christian community. In doing so he expands the arbitrary limits of “religion-morality discussion” (Berkman and Cartwright 2001:165). To this end God, and the community of believers composed of individuals united by their belief in and commitments to Jesus Christ, are the irreducible Christians’ “moral-core” without which moral formation is impossible.

Therefore, it is Murdoch’s promotion of the individual’s autonomy and abandonment of God that constitutes Hauerwas’ denunciation of his faith in Murdoch’s moral thought. The persistence of Murdoch’s line of thinking is ironically part of the motivation for the rise of Virtue Ethics, and rightly so. But her approach, in the same vain revives the project of Enlightenment, entrenching it even further despite its failures.

Since the 1980s, the rise of Virtue Ethics has been associated with Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre does not refer to Iris Murdoch or to Charles Taylor. He nevertheless refers to Anscombe, a contemporary of Iris Murdoch at Oxford University. MacIntyre owes his interest in Virtue Ethics in some way to Anscombe. I shall highlight her arguments with regard to the dilemma in moral philosophy, a basis for the rise of Virtue Ethics as an alternative ethical theory.

### 2.2.2 G.E.M. Anscombe

G.E.M Anscombe influenced scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas in their attempt to introduce this third ethical theory, namely Virtue Ethics.
In their presentation is vested the need for an external resource that must aid the natural human moral deficiency. Anscombe’s influence tended to focus on God as the external dynamism that should, when internalised, influence the development of Virtue Ethics. She also pointed to some essential aspects abandoned by the “project of Enlightenment” which, when revived, would somehow help in solving the prevailing moral dilemma. What were Anscombe’s core arguments?

In Anscombe’s article *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1958), she starts by developing two important theses. The first is that moral philosophy needs an adequate philosophy of psychology. Arguably, matters of morality seem to reside in the faculty of human emotion. To be moral, then, would be a choice that the human being makes from the position of how they feel. From this perspective, the individual is able to judge actions as “blameworthy” or “praiseworthy”. External forces cannot control the processing of moral thoughts without the moral agent feeling pressure on his/her inclination, especially if he/she does not want to respond favourably. Philosophy of psychology becomes fundamental if we are to understand the nature of human response to both internal moral stimuli and external command. The commands or rules are often processed and they exist in traditions. This means that the moral agent has not participated in their formulation. Unless he/she voluntarily surrenders to them it would be immoral to force him/her, since it may involve breaking all the three categorical imperatives above. This is why Butler’s exaltation of conscience is out of step, since he assumes that the individual’s conscience will always direct him/her to do only the right and not the wrong things. Hume’s consideration of “truth” excludes “ethical judgments” and yet it is they that in many ways govern the actions of individuals. Hume’s treatment of passion as an innocent drive to the right goal misses the psychological understanding of passions as sometimes obsession to things that are morally negative or wrong.

Anscombe discloses the flaw inherent in Kant’s idea of a self-legislating moral agent. Of course this follows naturally from the assertion of the autonomy of the individual. If Kant, argues Anscombe, chooses to make the individual democratic, why does he not realise that a self-legislating individual is simply one vote against zero challengers? The individual may have a sense of being 100% right but may as well be
100% wrong. Self-evaluation is in fact impossible in the whole scheme of moral conception outside any external judge (God and/or community).

Adding another dimension to this self-legislating individual are Bentham and Mill (to be discussed later) who advance the pursuit of pleasure. Anscombe argues that this cannot be an internal quality of character that generates external virtuous qualities/fruits, because nothing pleasurable is internal. On the contrary, all pleasure is expressed externally.

Anscombe’s second thesis was that rules and obligations, as they are related to moral duty along side the sense of “ought”, belong to an earlier tradition of moral language. But this tradition has long been abandoned. If we need to retrieve our moral theories and effective moral practice, we also need to reinstate the tradition from which the current moral language originates. She maintained that conformity to moral law might remain impossible since its conception was based on a long tradition of the Christian faith. In this conception, human beings, without exception, subscribed to a divine moral system. However, since the 19th century humanity started moving slowly but surely away from its moral roots. Currently, what remains is moral language without the divine authority upon which it was established. Anscombe cautioned that it might in fact be harmful to use this moral language without its roots since in such usage one may not be able to answer the question “why” such and such is a moral rule. She elucidated that what we have now is similar to having the notion “criminal” where “criminal law and criminal courts [have] been abolished and forgotten” (Anscombe 1958:6).

The situation is aggravated by the modern pluralistic society where people are exposed to many different moral systems. Some may choose one or two, others a little bit from each, and yet others claim allegiance to none. If they share the same environment such as a local municipality how can they possibly agree on a moral way forward? How possible would it be to enter into agreements and sign contracts which bind them legally? Human “flourishing” is not attainable where humanity has lost moral virtue. Instead, laws are introduced which are externally enforced by the police.
The pursuit of human flourishing requires that we accord justice to that moral system that has had good results in the past. The Greeks (Aristotle), the Stoics, the Jews and the Christians applied virtue from the viewpoint of the divine lawgiver. The lawgiver is an external enabler. The moral agent refrains from unjust actions because the law of God states that such and such actions are wrong. He/she also knows that to be obedient to this divine law is what is expected of him/her by the community. Moral support is supplied from outside. The individual is not simply voting for him/her (self-legislating) but there is an arbitrating divine authority. This authority is shared in the community so that it becomes alive in the shared moral tradition. The individual is not abandoned to his/her inclinations, passions or desires (as Murdoch’s presentation suggests). When such a perspective is interiorised then justice as a virtue prevails and humanity flourishes. Anscombe concludes:

If he is a Stoic, he is apt to have a decidedly strained notion of what “flourishing consists” in; if he is a Jew or a Christian, he need not have any very distinct notion: the way it will profit him to abstain from injustice is something that he leaves to God to determine, himself only saying “It can’t do me any good to go against his law”. But he (sic) also hopes for a great reward in a new life later on, e.g. at the coming of Messiah; but in this he is relying on special promises (Anscombe 1958:19).

Anscombe takes the giants of moral philosophy by the horns, a very brave undertaking, in order to demonstrate the shortcomings in their moral philosophy. She does not hesitate to assert that their inadequacy is responsible for the current moral dilemma.

Further arguments by Anscombe have been adapted in my analysis of MacIntyre’s works. MacIntyre, following Anscombe’s moral thought, represents a particular moral stance, compared to Murdoch’s moral thought, although both fall within the philosophical strand of agent-centred Virtue Ethics. MacIntyre maintained the argument that we cannot espouse the current moral theories without the divine lawgiver. What we need, is to embrace God and be willing to interiorise divine external moral resources to aid Virtue Ethics in a moral agent-centred morality. I shall now follow this perspective in the works of Alasdair MacIntyre.

48 On the contrary, believing in natural law assumes that every grown up in his/her knowledge of good and evil feels obliged to obey such a law (cf Anscombe 1958:14).
2.3 MacIntyre’s contribution to the rise of Virtue Ethics

I have identified three reasons advanced by MacIntyre as the causes of the rise of Virtue Ethics. These reasons are borne out of an apologetic stance as MacIntyre and others try to address the current moral degeneration. The three identified reasons for the rise of Virtue Ethics are generally antithetical, but when reversed they promote Virtue Ethics for human flourishing:

(i) the rejection of the importance of tradition in which our relationship with God as the lawgiver and origin of moral language has been pushed to the periphery of moral discourse;
(ii) the fragmentation of the individual;
(iii) the demise of the community.

The rise of Virtue Ethics seeks to redress the three issues that characterise “the project of Enlightenment”. The hope is that a revival of Virtue Ethics will possibly correct the current moral dilemma. The fundamental notion in Virtue Ethics advocated by scholars such as Iris Murdoch (1970), Elizabeth Anscombe (1958), MacIntyre (1981, 1990) Hauerwas and Pinches (1997) and Richardson (2003), is that of “being” rather than “doing”; “goodness” (or badness) of character rather than “rightness” (or wrongness) of action; and the question “What sort of person should I be?” rather than the question “How should I do such and such so that it can be regarded as right or good?” Virtue Ethics is “agent-centred” while both utilitarian and deontological ethics are “act-centred” and “duty-centred” moral theories. Below are antithetical arguments to show what has gone wrong in the current moral theories as a motivation for the alternative Virtue Ethics.

2.3.1 The “rejection” of traditional belief in God, the law-giver

The concept of tradition in relation to Virtue Ethics refers to family, the polis/city state, the synagogue/temple, the homestead/family, kraal/fireplace, and the local church as the cradle of moral standards, values and virtue. A contractual divine authority is recognised by the individual in these institutions as a common external regulator of moral conception. Since the Heroic societies, through the centuries,
family, city-state or political structures have played this role of being the source of external authority that regulates the moral practice of individual citizens.

The individuals were expected to respond with excellence of character (virtuously) according to their prescribed roles. They were also answerable if they failed to fulfil their duties in society. MacIntyre refers to these social structures in his account of *Virtues in Heroic Societies* and the *Virtues at Athens* (MacIntyre 1981:114-136). They (Greeks) also had written sources which served as scripture for moral reflection. These were contained in the plays often staged for public viewing. Epic poems such as Homer’s *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are also cited as such sources (cf MacIntyre 1981:129). The invocation of the gods to intervene in the tragedies demonstrated the limitation of human wisdom and strength in resolving some social moral conflicts. However, this intervention never seemed to offer any suggestion or resolution to the morally conflicting forces in the play. This left unanswered questions with regard to the conceptualisation of the role of the community gods in resolving moral conflicts and dilemmas (cf MacIntyre 1981:124-125).

Recognising that God (religion) is pushed to the periphery of moral discourse, Anscombe argued that God had to be reintroduced and the religious language revived in order to make moral injunctions complete and meaningful. Anscombe maintained that the God of the Judeo-Christian religion (including Islam) who gave the laws upon which moral language originated, had to be revisited or else moral language would remain meaningless and ineffective, if not harmful (cf Anscombe 1958:6).

Considering the Jewish tradition we find it no different in assigning authority to God, the head of the family, the immediate social group (clan/tribe), and to the whole nation of the people of Israel. This tradition started with the call of Abraham. God was the ascribed authority determining standards, values, and virtues in the preservation and support of the relationship between him (God) and the people. This relationship ensured that the nation would flourish as a whole. God exercised authority over Abraham yet remained deeply aware of Abraham’s vulnerability due to harsh socio-political conditions and Abraham’s own human weaknesses. We note that Abraham submitted to God out of his own accord. God’s intervention was in many cases in Abraham’s favour. Abraham obeyed, God made him succeed (cf Genesis.
12). This pattern of a God - people link which started with Abraham was to characterize God’s relationship with the Israelite nation, Abraham’s descendants. Through Abraham God would bless all nations with similar blessings under-girded by God-given moral standards, values and virtues (cf Gen.12:3; Exodus 20).

God offered to the Israelites the Torah as a means of grace by which they would walk in his righteous (a high moral standard) ways and be blessed (cf Exodus 19-20). This was in some way the beginning of a particular moral tradition in which God would be the lawgiver whose language was articulated in the Judeo-Christian Scripture. This is the Christian Bible or moral literature detailed in the Israelites’ narrated experiences of God active in their history as a moral focus and guide for their own flourishing. These sources include the Old Testament narratives, wisdom literature and prophecies. The Christian world incorporated the New Testament with these texts. The New Testament gives details of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ, inter alia, an event that has moral implications for all humanity, whether they choose to obey God or not.

As for the Christian tradition we locate it at the beginning of the early church, perhaps after the Day of Pentecost. Yet its roots are founded in the Jewish tradition, as Christians purport to be the “new Israel”. The Christian’s reading of the historical narratives (the stories of people’s lives in a relationship with God), wisdom and prophetic literature make claims with regard to the coming of Jesus Christ. This Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God who is eternal beyond creation and he is the evidence of the invisible God. The fundamental aspect of Jesus’ ministry on earth was that of transforming humanity from sin (contrary to morality) into relationship with (the agent’s goodness/righteousness) God. He is the power and wisdom working in the respondent moral agent in a community context to accomplish this task through the Holy Spirit. Human beings, as moral agents, need to “surrender” to him so that they may experience a new kind of freedom in Christ in the arena of a divine moral relationship.

Alongside this theological tradition is the church, an institution of the believers in Jesus Christ - the Christians. The Church is the custodian of the promises of Jesus Christ, particularly the concept of forgiveness of sin, which has moral implications.
The church as an earthly institution assumed the particular authority of interpreting and teaching the message of the good news of God’s kingdom. The Kingdom of God describes those who intend to pattern their lives on Christ. The church’s duty is that of communicating Christ. In Christ, we recover a relationship with God and with one another. A people who are in a right relationship with God and with one another, form the new community - the community of believers. This the community of the wise, held together by a common moral vision, passing on and building stories by their virtuous living.

These are the ideal notions invested in the Judeo-Christian traditions. MacIntyre is of course critical of the Church, and I hope by the church MacIntyre implies the church establishment. I maintain that the custodians of the church might have failed, but not the ideal notions for which the church of Christ stands.

By the Middle Ages the church had assumed such authority in moral matters that it had almost succeeded in dismissing “all pagan teaching as the devil’s work and sought to find in the Bible an all-sufficient guide” (MacIntyre 1981:156). During the Reformation led by Martin Luther (16th century), this authority, among other issues, was questioned. The authority of the church and with it, its Scripture, as moral sources, suffered further catastrophe during the age of Enlightenment – that is the rejection by [the] utilitarianism of the premise that what is to be counted as a correct moral rule or principle is laid on us by God (cf Anscombe 1958:5).

The result of this moral system is summarised in MacIntyre’s observations:

According to his (MacIntyre) thesis, the interrelatedness of all aspects of reality, and of all people within an objective moral system, was destroyed as morality was uprooted from its traditional and divinely sanctioned context (in Chapman 1998:379)

From here onwards, morality was “dislocated” from its “inherited modes of thought” and “reality fragmented into distinctive and competing spheres” (Chapman 1998:379). Chapman takes on the observation of Colin Gunton, an English systematic theologian, who analyses the individual’s isolation “from his or her embeddedness in a social
context in a manner reminiscent of MacIntyre” (see Chapman 1998:379). Gunton maintains that:

Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the dominance of individual reason above any sense of the whole, marks the culmination of this breakdown of being-in-relationship. Indeed it becomes a means of replacing God “with a plurality of finite wills each aspiring to divinity” (see Chapman 1998:379). 49

In MacIntyre’s historical sketch of the moral tradition, he notes that “moral judgments are linguistic survivors from the practice of classical theism which have lost the context provided by these practices” (MacIntyre 1981:57). Moral judgments stated hypothetically with regard to “what conduct would be teleologically appropriate for a human being and they were also categorical … insofar as they reported the context of the universal law commanded by God” (MacIntyre 1981:57). Moral judgments lost their traditional context, linguistic and practical ways in the secular and pluralistic world. It is nevertheless not surprising to note, as does MacIntyre, that even the most articulate of the scholars acknowledge this change, namely the loss of context, and with it the clarity of moral judgments, as if it was “a deliverance both from the burdens of traditional theism and the confusion of teleological modes of thought” (MacIntyre 1981:58). MacIntyre elaborates the response of the moral philosophers thus:

What I have described in terms of a loss of traditional structure and the content was seen by the most articulate of their philosophical spokesmen (sic) as the achievement by the self of its proper autonomy. The self had been liberated from all those outmoded forms of social organisation which had imprisoned it simultaneously within a belief in a theistic and teleological world order and within those hierarchical structures which attempted to legitimize themselves as part of such a world order (MacIntyre 1981:58).

The autonomous individual lost his/her tradition and respect for communal authority. These were major consequences. The autonomous individual is a pleasure-seeker and

49 This is post-Kantian moral philosophy, which is the notion of the will as the creator of value. This shift began to affect all moral expressions as Murdoch observed: “Values which were previously in some sense inscribed in heaven[s] and guaranteed by God collapsed into human will. There is no transcendent reality. The idea of the good remains indefinable and empty so that human choice may fill it. The sovereign moral concept is freedom, or possibly courage in a sense which identifies it with freedom, will, power” (Murdoch 1970:80-81).
a pain-avoider within the broader context of utilitarianism moral theory. The mode of
service is then infested with emotivism and lack of any sacrificial service. Even the
most avowed defenders of the Enlightenment project such as Bentham and his student
John Stuart Mill conceded that the “teleological content” of the utilitarian moral
time was becoming “more and more meagre” (see MacIntyre 1981:61). But worst of
all was the fragmentation of the very individual that the project of Enlightenment had
created an autonomous, but abandoned individual.

2.3.2 The fragmentation of the individual

One of the characteristics of the project of Enlightenment which is responsible for
moral degeneration was the “invention of the autonomous individual”. Lawrence
Blum alludes to this invention in his reference to theories which emphasised the
“primacy of the rational autonomous individual in moral agency and in the normative
foundation of political structures” (Blum 1996:231). MacIntyre made a similar
observation to this effect:

Any contemporary attempt to envisage each human life as a whole, as a
unity, whose character provides the virtues with an adequate telos encounters
two different kinds of obstacles, one social and one philosophical. The social
obstacles derived from the way in which modernity partitions each human
life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of
behaviour. So work is divided from leisure, private from public, the
corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been
wrenched away from the rest of human life and made into ever-distinct
realms. And all these separations have been achieved so that it is the
distinctiveness of each and not the unity of the life of the individual who
passes through those parts in terms of which we are taught to think and feel
(MacIntyre 1981:190).

During a particular activity or service, an individual is subjected to the moral values
required by that service, perhaps in a deontological mode. Should such an individual
change the role or nature of service, he/she has to adjust to new sets of moral values.
This means that the individual can always move out of a particular moral system into
another. Moreover, there is a time when the individual is between the two value
systems, and here he/she might be in a morally neutral situation, correspondingly
unable to reflect or comment on either the preceding or the anticipated situation. In
the project of Enlightenment what seemed to matter was not so much the individual
but the duty (deontological) to be accomplished. The values protect the duty to be
performed, which is a segment of the whole person. What matters are the separate segments of an individual’s life during which he/she is engaged with the “duty for duty’s sake” and not the whole human being.

MacIntyre reminds us that this manner of thinking is espoused by “analytical philosophy” which has “the tendency to think atomistically about human actions and to analyse complex actions and transactions in terms of simple components” (MacIntyre 1981:190). It is common for many sociological theorists and existentialists, maintains MacIntyre, to consider particular actions separated from their whole. This dominant view does not take cognisance of the fact that “life may be more than a sequence of individual actions and episodes” (MacIntyre 1981:190).

The result of social-existential and analytical-philosophical analysis is that the individual becomes invisible and only the roles he/she plays become pronounced. What the individual does takes prominence over what the individual is. Ultimately, the individual life is only recognised momentarily during "action" on the stage of life. Moreover, he/she is regarded as nothing other than an object in a series of unconnected episodes which the individual is required by duty, to perform. The danger of positioning the individual human being as a means to an end emerges. This is what MacIntyre calls the “liquidation” of the self, characteristic of Goffman as the individual strives to apply his/her will within a role-structured situation. Goffman's emphasis is on success in a world devoid of common standards of achievement apart from the momentary ones, needed in a given space and for a specific function or duty (see MacIntyre 1981:108).

Some examples may illustrate the point. Let us consider the soccer rules which help us to characterise a player as a good or bad one. Often nothing more is known outside the 90 minutes of the spectators’ remote interaction with him/her. Still, the manner in which public officials may present themselves under the guise of professional ethics creates an impression that they are good or bad in applying the standards required by their profession. In the meantime, their lives outside the public office or even after the moment of interaction are very different or require another set of ethics. In such a socio-ethical ambience even the basic moral requirements seem to be absent. What we have is a mere cynical expression of the social reality of human life (cf MacIntyre
1981:108, 190-191). Without tradition and without the individual there can never be a community.

2.3.3 The demise of the community concept

The autonomous but socially liquidated individual is also by implication on his/her own, lonely in a crowd of other lonely people. Nevertheless, this would be acceptable if the individual did not have to make and execute decisions whose actions and ultimate consequences affect others in one way or another. When an individual pursues his/her own desires (emotivism) the result is what MacIntyre calls a “mutual destructive anarchy” (MacIntyre 1981:213).

Then a new community of “individuals in community” emerges, each with their egoistic pursuits. Because of this self-centredness each one is always trying to manipulate the other for selfish ends. Inherently selfish is what human beings are and this human nature comes out more clearly when we are left alone. Cardinal virtues are evoked with courage and prudence directing the emotion of anger. This, as Stanley Hauerwas and Pinches have remarked, culminates “in the bond of pagan friendship, which is nothing less than the embodiment of justice” (cf Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:91). It is not surprising, then, to note that by the 17th and 18th centuries, the view that most people were egoistic and dangerous was common, and that because of this problem “altruism” was to be preferred. Though it was socially desirable, it was at the same time apparently impossible.

Of course the concept of community has been eroded further since the 18th century. Each individual in community has to pursue his/her own pleasures that are more often than not different from those pursued by others. Should they be the same, such as in the capitalistic economy, where fierce competition diminishes the importance of relationships built on moral considerations?

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50 Consider the reckless sexually active individual who disregards the sense of community. Yet when he/she is sick he/she will need the other individuals to care for him/her. Only a virtuous community could have it within themselves to exercise care and ubuntu. The concept of an individual offers a false sense of freedom and self-sufficiency to the individual during those short moments when the individual seems to feel that necessary sense of self-identity.
Community is held together by shared standards and values (moral goods). Without a commonality of these goods, there is nothing to preserve together and nothing necessitates holding on together. The quest for the survival of the fittest has reduced people to a means to an end. The very negation of the deontological ethical theory (categorical imperative) has been ironically produced by the same moral theories. What we have is a defenceless community something that we can call: Acquired Value-deficiency Community Syndrome (AVDCS) (cf Nkesiga 2004, July). Here HIV/AIDS thrives, politics of obscurantism and (the) perpetuation of corrupt living characterise the ethos of the community, leading to widespread frustration and feelings of powerlessness. To turn the tide, some concerned moral philosophers have proposed this third moral theory, namely Virtue Ethics. They hope that Virtue Ethics will resolve the current moral dilemma, recover the individual and re-establish the community. This paradigm will sustain goodness in the community.

2.4 The nature of moral disagreement

Debates on moral theory and moral practice are marked by three disheartening characteristics. The first, argues MacIntyre, is that moral utterances are characterised by “disagreements” as a dominant intellectual correctness. This aspect has been more common in moral discourse. Secondly, the debates on moral theory and practice simply go on endlessly as their main feature and lifeline. Thirdly, the “interminable character” of these debates, is that there “seems to be no rational way of securing a moral agreement in our culture” (MacIntyre 1981:6). Three examples are used to elucidate these observations.

2.4.1 The question of a “just war”

(a) “A just war is one in which the ‘good’ to be achieved outweighs the evils involved in waging the war and in which a clear distinction can be made between the combatants – whose lives are at stake – and the innocent non-combatants” (MacIntyre 1981:6). Unfortunately most wars remain unplanned according to this suggestion. No life, not even that of the combatants is dispensable. Individual or group interests have clouded the motives of most recent wars. In addition, no war has succeeded in
isolating the innocent from the crossfire.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, the effects of wars affect the innocent anyway, beyond the actual military engagement. “Therefore no modern war can be a just war and we all now ought to be pacifists” (MacIntyre 1981:6).

(b) “If you wish for peace, prepare for war. The only way to achieve peace is to deter potential aggressors” (MacIntyre 1981:6). Because of this utterance, many countries have concentrated on building up their military capacity and establishing policies that do not “rule out” the possibility of “going to war on any particular scale…” It is this perception that has pushed some countries to the brink of nuclear global threat. The assumption is that war is inevitable and cannot be avoided, otherwise a country would be defeated if they neglected the object of stockpiling of any of the latest military ware.

(c) “Wars between the Great Powers are purely destructive; but wars waged to liberate oppressed groups, especially in the Third World, are necessary and therefore justified means for destroying the exploitative domination\textsuperscript{52} which stands between mankind and happiness” (MacIntyre 1981:6).\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, there is no established way of confirming any allegations of exploitative domination, apart from basing it on the views of anyone wishing to fight the incumbent regime.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} The recent war against Sadam Hussein of Iraq is a typical example. It was clouded by personal and group interests, and the innocent have not been protected.

\textsuperscript{52} USA invasion of Iraq to oust Sadam Hussein (March – April 2003) is a case in point.

\textsuperscript{53} These arguments for the world’s moral discourse are very revealing in terms of understanding the perpetuation of armed conflicts in the politics of Africa. Euro-West politicians supported Idi Amin in staging a military \textit{coup d’etat} against Milton Obote, both of Uganda (1971), because the latter was being accused of inclining to the communist bloc during the Cold War period. Little did they know that they were supporting, a fascist (Idi Amin), who would reduce the anticipated happiness of Ugandans to tyranny in his eight years of rule (cf Museveni 1997:46-97; also Furley 1989:275-294).

\textsuperscript{54} One such case is that of USA’s support of Jonas Savimbi of Angola, whose claims were grossly selfish since he could not even win an election when the opportunity was given to him (1998). He eventually died when his military support was withdrawn after the end of the Cold War (Russell 2000:95-126).
2.4.2 The question of abortion

(a) “Everybody has certain rights over his or her own person, including his or her body” (MacIntyre 1981:6-7). It is from these inalienable rights that proceeds for example the right for a mother “to make her own uncoerced decision on whether she will have an abortion or not” (MacIntyre 1981:7). It would appear that abortion is morally right, permissible and ought to be legalised.

(b) No one can will that his/her mother should have had an abortion whilst she was pregnant, only in circumstances of grave damage to the embryo or the mother could abortion be allowed. If, therefore, one cannot will it, then, one cannot deny to others the right to life. MacIntyre considers this a contradiction of the Golden Rule unless he “denied that a mother has in general a right to an abortion” (MacIntyre 1981:7).

(c) MacIntyre advances that “murder is wrong” especially when defined as “taking of an innocent life” (MacIntyre 1981:7). The embryo is an individual but only at an earlier innocent stage on the road to adult capacities. Murder at any stage of human development is illegal. Abortion is therefore morally wrong and ought to be legalised as such.

2.4.3 The question of distributive justice

(a) “Justice demands that every citizen should enjoy, so far as is possible, an equal opportunity to develop his/her talents and his or her other potentials” (MacIntyre 1981:7). This right would suggest equal access to health and educational services. It should be the responsibility of the governments to pay for these provisions financed out of taxation. No citizen should buy an unfair share of such services and no individual should be allowed by law to own a private medical practice or school servicing only the financially able people.55

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55The rich can study and be enlightened while the poor remain ignorant. The rich can have health and the poor can die of treatable ailments. This is the capitalistic mentality advanced by Darwin in “the survival of the fittest” concept.
(b) However, the freedom to choose a doctor or a school and that of a doctor to practice and a teacher to teach has been abrogated by regulatory institutions such as the medical schools, universities and the state.

MacIntyre claims that these arguments have not only been widely recognised but have also been made influential because of being articulated by expert spokesmen (sic) such as “Herman Kahn and the Pope, Che Guevara and Milton Friedman” among the authors “who have produced variant versions of them” (MacIntyre 1981:7). The media have also helped in popularising these views to the extent that they have become household knowledge.

MacIntyre asks, “What salient characteristics do these debates and disagreements share?” He identifies three.

The first one is developed from an adaptation of “an expression from the philosophy of science, the conceptual incommensurability of the rival arguments in each of the three debates” (MacIntyre 1981:8). That is to observe that each of the three arguments is “logically valid” implying that “conclusions do indeed follow from the premises”. But the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one against another” (MacIntyre 1981:8). This is because each premise employs a different normative or evaluative concept from the other, making the claims in each case of a different kind. As such, the first argument maintained that:

premises which invoke justice and innocence are at odds with premises which invoke success and survival; in the second, premises (those) which invoke rights are at odds with those which invoke universalisability; in the third, it is the claim of equality that is matched against that of liberty (MacIntyre 1981:8).

The result is interminable arguments, since from one rival conclusion one argues back to another rival premise. However, at this point the argument ceases and what remains are “pure assertions and counter-assertions”. This is because there is no established way of deciding between competing claims and arriving at some form of moral agreement. No one comes to a debate of this nature with an open mind. MacIntyre observes that there seems to be a “disquieting private arbitrariness” so that there is no
hope of convincing one with an opposing moral view because they seem to have “some non-rational decision to adopt that position” (MacIntyre 1981:8).

The second and equally important salient characteristic of these debates is that they purport to be impersonal rational arguments and are presented in a mode appropriate to that impersonality. However, any moral injunction depends on impersonal criteria independent of the relationship pertaining at the time between the origin of an injunction and the person being addressed. The source of an injunction must possess some form of authority (father, priest, officer, teacher – a position of superiority) that must be known to address a specific context. “The force of reason-giving which always holds in the case of personal preferences or desires is severed in the case of moral and other evaluative utterances” (MacIntyre 1981:9). MacIntyre has argued this point elsewhere in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988):

Modern academic philosophy turns out by and large to provide means for a more accurate and informed definition of disagreement rather than for progress toward its resolution. Professors of philosophy who concern themselves with questions of justice and practical rationality turn out to disagree with each other as sharply, as variously, and, so it seems, as irremediably upon how such questions are to be answered as anyone else. They do indeed succeed in articulating the rival standpoints with greater clarity, greater fluency, and a wider range of arguments than do most others, but apparently little more than this (MacIntyre 1988:3).

As claims quickly relapse into “unargued” disagreements, what comes to the fore is “a clash of antagonistic wills, each will determined by some set of arbitrary choices of its own” (MacIntyre 1981:9).

The third of the salient characteristics of contemporary moral debate arises from conceptual incommensurability of rival opinions. Take, for example, the concept of justice. MacIntyre argues that it is rooted

in Aristotle’s account of virtues; the second one runs through Bismarck and Clausewitz to Machiavelli; the concept of liberation in the third argument has

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56 Incommensurability is a term used by MacIntyre, to describe “two large-scale systems of thought and practice” which present themselves in such a radical disagreement”. MacIntyre maintains that in such a case, “there is and can be no independent standard or measure by appeal to which their rival claims can be adjudicated, since each has internal to itself its own fundamental standard of judgment” (MacIntyre 1990:4).
shallow roots in Marx, deeper roots in Fichte. In the second debate a concept of rights which has Lockean antecedents is matched against a view of universalisability which is recognisably Kantian and an appeal to the moral law which is Thomist. In the third debate an argument which owes debts to T.H. Green and Rousseau competes with one which has Adam Smith as a grandfather (MacIntyre 1981:10).

The point which MacIntyre is making here is that, such names bring to mind a historical dispensation which might mislead us. We might underestimate the complexity of history embedded in the intricate bodies of theory and practice which constitute human cultures, the beliefs of which the philosophers articulate only partially and selectively. However, the names suggested above indicate how wide and heterogeneous these fragments of moral sources are. These sources reduce our current pluralist moral utterances to a shallow rhetoric and suspicious discourse. The suspicion, MacIntyre maintains, is based on the fact that “all those concepts which inform our moral discourse were originally at home in larger totalities of theory and practice in which they enjoyed a role and a function supplied by context of which they have now been deprived” (MacIntyre 1981:10). In the past 300 years, many concepts have evolved in character, and evaluative expressions have changed their meaning so that our contemporary understanding of “virtue”, “justice”, “piety”, “duty”, and the imperative language “you ought to” is different from what they meant in their historical context. Moreover, reconstructing their historical contexts is neither helpful nor possible (cf MacIntyre 1981:10).

An interesting misnomer has gone on for a long time. This is the “unhistorical treatment of moral philosophy by contemporary philosophers in both the writing about and teaching of the subject” (MacIntyre 1981:11). Often philosophers of different contexts are discussed as if they were contemporaries not only of each other but also of the contemporary debaters. Their views are often uprooted from the cultural influence that bore and gave them meaning. As such, their utterances acquired a kind of independence that transcends time, cultures, change, geographical location, and their influences. Could this be the effects of the theory of “emotivism”? MacIntyre cautions us of the dangers in the theory of emotivism.

“Emotivism” is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference,
expressions of attitude or feelings, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character (MacIntyre 1981:11).

The test for emotivism is our consideration of factual moral judgments and those moral judgments based on expressions of feelings or attitudes. “Factual judgments are true or false” whereas “expressions of attitudes or feelings are neither true nor false” (MacIntyre 1981:12). It follows, therefore, that no rational moral agreements can be secured by emotive moral theory. Emotivism also contributes to the interminable character of moral judgments insofar as moral judgments are based on “certain non-rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree…” MacIntyre 1981:12).

MacIntyre refers to G. E. Moore, whom he counts as responsible for the culture of emotivism. Two concepts emerged from Moore’s contribution namely, intuitionism and utilitarianism. The former, which operated like vision of some sort, was taken as _prima facie_, and the latter was that every action had to be evaluated solely by its consequences, which would have to be compared with the consequences of other possible alternatives. In early 20th century England, these concepts were the contents of moral philosophy, whose objective was “the achievement of friendship and the contemplation of what is beautiful in nature or in art” (MacIntyre 1981:15). This became the sole justifiable end of all human action.

Keynes took this “plainly false, badly argued position” (MacIntyre 1981:15), and treated it as “the beginning of a renaissance”. Yet Lytton Strachey had declared these ethical utterances as ones that had “shattered” all writers on ethics from Aristotle and Christ to Herbert Spencer and Mr Bradley. Leonard Woolf had described the same submissions on ethics as “the substituting of the religious and philosophical nightmares, delusions, hallucinations in which Jehovah, Christ and St. Paul, Plato, Kant and Hegel had entangled us” (MacIntyre 1981:15). Because of the cogency of these philosophers, their views spread far and wide. MacIntyre argues that they were wrong. He is brave enough to say:

Austin Duncan-Jones and C. L Stevenson were pupils of Moore; it is implausible to suppose that they did in fact confuse moral utterance at Cambridge (and in other places with similar inheritance) after 1903 with
moral utterances as such, and that they therefore presented what was in essentials a correct account of the former as though it were an account of the latter (MacIntyre 1981:17).

This marked the scheme of moral decline, first with regard to a claim to evaluative moral theory and practical genuine objectives and impersonal standards. These standards, so it was skilfully argued, would provide rational justification for particular policies, actions and judgments. Secondly, and independent of the first point, were unsuccessful attempts to maintain objectivity and the impersonal moral judgments in support of the inevitable continuous breakdown of any rational justifications. Thirdly, the theory of emotivism “secured wide implicit acceptance” and “recognition in practice” although the theory’s purported “objectivity and impersonality” could not claim similar popularity. Despite MacIntyre’s objections, to the deficiency of this emotivist scheme, a deficiency that was explicit to any moral philosopher, the theory was neither deserted, nor its misleading language abandoned. MacIntyre remarks:

it is important to note how often in widely different modern philosophical contexts something very like emotivism’s attempted reduction of morality to personal preference continually recurs in the writings of those who do not think of themselves as emotivists (MacIntyre 1981:19).

It was this unrecognised philosophical power of emotivism that gave theory a cultural dynamism and as such,

Emotivism has become embodied in our culture. Of course in saying this I am not merely contending that morality is not what it once was, but also and more importantly that what once was morality has to some large degree disappeared – and that this marks a degeneration, a grave cultural loss (MacIntyre 1981:21).

From this tentative conclusion, MacIntyre marks out two objectives which constitute his task. The first is to identify and describe the lost morality of the past and evaluate its claims to objectivity and authority; and the second one is to make good his claim about the specific character of the modern age. To achieve these, MacIntyre turns to the social content and social contexts in which emotivism (and indeed any other philosophy) flourishes.
2.5 The cultural context of the project of justifying morality

We learn from MacIntyre that moral philosophy - including emotivism - thrives in a context of social interaction. The moral agent influences his/her social surroundings much as they do the same to him/her. Therefore, the conceptual analysis of the moral agent’s reasons, motives, intentions and actions is fundamental in situating the moral agent in the real social world. In his observation, MacIntyre notes that Plato, Aristotle, Hume and Adam Smith took cognisance of social content and social context. However, emotivists since Moore ignored this task. They obliterated any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative language. In so doing, they ended up treating persons as a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves.

The contrary is experienced when someone else is offered “good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons” (MacIntyre 1981:22-23) in process that recognises the autonomy of the individual as an end. The proponent of an ethical utterance refrains from influencing another person except by reasons that that other person judges to be good. Such an approach is characterised by an “appeal to impersonal criteria of the validity of which each rational agent must be his/her own judge” (MacIntyre 1981:23). 57

What is the consequence of the obliteration of social relationship? To answer this question MacIntyre turns to William Gass, who borrows some observations from Henry James’ novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (in Gass 1971), with regard to a rich European group. The investigation yields a metaphor of consumption and describes “what it means to be a consumer of persons, and [of] what it means to be a person consumed” (see MacIntyre 1981:23). In the social context of the rich Europe, the social content is to eliminate boredom and satisfy human pleasure. In the process of achieving these ends they contrive “behaviour in others that will be responsive to their wishes, that will feed their sated appetites” (MacIntyre 1981:23). To such as these, the world is simply a meeting place of peoples and their wills, preferences, and attitudes. After all, the sole purpose of human existence is the achievement of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. This is why the “other” becomes a means, rather than an

57 This is the genre of both African and Judeo-Christian proverbs in the Wisdom literature (Thompson 1974:34).
end for the “self” in pursuit of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. This social context has a high influencing factor. As MacIntyre remarks:

This is not to say that the realm of what Kierkegaard called the aesthetic is restricted to the rich and to their close neighbours; the rest of us often share the attitudes of the rich in fantasy and aspiration (MacIntyre 1981:24). 58

Do we have another kind of social context to rescue us from this hedonistic trap? MacIntyre suggests the “life of an organisation” whose bureaucratic structures define work which the “rich aesthetic with plethora of means” hardly thinks of. Organisations and corporations bring back an assumption in which competition for scarce resources becomes a reality. Managers have to drive available resources, human and otherwise, as means, to predetermined profits as ends. Effectiveness is derived from implicit “costs and benefits” while rationality is achieved through “matching means to ends economically and efficiently” (MacIntyre 1981:24).

The above argument, which MacIntyre owes to Max Weber, is indeed as emotivist as Weber. For example, we are reminded that “[q]uestions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent” because “rival values cannot be rationally settled”. Personal choice forms the criterion based on personal decision guided by personal conscience that is “irrefutable” (see MacIntyre 1981:25). However, this assumption is not in fact the case in practical situations. For in the effort to exercise managerial authority, managers ensure that their subordinates proceed from those positions that would lead them to the manager’s preconceived conclusions. Therefore, this Weberian managerial portrait functions in such a way that it controls behaviour and suppresses conflict.

It is important to note that, from this managerial portrait, we begin to notice a way in which specific social roles model character. Each culture may have its own dramatic way by which roles fuse into personalities distinctive from other cultures. The character of the culture of a people is in many ways defined by the manner in which

58 This is how Euro-Western materialistic character has influenced Africans. Among the poor, materialism is a fantasy and an aspiration. The aspiration may not be morally wrong, but the fantasy that drives many leaders to self-enrichment schemes by stealing public funds entrusted to them is due to moral deficiency.
such a culture’s specific roles are almost strategically characterised. Public leaders fall into this strategic position. MacIntyre puts it this way:

Characters have one other notable dimension. They are, so to speak, the moral representatives of their cultures and they are so because of the way in which moral and metaphysical ideas and theories assume through them an embodied existence in the social world (MacIntyre 1981:27).

The result here is that the individual and his/her social character in those specific public roles are absorbed into each other and are assumed to “embody moral beliefs, doctrines and theories” to be anticipated in the moral actions. To this end, an individual who has made the choice to participate in an intelligible scheme of beliefs intentionally expresses moral behaviour supported by a context of “intelligible sequence” and an “individual’s history of action, beliefs, experience and interaction” (MacIntyre 1981:27).

Is this ideal situation always the case? We now know that “the requirements of a character are imposed from the outside, from the way in which others regard and use characters to understand and evaluate themselves”. The Weberian expectations are such that the moral representative in the social role he/she furnishes the public with:

a cultural and moral ideal. Hence the demand is that in this type of case, role and personality be fused. Social type and psychological type are required to coincide. The character morally legitimates a mode of social existence (MacIntyre 1981:28).

There are cases in which the individuals may not necessarily fuse in these social roles to produce the anticipated character models. Some individuals may even perform their roles according to the set policies when in fact their beliefs and moral actions are at variance with those of the institution whose character they purport to represent. The emotivism makes this subtle behaviour possible by “obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations” (MacIntyre 1981:29). These social roles are “ends-driven”, for example the therapist, from a rational standpoint seeks “effectiveness in transforming neurotic symptoms into directed energy, maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones” (MacIntyre 1981:29). But the therapist does not engage in any moral debate with the “clients” because they
“purport to be restricting themselves to the realms in which rational agreement is possible – that is, of course, from their point of view” (MacIntyre 1981:29). These realms are “fact”, “means” and “measurable effectiveness” (MacIntyre 1981:29). This conception of the social role of a therapeutic discipline invades aspects of education and religion since it assumes a place beyond that of psychological medicine. Truth as a value is “replaced by psychological effectiveness” (MacIntyre 1981:29). The individual involved in this process is evaluated in terms of the ends or effectiveness.

The individual should be considered as one with a history and one with a character distinct from the social role (or the character of the organisation) by which the emotivist would like to define him/her. MacIntyre notes that there is no criterion for evaluating the self because standpoint is lacking in the emotivist’s approach. A standpoint is very critical in moral judgment since without it the emotivist self lacks a defined reference from which moral choices can be made. For an emotivist, “Everything may be criticised from whatever standpoint the self has adopted, including the self’s choice of standpoint” (MacIntyre 1981:30). Social roles seem to have a standpoint imputed by their trade and within this sphere, procedures to deal with disagreements are provided for. However, in the domain of morals “the ultimacy of disagreements is dignified by the title ‘pluralism’” (MacIntyre 1981:30). This leaves us with an open-ended self, no identity but a set of perpetually open possibilities, which pit the individual against the social world where the self is nothing. However, to be denied identity is to negate one’s very existence, which is impossible.

MacIntyre enhances this point by referring to the “pre-modern traditional societies” in which an individual was defined from the point of view of belonging to a family, in all its extended directions, in a particular location, village, and the larger tribe. These formed part of the substance that defined a person. The form as an evaluative standpoint provided criteria for judgment. This is one of the aspects of social moral content which was discontinued by the emotivist theory in the modern world.

The emotivist, on the one hand, offered an individualism marked by pluralism and open-endedness of standpoints that MacIntyre calls “the self-defined protagonists of individual liberty”. On the other hand, you have a lost self in the semblance of a
bureaucratically regulated system that MacIntyre calls “the self-defined protagonist of planning and regulation…” (MacIntyre 1981:33). Here both the individual and the bureaucracy are antagonistic sovereignties. MacIntyre concludes:

Given this deep cultural agreement, it is unsurprising that the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom that is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behaviour and forms of collective control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interest (MacIntyre 1981:33).59

As MacIntyre wrote in the early 1980s, he was one of the last inheritors of the transformation process from more traditional modes of existence into the contemporary emotivist. The form of moral discourse - the language of morality – was being transformed into a single history of contemporary moral utterance. On one side was the “apparent incommensurability of the concepts invoked” and on another was “the assertive use of ultimate principles in an attempt to close moral debate” (MacIntyre 1981: 35-34).

2.6 The failure of the project of the enlightenment and its consequences

Why did the project of Enlightenment fail and what were the consequences of this failure? The failure of the project of Enlightenment was not simply theoretical or a matter of intellectual argument. Many academic philosophers continued to labour, hoping that the moral theory, argued logically, would achieve their goal. The other problem was that of trying to be intellectually correct. This is the habit of being consistent with other acclaimed scholars even when their approach, while being logically correct, compromises essential tenets of morality. In reference to moral philosophers, most subsequent scholars often considered their predecessors as though they were timeless. Let us follow MacIntyre in considering a few of these contributors to moral philosophy.

The arguments of Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Kant (1724-1804), Diderot (1713-1784), Hume (1711-1776) and others were, of course, motivated by their own contexts.

59 I have elsewhere given examples that the judiciary, correctional services, and the security services (intelligence, police and the army) are all expensive institutions dictated by the need to control human anarchy due to self-interest.
Moral contributions were based on historical background and the dominating conceivable structures each in their different contexts. Firstly, their moral arguments were based on agreement about “the content and character of the precepts which constitute genuine morality” (MacIntyre 1981:49). The examples given are marriage and justice that were to be based on Christian moral standards. Secondly, they also agreed “on the character of morality”. They agreed “upon what a rational justification of morality would have to be”. For example, it would have key premises characterised by “some feature or features of human nature; and the rules of morality would then be explained and justified as being those rules which a being possessing just such a human nature could be expected to accept” (MacIntyre 1981:49-50).

They had some differences in the understanding of human nature. In analysing their differences, MacIntyre observed that for Diderot and Hume the relevant features of human nature were “characteristics of passions”. For Kant it was the universal and categorical character of certain rules of reason. Kant would, however, deny that morality is based on human nature, if that human nature is merely the physiological non-rational side of a person. Generally, they all shared in the project of constructing valid arguments that would move from premises concerning human nature, as they understood it to be, to conclusions on the authority of moral rules and precepts. MacIntyre maintains, in his argument, that this is why the project had to fail:

I want to argue that any project of this form was bound to fail, because of an ineradicable discrepancy between their shared conception of moral rules and precepts on the one hand and what was shared – despite much larger divergence – in their conception of human nature on the other. Both conceptions have a history and their relationship can only be made intelligible in the light of that history (MacIntyre 1981:50).

Then MacIntyre looks at the two rival moral models from which the moral philosophers drew particular elements of morality that dominated the 12th century onwards. These moral elements were drawn from both the classic and the theistic. Fundamental differences were evident in the teleological model “between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature” (MacIntyre 1981:50). The question was: How does man make the transition from the former state
to the latter? Ethics\textsuperscript{60} is proposed as the means by which people “understand how they make this transition”. This is because ethics offers “some accounts of the potentiality to act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal, and above all, some account of the human telos” (MacIntyre 1981:50). Anyone willing to commit him/herself to a moral transition would have to attend regularly to a system of precepts. These instructions or teachings or guidelines can only provide an encouragement to the inner human potential to act virtuously and be prohibited from the temptations of vices. This does not mean that the human being responds automatically. Precepts provide information, but the moral agent needs an inner motivation. This is the path towards “realising our true nature” (that which a genuine human being is aware of as true, beneficial and just) and to realise our true end, as MacIntyre explains:

\begin{quote}
The desires and emotions which we possess are to be put in order and educated by the use of such precepts and by the cultivation of those habits of action which the study of ethics prescribes; reason instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it (MacIntyre 1981:50).
\end{quote}

This was the classic conception of a moral scheme, which held sway in the Greek classic society until the late Middle Ages.

The Christian theistic scheme was to be added on to the classic one without much alteration. From the religious point of view, moral utterances were placed within the framework of theistic beliefs. “The precepts of ethics now have to be understood, not only as teleological injunctions, but also as expressions of a divinely ordered law” (MacIntyre 1981:51). Aristotle’s table of virtues and vices has to be amended, so that the concept of sin is added to that of errors. The true end of a person was not simply the realisation of moral ends - a matter of this world - but in the next. As such:

\begin{quote}
To say what someone ought to do is at once to say what course of action will in these circumstances as a matter of fact lead towards a man’s true end and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Ethics studies human conduct; it is concerned with questions such as “When is an act right?” “When is an act wrong?” and “What is the nature, or determining standard, of good and bad?” In asking these questions, ethical theorists have proposed differing accounts of the nature of ethical knowledge, the measure of it, the source of it, the means of knowing it, and how it ought to be applied (Ethics: in Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003).
to say what law ordained by God and comprehended by reason enjoins (MacIntyre 1981:51).

Words of wisdom (of a religious nature in contrast to the general precepts of the Aristotelian maxims) are used in this framework to make claims with regard to what is true or false. Biblical Revelation, which refers to God’s word and action more vividly revealed through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, provides the contents of this scheme. Moreover, it is supported by the discovery of reason (a new way of using reason is implied here) which provides a rational defence of the scheme (cf MacIntyre 1981:51).

This opens up contentious theological debate recounted by MacIntyre. The first contention is that we cannot have genuine comprehension of (a) person’s true end; secondly that the power of human reason was destroyed in his Fall.

From the submission of Protestantism using Calvinism as the exponent of this view, it was claimed that “reason might have played the part that Aristotle assigned to it, but now reason is powerless to correct our passions” (MacIntyre 1981:51). Hume shared in this view as a nurtured Calvinist. Although the concept of grace was added to reason, it seemed to persevere through Pascal (1623-1662), Hume 1711-1776, and

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61 Calvinism is described as the Christian theology of the French Church reformer, John Calvin. “Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536-1559; trans. 1561) was the most influential work in the development of the Protestant Churches of the Reformed tradition. Calvinist doctrine lies within the Pauline and Augustinian theological tradition. Its central tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone. As did the German religious reformer Martin Luther, Calvin denied that human beings were capable of free will after the Fall of Adam, but he went further than Luther in elaborating a doctrine of predestination—that certain people are elected by God to salvation, while others are rejected by Him and consigned to eternal damnation (Calvinism: in Encarta encyclopaedia 2003).

62 “Pascal espoused Jansenism and in 1654 entered the Jansenist community at Port Royal, where he led a rigorously ascetic life until his death eight years later. In 1656, he wrote the famous 18 Lettres provinciales (Provincial Letters), in which he attacked the Jesuits for their attempts to reconcile 16th-century naturalism with orthodox Roman Catholicism. His most positive religious statement appeared posthumously (he died on August 19, 1662); it was published in fragmentary form in 1670 as Apologie de la religion Chretienne (Apology of the Christian Religion). In these fragments, which later were incorporated into his major work, he posed the alternatives of potential salvation and eternal damnation; with the implication that only by conversion to Jansenism could salvation be achieved. Pascal asserted that whether or not salvation was achieved, humanity's ultimate destiny is an afterlife belonging to a supernatural realm that can be known only intuitively. Pascal's final important work was Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets (Thoughts on Religion and on Other Subjects), also published in 1670. In the Pensées Pascal attempted to explain and justify the difficulties of human life by the doctrine of original sin, and he contended that revelation can be comprehended only by faith, which in turn is justified by revelation” (Pascal Blaise: in Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003).
Kant (1724-1804). However much they may disagree, their insistence on basing morality on human reason prevailed, and this is why, MacIntyre maintains, the project of Enlightenment failed.

Ultimately, the Enlightenment moral philosophers rejected the Christian and the Aristotelian moral and evaluative tools in preference for secularism. The latter option (secularism) was and still is open-ended as a logical rationality based on human nature, and forms an open-ended basis for moral utterance (cf MacIntyre 1981:52). However, MacIntyre argues:

Since the whole point of ethics - both as a theoretical and a practical discipline - is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of the notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of a notion of a telos leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear. There is on the one hand a certain content for morality: a set of injunctions deprived of their teleological context. There is on the other hand a certain view of untutored-human-nature-as-it-is (MacIntyre 1981:52).

Despite the elimination of “man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-telos”, values, rules and standards of both the Aristotelian and theistic moral model were maintained – only in language. The secular moral scheme of the Enlightenment was based on the assumed new conception of human nature considered to be rational. According to this model, human nature needed no correction, education or improvement towards a purposeful end – telos. Consequently, strong tendencies to disobey injunctions of a moral scheme of the abandoned theistic plausibility structure were surely to be anticipated (cf MacIntyre 1981:53). The new conception of human nature was incompatible with the moral order, which they thought to maintain albeit in fragments. They could not reject the teleological conception of morality, since its rejection would have made morality “unintelligible”.

63 Hume’s contribution in moral theory follows Hobbes. Hume, “argued that human reason can influence a person’s action only by showing how one act is a better way to satisfy that person’s desires and passions than another. Reason, as Hume put it, is the “slave of the passions”. Consequently, moral or ethical behaviour must be based on passions too: in this case, secondary passions that are aroused because of a human tendency to empathize with other human beings’ pleasure and suffering. Hume showed how the rise and evolution of systems of social morality could be explained using this psychology, while he argued that moral beliefs, as expressions of passions, cannot be true or false. His views helped lay the foundations for utilitarianism, and also for all subsequent scepticism about the idea that there are such things as moral truths” (Hume: in Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003).
Nonetheless, as expected, their (the Enlightenment moral philosophers) teleology was defined as “a presupposition of pure practical reason” (MacIntyre 1981:53). In spite of all this, the moral scheme of God remained in view, but “freedom and happiness would be the final crown of virtue”, which Kant propounded (cf MacIntyre 1981:53)

The Enlightenment project had failed to construct a moral ethic. What were the consequences of this failure? These consequences have in fact progressively blossomed in the last 200 years to manifest itself in the current moral disorientation.

2.7 MacIntyre’s transition to virtue ethics: some critical remarks

I have discussed MacIntyre’s argument for the reviving of Virtue Ethics. These were marked as the abandonment of the teleological concept in which God is the source of moral obligation, the law-giver, and a concept upon which moral language is constructed. Directly linked to the preceding point is the rejection of the importance of tradition in moral discourse and moral development. This is what Milbank in his book *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990), has called “post-modern nihilism”.

He attributes his arguments to MacIntyre’s notions of the fragmentation of the individual; the demise of the community concept by the mores of capitalistic and bureaucratic establishments (cf Milbank 1990:327); and the interpretation of virtues in the progressive failure of the project of Enlightenment. In these notions, “good
actions” lead to “legal correctness” as opposed to a “good person” who is “morally willed” (cf Milbank 1990:338).

It is from these arguments that MacIntyre develops his transition from ethics of doing to ethics of being in the Virtue Ethics theory. His point of departure is recapitulated by Milbank as the realisation of this “postmodern nihilism” that “occupies a special position between modern social theory and practice on the one hand, and a revived classicism on the other” (Milbank 1990:326). This trend gave birth to “secular reason”, as a product of the morally degenerative effect of the project of Enlightenment that exposed its irreducible conflicts in problematic moral establishments. It is MacIntyre’s argument that trying to improve the Enlightenment project by correcting its misgivings will not solve the problem. Rather we should try to recover “what secular reason initially refused, namely a social order grounded on virtue” (Milbank 1990:226).

MacIntyre’s transition to Virtue Ethics and, indeed my own submission, are based on reclaiming God’s authority in the teleological conceptual moral scheme. MacIntyre presents this with a measure of academic philosophical correctness, but I propose it from a cultural-theological position, hoping to overcome the “pathos of modern theology” and its “false humility” challenged by Milbank (cf Milbank 1990:1). Once

These include lack of envy, love of liberty, perseverance and industry, patriotism, integrity and justice. This period is marked by incompatible tables of virtues from different moral philosophers. The French Jacobin clubs (1794), for example, had liberty, fraternity, equality, patriotism, and love of family as their virtues.

66 Classical natural law was an assumption that “all things pursue both their own good and the good of the whole” and revived classicism, referred to as modern natural law, argues that “modern natural law theorists regard the natural law as empirically discoverable”. It does not, however, “claim that every human being is independently capable of discovering the natural law”. It is rather argued that most people may only understand “that punishment will follow failure to obey this law” (Herdt: 2001:150).

67 “Secular reason” is a term that captures all the modern moral theories that are nihilistic. These may include humanism, which puts emphasis on the individual and his/her freedoms and pursuit of pleasure.

68 The conflict referred to here was the struggle between the modern natural law theorists and the perfectionists. Thinkers such as Hugo Grotius (1583 -1645) and Aquinas Hobbes (1588 -1679), Samuel Pufendorf (1632 -1694) and John Locke (1632-1704) with regard to natural law theory advanced these two moral positions that rose from the European Renaissance period. The perfectionists included moral philosophers such as Herbert of Cherbury (1582-1648) and Rene Descartes (1596—1716) (Herdt 2001:150 -151).

69 MacIntyre did not in fact start this line of argument; rather he is probably the most articulate in the last two decades. While MacIntyre best represents the advocacy of Virtue, he is the “heir of earlier writers like Jacques Martains, Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss” (Milbank 1990:326).
this is in place, then what MacIntyre calls agent-centred morality is established in a moral agent who has found his/her freedom in God.

The individual is recovered through a narrative of a life story, a kind of “self-knowledge” advanced in a catalogue of virtues by Jane Austen70 (see MacIntyre 1981:222-226). Austen’s catalogue describes that special encounter with the transforming power and wisdom of God. The story is told to a community whose ethos is based on virtue as the common desire to pursue what is good for all. Here authority, whether of God or the community, over the individual is “not simply an effective peace and order, nor representation of majority will, nor the liberty and equality of individual, but rather the education of the individuals into certain practices and states of character, regarded as objectively desirable goals for human beings as such” (Milbank 1990:226).

Perhaps the most striking contextual similarity between the Greek ethos and the current modern one is MacIntyre’s analysis of the commonality of a debased morality in a relativistic culture. Hauerwas and Pinches have reiterated Milbank’s observation with regard to MacIntyre’s analysis. They affirm MacIntyre’s view that the Greeks perceived their social-intellectual situation more or less in the same way as we think of our own. He observes:

> We find ourselves in the midst of a debased, democratic politics, frequently tending to tyranny, and at the same time struggling for responses to ‘non-civic’ philosophies which instil an uncompromising relativism (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:63).

Milbank goes on to argue:

> MacIntyre’s return to Plato and Aristotle belongs, therefore, in the context of a contemporary response to the problem of relativism. Plato’s and Aristotle’s solutions to this problem acquire a new appeal once it is seen that modern rationalist/empiricist attempts to ground ethics in universal “natural” facts

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70 Jane Austen turns away from the catalogue of competing virtues with her virtue of “happiness” (18th century), in an attempt to restore the teleological perspective. She has virtues such as “being socially agreeable”, “the virtue of amiability, which requires a genuine loving regard for other people as such, and not only the impression of such a regard embodied in manners”. She also includes “practical intelligence”, “humility”, and “self knowledge”. All these were motivated by her Christian devotion, and the latter was a development of repentance (MacIntyre 1981:222-226).
about human nature – desire for pleasure, avoidance of pain, or the freedom of human will – are untenable (Milbank 1990:337; also cf Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:63).

However, what MacIntyre wants, is not necessarily the Greek virtues as in a Greek *polis*. Hauerwas and Pinches do not think that this point comes out clearly in MacIntyre’s transition to Virtue Ethics. Milbank affirms their observation, especially when MacIntyre wishes to hinge the revival of Virtue Ethics on a Christian teleology. Hauerwas and Pinches observe:

As Milbank suggests, the deeper implications of the Greek understanding of virtue clash with the political (and essential) claims of Christianity. MacIntyre largely ignores this and so cannot see that the Christian virtues, represented (ironically) most strongly by Aquinas, actually offer an alternative which radically challenges Greek notions of virtue (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:63).

We are made aware that Greek virtues were established under a patriotic and militant spirit of the *polis*. The dominant forces within and outside the *polis* were those of conflict and conquest. Milbank argues that causing virtues to lean on Christian faith without mention of their original drive may in fact misrepresent genuine Christ-centred morality. Robert Vosloo in his article *Back to Virtue* (1997) also highlights Hauerwas warning in favour of this argument:

Hauerwas is of the opinion that the exemplary illustration of courage, namely that of soldiers in battle, should not be normative for Christians. Christians should always be wary of illustrations of courage that drive their intelligibility from war. For Christians martyrdom is a more exemplary illustration of courage (Vosloo 1997:307).

In his argument concerning the incompatibility of Greek versus Christian virtues, Milbank maintains that we should be wary of attaching Greek virtue to Christian ones, simply because the former were “founded on politics of violence and exclusivity”. The term “virtue” is developed from the Greek word *arete*. Milbank argues:

*Arete* has meaning in relation to a fundamentally heroic image that has no telos other than conflict. The hero vanquished his foes, and the virtues are his wherewithal, as well as those traits for which he is accorded honour in the polis he violently defends (in Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:63).
Greek conceptualisation of virtue clashes with the witness of Christian moral beliefs, since for the latter attaining virtue is not fundamentally a victory, as it is for the Greeks. For the Christian, the term that becomes an appropriate forerunner for virtues is therefore *caritas*. Milbank maintains that:

By contrast, *caritas*, the very form of the virtues for Aquinas, sees the person of virtue as essentially standing in mutuality with God and with her fellow human beings (in Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:63-64).

Milbank concludes that “[i]n that sense, Christianity is not a continuation of the Greek understanding of the virtues, but rather the inauguration of a new tradition that sets the virtues within an entirely different telos in community”. This is why Milbank holds “that we can never recommend virtue in general, but rather only Christian virtues in particular” (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:62-64).

Edmund Pincoffs, in his book *Quandaries and Virtues* (see Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:58), seems to move from a position of a supposed normative, “namely that of Enlightenment liberalism”. Although he does not disclose his stance in entering the debate on virtues, his suggestion of “mandatory virtues” asserts what Hauerwas and Pinches have called a kind of democratic virtue[s] or those which are conducive to life in an open society. Pincoffs is a Kantian alongside Chapman, who claims that humanity has [be]come of age and that in fact God has left us alone. Chapman asserts this view boldly:

In this all-too-human condition God is with us, he “drinks the earthly cup to the dregs”. And such a doctrine of Christ means that the inaccessible, the highest good, the beyond, is not in a secret place, but is actually at its strongest in human worldliness: In Jesus God said Yes and Amen to it all, and that Yes and Amen is firm ground on which we stand. Firm ground, yes, but always a ground which points beyond the use of power and toward the denial of final authority, even divine authority. And that, I think, has something to do with our growing up: God has left us alone; God trusts us, and trusts us to be as we are, finite, uncertain and secular. And any other way is denial of that human responsibility entrusted to us (Chapman 1998:390; also cf 385,387).

Chapman is very subtle and perhaps radical in the way he interprets the place of God in human moral affairs. The maturity he refers to points to the entrenchment of
autonomy of the individual in the line of Kantians such as Murdoch, Taylor, and Pincoffs. These may be scholars who have abandoned the notion of Christ’s enduring presence through the Spirit. By Christ’s transforming experience, one knows, internally, that God has not left us alone. This experience of Christ puts the respondent person into the freedom of the Christian ethos. Murdoch may struggle to find logic to explain that an individual is alone and purposeless. Christian life is full of examples of people whose lives have internalised the Christ-centred values and have henceforth lived purposeful lives.

Christ-centred ethics could be the sole foundation for “agent-centred” ethics, “ethics of being”, or “ethics of responsibility”. At least this is the core of the moral proposition of this study. The possibility of moral transformation is often certain in those who have chosen to submit to being Christ-centred and have interiorised Christian virtues. Christian living embodies a moral agent-centred Virtue Ethics, the recipient of which is an asset to the new community (cf Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:64; also Milbank 1990:359-360). This will be placed in the context of an African understanding of God as well as the intricate relation between individual and the community in the last chapter of this study.

Vosloo, however, has warned that whereas this separation of secular and Christian virtues is indeed necessary, we should work to avoid the tyranny of the virtuous in all cases. He maintains:

The plea for an ethics of virtue can easily turn into a new form of dictatorship that leads to violence. The postmodern criticism against such totalitarianism serves as important resistance. In my opinion it is important to utilise certain resistance devices within the Christian tradition to resist the possible tyranny of virtuousness. (Vosloo 1997:307)

Vosloo’s summary is worth recounting for anyone, this study included, seeking to engage Christ-centred virtue ethics. He advises that:

(i) virtues do not become a camouflage of petty bourgeoisie
(ii) virtues do not turn into new laws
(iii) virtues do not lead to a new arbitrariness
(iv) virtues do not turn into a new dictatorship
(v) secular virtues are not to be equated to Christian virtues in an uncritical manner (cf Vosloo 1997:307).

If we accept that these are sound arguments for pursuing the potential of an agent-centred ethics based on an understanding of virtues, the task now is to look at how these virtues have been understood in some of the major thought traditions. The link between a theology of wisdom and “wise living” (both individually and collectively) is obvious, but what such “wisdom” actually entails, will have to emerge from a careful interpretation of wisdom traditions. This is the task of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
A Sapiential Analysis: The Virtue of Wisdom as Foundation for Virtue Ethics in Africa

Whereas chapter one provided the imperative for reflection on moral regeneration, the previous chapter established the moral philosophical pre-eminence of virtue theory as framework of such a rebirth of the African continent. 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. In the second part of this chapter, wisdom itself is therefore traced in four dominant traditions: Hellenism, Judaism, African and Christian. This will provide the foundation for developing a theologically founded wisdom ethic in the African context in the last chapter.

3.1 Discussion of the cardinal and theological virtues

In the previous section, we dealt with problematic moral theories characterising the *modus vivendi* of the modern and post-modern ethical and moral discourse; arguments surrounding the failure of the project of Enlightenment; the rise of Virtue Ethics; and MacIntyre’s transition to Virtue Ethics.

In this section, I shall develop the prominence of the virtue of wisdom by looking at it from the discourse of the cardinal and theological virtues. I will include lists of “modern versions” of virtues and a discussion on their failure to solve the current moral dilemma. I shall then argue that “wisdom” is fundamental to Virtue Ethics. First, let us look at the definition and function of virtues. In addition, I will go on to show how the individual who possesses these virtues becomes a moral agent.

3.1.1 Virtue: definition and function

Four questions are answered in this chapter. What are virtues? How do they relate to each other? How are virtues foundational and instrumental to a virtue-centred moral agent? What is the Christian interpretation of virtues?
Virtues, as the ancients presented them, were friendship, courage, self-restraint, wisdom, and justice (cf MacIntyre 1981:134). According to MacIntyre, they arose from the Athenian community and were often specific to a single city called a polis, as a standard for determining or governing private and public positions. The ancients argued that a good person made a good citizen and vice-versa, without contradiction (cf MacIntyre 1981:133, 135).

MacIntyre, who has developed his definition of virtues from a historical analysis, has also shown that virtues exist in two categories. The first category is “Cardinal Virtues”. These are “justice, prudence, temperance, and courage” (MacIntyre 1981:167). The second category comprises the Judeo-Christian tradition, from which three other virtues - “theological virtues”- were added to the list. These are “faith, hope, and charity/love” (MacIntyre 1981:167-168; Rachels 1993:160). The central feature of the Judeo-Christian morality is the conceptualisation of virtues as the acknowledgement of God the lawgiver (cf Rachels 1993:161). As such, rightness of virtuous living requires obedience to the divine commandments. The Christian proponent of Theo-centric moral virtue was St. Augustine, who maintained that moral goodness depended on subordinating oneself to the will of God (cf Rachels 1993:160).

Moreover, even if one wanted to promote rationality in moral pursuit, St. Augustine argued, faith in authority should precede rational understanding. This principle should always be guided by the virtue of humility – that is, one’s willingness to submit to God and allow divine standards and values to characterise the

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71 Anscombe argued, in her paper, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958) in the journal Philosophy Vol.33, that Kant’s utilitarian assumes an incoherent notion of “law” without “a lawgiver”. She concluded, “we should stop thinking about obligation, duty and rightness” (cf Rachels 1993:161). The key issue here is that modern moral philosophy has been on the wrong track. MacIntyre and others advocate for Virtue Ethics that claim the reinstatement of God to his rightful place as a lawgiver in moral theological discourse.

72 In contrast, the Greeks’ central element in virtuous living was “reason” whose source is practical “wisdom” or “prudence”. For the Greeks a virtuous life was inseparable from the life of reason (cf Rachels 1993:160).

73 Theo-centric moral ethics characterised the Christian medieval thinking. All this was to be changed by the progressive wave of the European Renaissance’s secularising influence. The “divine law” was replaced by the “moral law”, which referred to a system of rules arising from human reason, which determined what was the right thing to do and what was wrong [from which one was to refrain ] (cf Rachels 1993:160). In recent times, the work of theologian James Gustafson attempted to recapture a theo-centric ethics vision.
relationship with Him, thereby providing one with the right mind in determining what virtuous is (cf MacIntyre 1990:84).

In developing the understanding of virtues, MacIntyre maintains that they (virtues) are an individual’s internal qualities that ensure success. However, this success is relative, particular, and specific (cf MacIntyre 1981:139). The result should be the production of what is universally good, following Platonic tradition, this “good” leads to satisfaction of desires and therefore happiness. Intellect plays a significant role both in the conceptualisation of virtues and their practical application.74 “A virtue is then naturally defined as a quality which will ensure success” (MacIntyre 1981:139). This pursuit of success and happiness as the goal of virtuous living has indeed been the cause of moral concern, particularly among leaders. Success is reduced to action, which makes the “acquisition of power to do and to get whatever one wants the entire content of success” (MacIntyre 1981:139).75

Taking another dimension of the definition of virtues by Aristotle from Rachels’ book The Elements of Moral Philosophy (1993), a virtue is a “trait of character that is manifested in habitual action” (Rachels 1993:162). The “traits of character” given are the four cardinal virtues namely justice, prudence/wisdom, courage/fortitude, and moderation/temperance. However, since vices are also traits of character manifested in habitual action, we need further clarification which will distinguish virtue traits from vices. Pincoffs offers a clarification that might be helpful. He suggests that “virtues and vices are qualities that we refer to in deciding whether someone is to be sought or avoided” (See Rachels 1993:162). This is the same as saying that virtues and vices qualify and quantify a person, so that moral virtues are virtues of a person (cf Rachels 1993:162).

74 Intellect’s productivity may lead to the dominance of the strong in mind over the weak in pursuit of individual satisfaction and happiness.

75 From the Greek legend of Agamemnon, a commander of the Greeks at the siege of Troy, the pursuit of success as a goal of moral virtue was developed. In these Homeric myths, Agamemnon loved to win and to enjoy the fruits of victory for himself. Agamemnon maintained, “Everyone is to be used or overcome” (MacIntyre 1981:139; also Laing 1950:42).
From Pincoffs’ clarification a new definition emerges, which isolates the virtuous traits from vices for a moral character. Thus, a virtue is “a trait of character, manifested in habitual actions, that it is good for a person to have” (see Rachels 1993:163). The list which Pincoffs develops, which is a general sampling of traits, shows those traits that are good or bad to find in a person. (cf Pincoffs 1986:76-77). Overall, the good traits have a unifying characteristic in that they are often concerned with the regard that the agent has for the interests of others. They are virtues because the person who possesses them acts with a positive motive – the good of the others. The opposite of this definition is also true, according to Pincoffs. That is to say, a person has vices if he acts or fails to act out of a negative motive which intends ill for others (cf Pincoffs 1986:89).

3.1.1.1 The individual as the possessor of virtue and therefore a moral agent

According to Aristotle, “Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good; for by “the good” or “a good” we mean that at which beings characteristically aim” (see MacIntyre 1981:148). Virtues, therefore, are the qualities of character and not the “means”, the possession of which will enable an individual to attain this “good”. To possess the virtues and to apply them in human disposition is a taste of human “good”. However, to be virtuous is complete in itself without necessarily being motivated by anticipated goods.

Virtues produce goodness, as Van der Ven reiterates Aristotle’s argument: “Aristotle saw goodness as constituted in practice, and virtues as being formed out of habitual actions of actual people in actual situations” (Van der Ven 1998:383). Virtues are born out of the “lived-out motivation” of a person who practises them. Such a person is capable of doing “the right thing at the right time in the right way” (Van der Ven 1998:383). Aristotle developed this conception in his famous doctrine of the mean. The doctrine of the mean is apparent in the virtue of moderation. It is the counsel that helps the individual in a given concrete, specific, and particular situation to know the right thing to do and the best way to respond (cf Norman 1998:35-36).76

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76 There is a superficial understanding of the doctrine of the “mean” as a counsel of moderation. The assumption is that people who observe this doctrine never exhibit any strong emotions or never go to
Beauchamp (1991) defines virtue as a character trait of a particular person, which is morally valued, such as truthfulness, honesty, gentleness, and politeness. These virtues are important in the disposition of a moral agent towards others. The value is, at most, to the benefit of the others, while the moral agent might be suffering (altruism) in order to represent a virtuous disposition. However, not all virtues fall into this definition. Some virtues are non-moral, for example, virtues such as calmness or competitiveness. Such virtues do not refer to moral goodness or badness. Virtues such as those required by wartime responsibilities can turn out to be immoral, and be inappropriately interpreted in the category of socially valued virtues. Another example is integrity, as one among those virtues that are all-encompassing. Integrity is the trait of being faithful to one’s values while standing in defence of those same values (cf Beauchamp 1991:213; Pincoffs 1986:85).

Norman’s definition of virtue touches a practical motivation, a priori for moral good. But this puts him in conflict with Kant’s position. Norman maintains that a virtue is that disposition of a moral agent that stands beyond selfish interest or mere moral obligations. It is an ideal, a deep motivational composition of the character of the moral agent. Kant rejects such conceptualisation of virtue, based on his earlier argument. We have seen from Kant that motivation to act in accordance with a rule of obligation is not morally sufficient for a virtuous person. For Kant, this is simply a natural inclination. Instead, he argues that duty should come first. We have already noted that “as well as having an inclination to perform the action one also recognises it to be one’s duty, and on the strength of this recognition one would have performed the action even if one had had no such inclination” (see Norman 1998:73).

If we eliminate inclination and take the consideration of consequences regardless of their value, then we have lost all motivation. The problem is that duty-inclined actions do not foster any friendship or relationship with the beneficiaries of duty-oriented

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77 Altruism contrasts with egoism; the two are extremes (each on the other on the opposite end of the scale). Altruism may “harm” the moral agent, while egoism may cause the moral agent to harm others. Scholars in this area include Rachels (1993:62-73) and Prichard in Norman (1998:41, 51-53.)
service. Duty-for-duty’s-sake service, by Kant’s moral standards, is meant to be impersonal. It is assumed that rational duty takes precedence where desires (inclinations or motives) and consequences are in stark conflict. But this is not always the case when we analyse the current moral situation. Public servants claiming to be duty-bound are often uninterested when their (own self-serving) interests are not being served. The danger lies in public servants becoming beneficiaries of their public offices. Instead of serving to realise the greater purpose for all, they do their work duty-bound, emotively exploiting the system. This is a common human tendency. Murdoch 78 observes that human beings are essentially selfish, hence the combination of duty-oriented morality (deontological), the pursuit of happiness, and the avoidance of pain (utilitarian) had to fail. I have argued that this is what gave rise to Virtue Ethics. Below, I shall discuss the cardinal and the theological virtues.

Unlike David S. Oderberg, whose thesis asserts the cardinality of the Cardinal Virtues, my analysis of virtue is focused on the classical virtues (Oderberg 199:305 -322)79. What are these good character traits manifested in habitual action that are good for a person to have? We now turn to the seven virtues to show how they function, starting with the cardinal ones.

3.1.2 Cardinal virtues

In considering Cardinal virtues (also known as classical), I will deal with the list of virtues that found classical description in Aristotle’s Ethics. My choice of him is based on the fact that many scholars through the centuries have drawn from the central theses advanced by Aristotle to enhance their own scholarship. As a result, endless lists of virtues have been offered (cf Pincoffs 1986:73-100). The cardinal virtues are the virtues which seemed to be inclusive of any conceivable qualities pertaining to a good character. They are listed as: courage, temperance, prudence, and

78 Murdoch refers to human selfishness as one of the fundamental assumptions in her argument (Murdoch 1970:78).

79 David S. Oderberg maintains that there is “in moral philosophy a venerable tradition which singles out four virtues as having a pre-eminent place: they are usually called prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, and collectively named the cardinal virtues. Literally, this means that they are the virtues on which all the others hinge (Latin, cardo, a hinge)” (Oderberg 1999:305).
justice (cf Oderberg 1999:305). An analysis of each of these virtues is given here below starting with the virtue of courage.

### 3.1.2.1 The virtue of courage/fortitude

Courage is defined as “the virtue or personal quality of character that lies behind and makes possible the carrying out of a courageous action” (Walton 1986:220). Aristotle defined “courage” as “a mean between the extreme of cowardice and foolhardiness” (see Rachels 1993:163). In other words, courage is the capacity to take a risk or bear pain, or a kind of resilience often involving the carrying out of difficult or sometimes dangerous undertakings for some perceived good purpose. However, the moral agent is expected to judge that the actions to be undertaken are the right thing to do, sometimes regardless of the consequences. Goal or “means-end judgement of the worth of line of action relative to the danger of a particular situation is always involved in any judgement of an action as courageous (or cowardly)” (Walton 1986:221). Speaking the truth or refusing to participate in a popular movement or a prophetic statement may cost the proponent his/her life. The example given here is the courageous action of someone trying to save a drowning person. The Kantians, regardless of the success or failure, or even the tragedy of both persons drowning, would deem him/her courageous. Aristotelians would, on their part, consider the dangers involved and the judgement of the chance of saving the drowning person. They would ask, in the effort to establish the mean, “Is it worth the effort, or is it suicidal?” Sometimes it may be courageous to abandon a dangerous undertaking if the cost was too high, and if the attempt would be regarded as sheer stupidity. Here the virtue of courage would have to be regulated by other virtues, mostly concerned with practical wisdom.

A distinction should be made between physical courage and moral courage. Physical courage is overcoming fear induced by threatening danger. A chemical rush of adrenalin often triggers off this fear, described as an emotional ability to overcome real or perceived danger. The physical courage bordering ethical and emotional behaviour is, for example, that of fire fighters escaping or rescuing someone.
That maintained sense of rationality in the calculation of the risk, going beyond the requirements and expectations of duty, often regardless of results in relation to the overall goal, is what is credited as courageous.\(^{82}\) Courage is that disposition to overcome fear while engaging in actions requiring the ability to act appropriately and prudently, so that reflection on the situation afterwards may generally agree that the moral agent judged the situation correctly. Such rationality requires a habitual reflection and imagination of possible scenarios prior to possible courageous actions. The courageous person would then proceed into real or perceived grave danger and nonetheless perform an action beyond the requirements of duty (cf Walton 1986:221). Both Aristotle and Aquinas would, however, have argued that should the moral agent show an extreme demonstration of fearlessness which may seem to go beyond rational responsibility, and regardless of consequences, such fearlessness would be tantamount to a vice rather than a virtue.\(^{83}\) This argument is based on the “grounds that people who do not fear death at all must show a lack of love of their own lives. Since this is a defect, a too consistent fearlessness would be more of a vice than a virtue” (Walton 1986:221).

Courage in military service, though credited as “courageous”, is courage of another kind. A soldier’s tasks require courage. However, if we consider situations in their concrete, singular, and fragile particularity, not all military courage may be sustained as virtuous. The examples cited include the exploits of the Nazi soldier, some South

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\(^{80}\) In this case, the response of the person is not controlled by rational capability. This understanding of courage goes deep into the psychological reflex responses, and cannot possibly be considered as ethical behaviour to which the virtue of courage would be accredited. This kind of “courage” has been evident in survivors of car crashes or other forms of violent attacks.

\(^{81}\) The courage of fire fighters is a virtue located between application of professional knowledge and emotional influence.

\(^{82}\) Fire fighters, in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, New York on September 11\(^{th}\), 2001, especially those whose bodies were found at about level 70 of the building, are a case in point. Norman cites another example where B attempts to rescue A from drowning, but they both drown, though the contrast here is between intention and results as content of praise or blame. The fact that B would possibly be praised regardless of consequences shows the acknowledgement of courage in this instance (cf Norman 1998:72).

\(^{83}\) The “courageous” hijackers of the USA September 11\(^{th}\) 2001 and their heinous acts fall into this category, as does the increasing number of suicide bombers in the Middle East and Iraq. Their support, whether politically or religiously motivated, is simply that of people caught up in a political conflict. This conflict has the capacity to inculcate an altered state of moral judgment.
African police in dangerous operations motivated by racism, or destructive operations by activists against an oppressive system, motivated by anger and sometimes involving innocent victims. Where the intrinsic link between “courage” and the “pursuit of good” is absent, courage is almost meaningless as a virtue. For instance, courage has been attributed to villains, such as the action of a burglar. Wright maintained, for example, that some actions require “guts” or a display of bravery that could be referred to as courageous. Foot argues that some villainous actions take courage to perform, even if we should hesitate to describe them as courageous acts (Walton 1986:221).

Fear is not the only motivation and need not be the qualifier emotion (real or perceived) for courageous actions. Neither is courage limited to heroic actions only. There are small courageous victories in daily lives, recounted by Geach, from which an individual builds self-awareness and confidence.

For example, we may consider the progressive courage of a child learning how to walk, which comes to an end once the child masters the skill. Perhaps the courage to trust again after enduring hardships and disappointments comes eventually. The courage to try after failure requires one to summon inner strength and resilience. The courage to challenge a status quo may be of the radical type, while courage to persevere in hardships calls for a patient spirit. The courage to disclose one’s HIV/AIDS status, the courage to accept one’s situation as opposed to a sense of resignation may be prized, the ability to endure shame and public ridicule, and so the list of different “forms” of courage goes on. Habitual acts of courage qualify as virtuous actions because they provide impetus for courageous living. Courageous living, in turn, develops into the experience of proper judgement. This enables a person to know when it is appropriate to undertake a particular task. This is the virtue of temperance.

3.1.2.2 The virtue of temperance/moderation

“Temperance” and “moderation” are two words often used interchangeably to refer to the same virtuous trait. According to Aristotle, temperance is the virtue in which the moral agent is judged by his/her ability to choose the appropriate “means” between
two extremes. Aristotle’s “doctrine of the mean” is identified in the virtue of temperance which is “the mean between insensibility (anisthesia) and self-indulgence (akolasia)” or “observing the mean between excess and deficiency” (Norman 1998:35), because temperance or moderation is the virtue which counsels all the other virtues.

The function of this virtue, according to Plato, is to provide harmonious relations among its three parts, namely reason, spirit, and desires, reason being “the acknowledged and effective leader” (Mele 1992:1239). Temperateness is that specific excellence of the appetitive part of the psyche or the human mind that directs the moral agent “to take less delight in pleasure than one should” (see Mele 1992:1239). The two extreme vices, namely, insensibility and self-indulgence on either side of the mean, usually concern themselves with a specific “class of bodily pleasures – sex, food, drink, and the like, or what Aristotle associates with a class of pain, those that may arise from the lack or want of pertinent pleasures” (Mele 1992:1239).

Temperance is distinguished from the trait of continence, the ability to control oneself in the face of temptations. Both traits imply a character disposed “to do nothing contrary to the rule for the sake of bodily pleasures” (Mele 1992:1239). For the character disposed to continence “must constantly struggle against ‘bad appetites’”, though agents of continence are said to be often “successful in resisting temptation” (Mele 1992:1239). For the temperate agent, his/her “desires and feelings” are in “perfect agreement with his (sic) rational principle. And since the moral virtues imply the presence of the right rule or principle, the desires and feelings of temperate agents never miss the mark” (Mele 1992:1239). Aristotle maintained that temperate agents are never subjected to temptation (see Mele 1992: 1239).

However, the question raised here is whether a moral agent exhibiting a temperate disposition is also aware of any desires at all. This is precisely because not to be tempted may mean poor acknowledgement of the object of temptation and recognition

84 Wallace maintains that self-indulgent individuals feel unable to “forego an immediate pleasure when consideration indicates that he (sic) should”, and in the same argument, the temperate individual will always be willing “to forego immediate pleasure for the sake of what he deems greater goods” (Mele 19192:1239-1240).
of the pains of exercising restraint. This would be an inclination, and as Kant would argue, inclinations stand in contrast to reason, and accordingly may not be morally credited (cf Norman 1998:72-73).

A temperance virtue enables the moral agent to manifest knowledge of those objects that might evoke his/her desires and spirit. Nevertheless, he/she remains under the control of reason with regard to a given specific, singular, and fragile situation. The virtuous person, one who is capable of exercising temperance, demonstrates the will (volition) to direct his/her desires to what is reasonable and honourable to do. In most cases, the agent’s egoistic traits suffer suppression and his/her honest and genuine feelings are checked and brought into conformity with reason and spirit, so that such desires will always “fall in line” (see Mele 1992:1239). 85

We may add that temperance causes the moral agent to be alert and have better judgement in any prevailing undertaking. This better judgement is aided by different alternatives, which offer higher and greater “good” in contrast to the immediate pleasure. To this extent, immediate pleasure is always viewed suspiciously when the moral agent claims to be in conformity with it in reference to the moral agent’s greater “goods”. Mele observes, “Conformity of one’s desires for pleasure to one’s better judgements about pleasure is not sufficient for temperance” (Mele 1992:1240). An appeal to higher, agent-independent standards of value of a voluptuous nature cannot be regarded as temperate. In this case, the contrast between the temperate and the voluptuary persists. That is, the temperate display moderation in their pursuit of appetitive pleasures while the voluptuary does not.

Temperance as a virtue requires that the moral agent subject his/her supra-normal appetites to full control on one side of the scale, and total abandonment of one’s self-control on the other side. Thus, temperance is distinguished from continence. The

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85 I am borrowing Kant’s analysis of inclination with respect to moral duty, to highlight my preference for continence or self-control. We have to learn through training and habituation to silence the desires with regard to negative appetites. There should be an effort as a demonstration of willingness to build a virtuous character. For Kant, insistence on moral obligation and duty would force the moral agent to act whether he/she likes it or not. I would rather people be trained to be virtuous than be forced in every changing situation to act out of duty. In this regard, a moral system of deserts becomes a necessity, the former to set standards and the latter to regulate positive or negative motivations paving the way for virtuous living (cf Chadwick 1998:617-618; Norman 1998:72-73).
former suggests that the moral agent is so disposed that he/she does not even contemplate pleasure because it is not in his/her character composition. The latter is of such a high standard that the moral agent has exceptional ability to resist temptation in the face of intense awareness of the pleasure to be derived from a given temptation (see Beker 1992:1239). Continence is more realistic to human nature, which is open to suggestions and is subject to multiple choices and decisions to be made.

Aristotle preferred temperance to continence. He argued that a virtuous person should be struggling against alluring appetites by means of self-control. His was a rigid rule, where temperance applied the rational principle. Aristotle assumed that temperate virtue flows naturally in the moral agent who possesses it. I would argue, however, that Aristotle’s assumption contradicts what virtues are - habitually acquired traits.

The community as a support structure with a conception of the higher “good”, a system of values and better applicable judgements, may be necessary for the development of the virtue of continence. This behavioural approach would entail a moral renewal – a kind of transformation or an orientation in a habitual process intended to inculcate this virtue. A serious pursuant of temperance needs to refrain from conforming to conditions of sensual pleasure and pay the price of developing the pursuit of higher “goods” as a model of moral virtuosity. This leads to a developed sense of fairness, described as the practice of justice.

### 3.1.2.3 The virtue of justice

According to Aristotle, “justice” means “not to harm another person and to give this person his/her due in his/her pursuit of happiness” (see Van der Ven 1998:351). As such, all virtue is summed up in justice. There are too many theories of justice to discuss here. I will only emphasise the link between moral formation and justice.

Different aspects of human transactions show the need to internalise different conceptions of justice. A virtuous community should have an understanding of justice in the exchange of goods (commutative justice); distribution of goods (distributive justice); and government justice (legal justice). Unlike other virtues, justice does not fit into the structure of the doctrine of the mean. A practice is either just or unjust.
However, injustice can have two practical implications, that of “doing injustice to” and that of “suffering from injustice” (see Van der Ven 1998:351).


Kohlberg gives six stages of justice reasoning summarised here below.

Stage 1 is justice-reasoning, guided by the principle of “equality in the distribution of goods to persons”. This is called “heteronomous morality”. Distribution is based on a

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86 Kohlberg’s theory is related to that of Piaget. Piaget has done quantitative research on development stages from childhood, through to adulthood. He distinguishes a “merely motor action” stage during which a child between the ages of 1-2 is individually engaged in repetitive motor habits “conditioned by a particular situation”. From the scheme that underlies these habits, these actions become rituals because of their repetitive occurrence (cf Van der Ven 1998:186).

From 3-6 “the child begins to play with other children …leading to the first social action. Imitation of older children on the basis of specific rules promulgated by adults such as parents, educators and teachers, occurs.” The child responds obediently to these moral authorities from “a sense of respect”. Piaget calls this “respect for moral authority” and “realism”. However, at this stage the child is egocentric and his/her obedience is based on self-advantage in terms of the adult’s attention or in the form of “reward, protection and affection”. The adult in charge of the child should be cautious of the child’s manipulative emotions seeking to change the rules toward the achievement of the child’s “whims, needs and desires” (see Piaget in Van der Ven 1998:187).

Between the ages of 7 and 10, up to 11 and 12, the child develops a sense of “mutuality and cooperation” during which the rules are followed because of their recognised value and intrinsic corporate reward. Here rules may be changed by “mutual agreement” insofar as the aims of peer happiness would still be realised.

Kohlberg’s “moral development” and Piaget’s “cognitive development” are the foundations for the understanding of justice in moral character formation, to which I will turn later. The understanding of moral environmental impact is necessary as a contributory factor to moral regeneration. However, this study considers it to be even more important insofar as the adults are models of morality to [their] successive generations down to the child. This is what leaders are to the led. Let me take Kohlberg’s argumentation further with regard to the relationship of moral development and justice.

According to Kohlberg, justice is fundamental in the “six stages” theory for moral development. The three levels discussed earlier are each elucidated in terms of justice. The six moral stages are sometimes referred to as “stages of moral reasoning” or “justice judgement”. The sixth stage forms a watershed because it is anticipated in every stage. Once reached, stage six becomes a starting-point for moral character formation. The question to be answered is, “Why justice?”

Kohlberg responds that: “the concept of justice is based on the fact of conflicts of interest and competing claims among individuals. Such conflicts, which are part of everyday life, disturb the equilibrium on which social life depends” (in Van der Ven 1998:200). This social conflict is between the self and other selves competing for goods in the same environment. In order for a human society to function peacefully, there needs to be a regulatory system by which the community is ordered. Justice plays this part as a means of restoring the social equilibrium for the relational functioning of the community.
specific need or deservingness, and should follow set rules and norms of the community.

Stage 2 is more of a pragmatic approach, because here equality means recognising all individuals including “self” as having equal needs to be satisfied. This is often called “individualistic instrument morality” where exchange of goods is reciprocal following a natural process.

Stage 3 is the instrumental exchange transcended by the third party perspective of “the generalised other”. Equality therefore is equality within and from the perspective of the group. Reference is made to the application of the “golden rule” for the first time. “Do to other members of your group as you want them to do to you”. Kohlberg has called this the “interpersonal normative morality” based on informal rules and norms.

Stage 4 is a depiction of the individual in the perspective of the social system, such as a community. The rules and norms applicable here have been formalised, including roles, codes and procedures to ensure impartial distribution of goods and burdens among members. Equity is seldom called into play where rules have been unfair. Kohlberg has called this “social morality”, which can as well be understood as “social justice”.

Stage 5 is an assumption of a “society-maintaining” perspective, which involves a social contract based on commutative justice. This type of justice is for the protection of human rights and welfare of all, especially the marginalized and voiceless groups in the community. Its inclination to human rights earns it the description of a “human rights and social welfare morality”.

Stage 6, as maintained earlier, is the culmination of the real “moral point of view”. The assumption is that this ideal “moral point of view” is practised by all humanity toward one another. This would mean that the individual would have to regard others as free and autonomous persons too. The resultant human disposition is that the autonomous selves will be capable of “deliberate reflection on these principles as ‘self-conscious principles’.”
To these principles, Kohlberg has assigned the term “morality of general moral principle”. When an individual has had reasonable emotional development and cognitive interaction with moral reasoning, then he/she is expected to have a virtuous moral disposition. The foregone discourse serves as background to Virtue Ethics, which is fundamental to the conception of justice in a community (cf Van der Ven 1998:201-205).

Kohlberg’s submission is indeed a community resource for moral virtue development. It should be passed on through education and modelling. However, in order for a community to pass on such conceptualisation of justice, there is also a need to have regard for authority from which such justice proceeds. It is important to have a kind of a final authority which is external and commonly revered and accepted as the final arbiter in this virtue of justice.

For Christians, the source of moral guide is Scripture as the Word of God; for secular governments, it is a national constitution, popularly referred to as the “Supreme Document”. However, God provides both the external and internal stable motivation as perceived by Christians. Such a just God goes beyond the mind of constitution makers, following Rawls’ theory. We, in Africa, have seen many constitutional changes, some so completely disregarded that a constitution has ceased to be that supreme document that protects those who believe in it. Justice that arises from a God-fearing constitution-maker who confesses God as his/her source of inner and external motivation is to be preferred. This way, the “ignorance” (suggested in Rawls’ theory of justice with regard to constitutional development) of those who are nominated for the formulation of the constitution would not be defining the character of the people serving particular patriotic or even selfish interests. Rather, such people would have a view of justice which embraces all people from God’s point of view (of justice). This character disposition needs the virtuous trait of wisdom, intellectual and divine, in the face of the current moral leadership degeneration.
3.1.2.4 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).

Greek wisdom was often expressed in gnomic poetry and aphorism, or in proverbs, which made such wisdom accessible to ordinary people. They concentrated on “moderation… and fitness of act to time and situation” with “an instinct for justice as the fundamental element in every true life” (Sherman 1992:745).

However, from Aristotle\(^{87}\) onwards (including the Hellenistic writings, particularly those of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), the term *phronesis* acquired a technical meaning, namely the “intelligence of the good person” (Sherman 1992:1002). The term “prudence” retained its normative character. To be practically wise was inseparable from having a good character. Wisdom was the mark and sufficient condition of the mature that manifested in the following characteristics.

Firstly, wisdom translated as prudence (or practical wisdom) was “the good person’s deliberation about the promotion of happiness (*eudaimonia*)” (Sherman 1992:1000).

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\(^{87}\) Following the Greek wisdom tradition, highlighted by the Socrates’ debates and Plato’s contribution, Aristotle developed this Greek wisdom further to a level of intellectual enterprise. Today Aristotle’s foundation in ethical theories is being sought to rescue the post-modern moral fragmentation (Gordon, 1992:746; also MacIntyre 1981:1-5).
This happiness resided in the constituency of a “good life” as a “moral end”. Secondly, wisdom or prudence promoted not just isolated aspects of life for happiness’ sake, but the whole. Such wisdom gave something like a “life plan”. Although this was considered to be rigid, leaning toward the law, prudence was often about “practical judgement” (cf Sherman 1992:1000). The judgement implied took cognisance of a range of issues in its promotion of ends. It was capable of working out “ends which are revisable and defensible in light of other ends constitutive of character” (Shernam 1992:1000). Yet this approach did not imply any radicalism, rather an ongoing habituation of character, where the development of a reflective capability was congruent with this education. In the final analysis, “the ends a person adopts largely reflect an ongoing habituation of character” (see Sherman 1992:1000).

This did not mean that the moral virtue agent was mindless, or acting involuntarily in the process of being morally shaped. The agent is actively engaged in the development of reflective capacities as part of education, “culminating in a capacity to exercise virtue in a way that is sensitive to the specific requirements of circumstances” (Sherman 1992:1000).

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).
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.

Is there an excellence of practical wisdom peculiar to the virtuous person, differentiating the practice of reason applied by the vicious (non-virtuous) in promotion of their ends? A possible difference given by Sherman is that the vicious person uses practical wisdom as in cleverness that has instrumental value only. Here the goodness of the virtue has been “hijacked” by its evil on the negative end of the “mean” scale. Vicious practical wisdom falls short of the judgment of other virtues, and it cannot be defended in terms of the moral end. However, prudence possesses and values both the intrinsic goodness consistent with other virtues and instrumental qualities of practical wisdom. Sherman, in reference to the difference between vicious and virtuous wisdom, concludes:

For the vicious, it is merely instrumental value - a way of promoting power, gain, deceit and avoidance of risk or fear. For the virtuous, it is of intrinsic as well as instrumental value. The courageous reason about how to promote victory, but equally value the reasoning and choice of courageous action even when victory fails (Sherman 1992:1001).
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.

There is the assumption that a learned person will generally exhibit a wise disposition insofar as his/her procedure in doing tasks demonstrates logical premises leading to a specific logical conclusion. However, this would be only instrumental wisdom as well. Schematic instance may not necessarily be virtuous in a moral sense. Practical wisdom is and should always be in agreement with other virtues, just as it qualifies the other virtues. Before making a case for the prominence of the virtue of wisdom, let us turn to Aquinas’ “theological” virtues, in order to understand their indispensable contribution to Virtue Ethics.

3.1.3 The theological virtues
I shall introduce the theological virtues as presented in the Summa Theologia by Aquinas. For him the foregone virtues are innate to human beings. That is to say that virtues carry both human strengths and weaknesses. The theological virtues are regarded by Aquinas as being of a divine accent and they manifest in the divine strength only. Here is Aquinas’ thesis statement that dominates and directs all his theological presentations. For him, “all things proceed from and return to God” (Gustafson 1984:43).

3.1.3.1 The virtue of charity or love
This thematic stance that “all things proceed from and return to God” is dominant in all Aquinas’ theological work and indeed in his discussion of the virtue of love. The Summa Theologia distinguishes the virtue of love from all other forms of love. He calls the virtue of love “charity” because in it is a desirable voluntary moral quality of friendship.

Therefore, Aquinas introduces the virtue of love as “charity”, defined as “God’s friendship” (Aquinas 1989:349). Aquinas utilises Aristotle’s definition of friendship
in order to illustrate his point. Friendship, a characteristic upon which “charity” is built, is defined by Aristotle as “the love with which we love those we will good things to, distinguishing that from the love of desire we have for the good things so willed to ourselves” (Aquinas 1989:349). The “friendship” is specifically important because it denotes mutuality. Mutuality in this “friendship” offers to us the difference between understanding the love between human beings on the one hand, and our love for “things” such as horses and wine on the other. In the latter, “love” of “things” does not suggest our friendship with those “things” because contemplation of mutuality with “things” would be absurd.

This is why Jesus introduced this kind of love to his disciples when he said, “I no longer call you servants…but my friends” (John 15:15). Aquinas develops further the connection of the virtue of charity, following Aristotle’s definition. He suggests that mutuality in friendship between God and human beings is based on what we have in common. Aquinas maintains:

What God and man (sic) have in common is the eternal happiness he shares with us, the fellowship of his Son; and the friendship between God and man based on this we call charity (Aquinas 1989:349).

God’s love, understood as friendship, leads us to the love of those connected with him, even those who hurt and hate us. This is how such love, understood as “charity”, is even extended to our enemies whom we love for the sake of God - our chief friend (Aquinas 1989:349).

This act of love by God is a continuation of the hesed love, a term used to designate a torah-related type of love. Both the agape and hesed show God’s focus on the moral good which He desires for humanity. Hesed describes the moral standard which governs God’s love, while agape offers a free absolution from sin or moral failure. How does humanity respond to this love?

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88 Long, in affirmation, has also argued, “Most of all God’s charity, love and friendship is expressed in the Agape love, a term reserved to describe … the self-emptying love of God manifested singularly in his gracious act of sending his only son, Jesus Christ, into the world to take upon himself the consequences of mankind’s sins, thereby to absolve them of their guilt and free them to live eternally in God’s love” (Long 1987:37).
God has demonstrated his love and friendship in Jesus Christ. Here his love is made available to all people everywhere. Everyone is invited to “a loving response to God’s love, which is summed up in the commandment to love God with mind, heart and soul” (Long, 1984:37), and to love “others” as thyself. Aquinas concludes:

The source and inspiration of this love of both God and fellowmen (sic) (including one’s adversaries) is God’s love (agape) unsought by man and freely bestowed by God (in Long 1984:37).

How possible is it for us as human beings to put this love into action in our daily lives? Is there a pre-condition such as our obedience to God before this love is manifested in our lives? John Burnaby has argued that the contemplation of the pre-condition to agape love is a contradiction of God’s love since it is freely given. Nonetheless:

The love of God is indeed often coupled with the keeping of his commandments. … but there is no need to evade an apparent paradox by arguing that the command to love God really means the requirement of obedience to God’s law in all the actions of life. The commandment assumes that love in the natural meaning of the word is the natural response to love so wonderfully bestowed by God himself upon the people whom he has chosen (Burnaby 1967:197).

Peter Lombard argued that we respond to God’s love in all its virtuous forms because the Holy Spirit enables us to do so. McDermott approaches this suggestion with caution. This is because the enablement of the Holy Spirit does not mean that the Holy Spirit moves us as though we were mere “tools”, a state that would imply that our hearts were not the source of this love. Since the virtue of love is always voluntary and deserving, it would as a matter of necessity spring from our wills. So, the Holy Spirit moves our wills to love. Our wills originate from God who naturally has established in us the potential to love. The human nature that makes it possible to love is consistent with what God has implanted in us, inclining us toward our common goal (telos) with him and the rest of humanity.

Love, like every virtue, in a moral agent “consists in embracing a standard of behaviour, be it the standard of human reason (as in moral virtue) or God himself (in
theological virtue)” McDermott 1989:350). In charity we embrace God himself as
quoted from Augustine “a virtue which, as our most ordered affection, join[s] us to
God in love” (in McDermott 1989:350). It follows, therefore, that to fail to respond to
God’s love is to have forgotten God’s unique love.

From Aquinas’s point of view, if our ultimate goal is to enjoy God in eternity in a
friendship characterised by charity, our other purposes in life should be compatible
with this ultimate goal. This is a qualification for all our goals in life. Aquinas
observed that charity, which is God’s love characterised by friendship, “is involved in
every act of life, controlling even acts which are the immediate exercising of other
virtues” (in McDermott 1989:350). Our human goals fall short of charity, that is, the
true divine telos, if they are illusory. That is, when their ultimate end is not to enjoy
God in eternity, we fall out of fellowship with God, and in most cases, we are at odds
with fellow human beings. Aquinas concludes the argument:

Actions can be good of their kind without charity, but are only perfect when
done in pursuit of our ultimate goal. Charity orders our behaviour to its
ultimate goal, and so gives all virtuous behaviour its existence and life. That
is why we call charity the life of the virtues, for what makes them virtues is
that they dispose us to behaviour which is enlivened in this sense” (Aquinas

From Aquinas’ theological elaboration of the virtue of love, we now turn to the views
of moral philosophers to satisfy our curiosity regarding this virtue. For these moral
philosophers we turn to Gibson.

Love defined ethically is the “creative power of a new life” (Gibson 1992:153). In this
sense, it occupies a special position as a virtue of excellence insofar as it enables us to
live the best life. The creative character of love is always adjusting and improving
every action and response in promotion of this best life. Three definitions of virtue
place love at the centre of the moral virtue discourse.

Socrates defined virtue as “knowledge”, but Aristotle argued that virtue is a habit that
takes knowledge to a “deepening or transcending” level. Here virtue is the habit to
choose to be or do willingly, as guided by practical reason. Practical rationality helps
in locating the “mean” according to the singularity, particularity and fragility of a
given situation. Christian ethics take Aristotle’s position even further by defining virtue as “love”. Aristotle gives his “willing” habit value, so that virtues become moral habits that grow from their instructive foundations - “through the enthusiasm which we put into the task of their formation” (Gibson 1992:153). This enthusiasm for what is good should be expressed in decisions and habits, for it to qualify as “virtue”. “Love stands out as the great transforming and inclusive agency, and therefore as the ultimate virtue of the spiritual life, of the life which aims at a universal or common good” (Gibson 1992:153). Describing the capacity of love as a virtue, Gibson maintains that

Working through the emotion of anger, it is the root of moral indignation and of justice; through that of fear, it makes the object loved, the object whose hurt is feared. It regenerates the self-regarding sentiments, transferring their affection from the atomic, private ego to the personal and inclusive self; the competition of others, directed as it is against the merely individual self, is no longer felt as an injustice to one’s true personality and therefore excites neither envy nor ill-will (Gibson 1992:153).

This love expresses itself in giving, and in the dignity of all. It is inclusive, with distinctive knowledge between self and others. The respect of others grows in proportion to the regard of their own personality. Growing results in a reverence for the object loved, because of the joy rooted in the sense of its own reality associated with the sense of the lover’s own reality. At this point, love and faith converge as faith, or belief in the intrinsic value of the object loved, because it is essential and volitional. Gibson makes this connection thus:

For by “will” we mean the whole personality as active in this broader sense of the term, and this activity is motivated by the idea of a common good, then we seem justified in affirming that the power which vitalises such activity, and the moral excellence which characterises it - in a word, its virtue - is love (Gibson 1992:153).

An important distinction about the quality of love must be made. That is, though love is inclusive, it nevertheless hates, because it hates evil. “Hence as long as evil actually exists, love must exclude it with all the force of its being” (Gibson 1992:154). Unfortunately, in order for evil to exist, it must “graft” on to the “good” as a source of disintegration. When evil supersedes the “good”, the latter is enslaved to the extent that a gang of thieves exhibit honour (a form of good) among themselves. In the virtue of love, evil “exists” “depressed to an infra-actual level of reality” (Gibson 1992:154).
We could uncomfortably say that though love cannot include actual evil, it must include at all times the possibility of evil, seeing that the possibility of evil is implied in the possibility of good. As such, all moral choices are always taken between two evils, where the “mean” (the right choice to be made) is the possible “good”. Therefore, when evil has been reduced to “the status of a real possibility”, it also ceases “to lie outside love. Love will then be inclusive”. (Gibson 1992:154).

In summary, love involves taking a risk of self-giving or self-donation. It may be reciprocated or rejected. Paul describes the rudiments of love in 1 Corinthians 13 in a poetic form:

Love is patient; love is kind.
It does not envy; it does not boast;
It is not proud. It is not rude;
It is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered;
It keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil
But rejoices in the truth.
It always protects, always trusts,
Always hopes, always perseveres.
Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8a).

This kind of love characterised by friendship is anchored in God. Humanity can access it by faith in Jesus Christ.

3.1.3.2 The theological virtue of faith/belief

Aquinas begins our discussion on the virtue of “Faith” by establishing the object of our faith. Faith proceeds from two positions; one is the disposition to know, and the other is that which makes knowing possible. The central motif in these two positions is the “Truth Himself” as the object of faith to be known. Aquinas maintains that faith believes only in things that God has revealed, because God truth guarantees their truth in the first position. In the second position, “what Truth makes believable includes God but also much else related to Truth Himself, namely, the works of God which help us attain him: e.g. the manhood of Christ, the sacrament of the church, creation itself” (in McDermott 1989:328).
For Aquinas, Jesus Christ is this “Truth”. In Jesus Christ we have the mind’s assent which is “self-evident” as a first premise. Aquinas argues that if Christ, our assent of faith was determined by a voluntary choice between alternative positions, belief would be tentative and as such only an opinion. But in Christ Jesus we have certainty and are without doubt that He is the revealed Truth of God. Further more Christ as Truth is attested in Scripture and miracles in such a sufficient and convincing assent that it requires our believing.

From this submission, Aquinas maintains that we therefore have a basis for formulating faith propositions, by which we know, affirm and communicate the reality of what we believe (in McDermott 1989:329). This is the source of the creeds that articulate the faith of the Christian. These beliefs are essential to our faith and direct us towards eternal life. Aquinas concludes:

The creeds propose for our faith the hidden depths of the godhead, which we shall see when we enter bliss, and the mystery of Christ’s manhood, through which we enter the glory of the sons (sic) of God. This is eternal life: to know you, true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Aquinas 1989:330).

Jesus Christ is the Truth and affirmed the substance of our faith when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6a). He is our basis for faith in God and in other people with whom we share the common purpose in life and anticipation of eternal life. This understanding governs our moral disposition as we carry out the transactions of life. This is the theological description of faith. It constitutes our cognitive affirmation to which our volition surrenders voluntarily.

Faith is then, that cognitive affirmation of truth and the human volition to surrender to that truth. I.F. Burns explains that faith “is at once an affirmation of truth and surrender to the truth affirmed. Apart from the first, it would be blind. Apart from the second, without practical significance” (Burns 1992:89). However, common practice puts emphasis regarding faith on the cognitive aspect of faith that denotes belief, and less on the volitional aspect which denotes truth. Whereas volition points to any forms of truth on which character is modelled, this study is concerned with the Christian truth. Faith then becomes the connection between the acts of the human will,
cognitively perceived as from God and willingly surrendered to as beliefs that would affect moral virtue behaviour (cf Anscombe 1958:6).

God is the first and central object of faith as truth to be believed. This believing is also “an act of obedience to God, as unbelief is rebellion and a mark of hardness of heart” (Burns 1992:689; Ex. 14:11, Deut. 1:32, Ps. 78:32, Is. 7:9). The Biblical injunction, particularly from the Old Testament, calls humanity to the fear and love of, service and obedience to, and trust in God. “God’s word is thought of rather as a commandment to be obeyed than as a message to be believed” (Burns 1992:689).

At the convergence of Jewish faith in God with other religions, it became important to demonstrate a persistent belief in God as a “presupposition of fidelity” to him. The competitive nature of other faiths gave an increased concentration on the importance of faith in God, so much so that this subject became more prominent in Jewish literature.

In the teaching of Jesus Christ, the emphasis is not so much on calling people to have faith in Him as it is to point them to “trust in the power and goodness of God” (Burns 1992:689; cf Matt. 17:20, Mark 4:40). More than teach a doctrine to be believed, Jesus’ teaching “lays stress not on the acceptance of his word, but on the doing of it” (Burns 1992:689). Doing the word results in being that which God intends us to be in Jesus. Jesus was the best model/example of his teaching, and therefore the prototype and object of faith. He did what God told him to do and by so doing, became that which God intended him to be.

Therefore, what is critical to faith is not mere belief; rather it is whether the assented relationship between the believer and the believed has a moral influence. For the Christians this is possible through the imitation of Christ’s character, as a manner of acting out one’s faith. This has always been the crux of the matter – the move from knowledge to doing what the truth says.

Paul, in his preaching, assumes that human response to the gospel will be that of belief rather than obedience to the law. Burns sheds light on Paul’s accomplishment in
bringing the church (later to be named the community of character, good, just and wise) into a better understanding of faith in the doctrine of salvation. He argues thus:

This he accomplished by demonstrating the congruence of faith with the nature of the Christian gospel. Since the gospel comes as a revelation of Divine grace and righteousness freely offered to guilty man (sic), the fitting response on man’s part can only be that of humble and thankful acceptance of the gift (Burns 1992:689).

Faith is here understood as the property of the heart (emotion) rather than intellect (mind), calling for an earnest soul-searching openness toward God. In this process sin is disclosed and submission to God willingly taken, who in his exercise of unconditional love, has power to cleanse and restore to fullness of life any human being who responds to him in faith.

All the above depends on human volition. This is the willingness to “take a decision” of trusting, an exercise of human will - an aspect of faith. One position would be “that the will is confined to the power to execute what the understanding believes that it is the best, in all relevant circumstances to do” (Helm 1988:722). A response to what one wills to do is pertinent in mental “actions unless prevented by physical weakness or the compulsion of others” (Helm 1988:722). Another way is that of acting against the understanding – “what is sometimes called the power of contrary choice or the freedom of indifference” (Helm 1988:722). However, if we exercise our will such that we choose to surrender to God, then our volition would tend toward our belief in God. As Helm puts it:

What we believe is also of considerable practical importance. What we believe tends to determine our attitude and behaviour. Moreover, Heb. 11:6 recognises that before a person comes to God he must believe in the reality of God, and further believe that he will reward those who seek him diligently (Helm 1988:722).

Aquinas offers the means by which the virtue of faith is apt in the life of the believer as moral agent. He introduces this means with a text in Hebrews 11. “Through faith the blessed did what was right and received what God promised” (in McDermott 1989:334). This presentation is consistent with Aquinas’ theological motif, that everything proceeds from and returns to God. Our virtuous living is progressively
moving towards God. But the same applies to living by vice. All the virtuous and the vicious shall receive their appropriate deserts.

We are encouraged to profess our faith externally in thanksgiving and worship, and confession of our sins in repentance. Aquinas elucidates: “All external virtuous behaviour is the work of our inner faith working through love, commanding other virtues to evoke that behaviour rather than itself. Professing the faith is faith’s own external act, unmediated by any other virtue” (in McDermott 1989:334). Although our profession of faith is not necessary for our salvation, it is important to maintain a “living faith”. Aquinas maintains that believing is an act of mental assent commanded by will. To believe perfectly, our mind must turn unreservedly toward the perfection of truth. This should be achieved through an unfailing service of that ultimate goal (cf in McDermott 1989:335). The life of faith is charity. It evokes in the moral agent unconditional service to God and fellow humanity. Aquinas warns of a lifeless faith, one arrived at by choice from insufficient and uncertain alternatives. He argues:

But lifeless faith is no virtue: it has the perfection needed on the part of the mind but not the perfection needed on the part of the will. And faith that does not rely on divine truth can fail and believe falsehood, so such faith is also no virtue (Aquinas 1989:335).

Faith enables the believer who is also a moral agent to draw from inward truth, the strength of love of charity toward God and fellow human beings with whom he/she shares the common goods of life. But most of belief is motivated by the anticipated truth to be fully revealed. As such, the believer lives daily in increasing expectation. This disposition is the foundation for virtuous living. This is what makes faith the substance of what we hope for and evidence of what it is we cannot see. This leads us to the last theological virtue - hope.

3.1.3.3 The theological virtue of hope

Aquinas describes the virtue of “hope” as “an attitude in keeping with the true belief, and is praiseworthy and virtuous” (Aquinas 1989:348). What we hope always lies ahead as “future goods, challenging but possible of achievement either by our own power or with others’ help” (Aquinas 1989:344). Typical of Aquinas is the assertion that “insofar as we hope to achieve something by reliance on God’s help our hope
embraces God” (Aquinas 1989:344). This is what makes “hope” a virtue, and the act
of hoping, good. When our hope embraces God, it assumes a high standard beyond
which there is nothing to measure against such hope. So God is the beginning and end
of “hoping”. Aquinas explains that the “perfection of hope lies not in achieving what
it hopes for, but in embracing its standard, namely the God on whose help it relies”

S. H. Travis (1988) clarifies that “hope” is looking forward expectantly for God’s
future activity. Hope anticipates a positive outcome from a situation, whether good or
bad. This situation can be singular or particular or fragile, affecting a person. This is
largely so because life is “marked more by suffering than by triumph” (Travis
1988:321). The positive outcomes are described by Aquinas as the “good” that we
hope for from God, that is unlimited good, matching his unlimited power to help: and
that is eternal life (Aquinas 1989:344).

Paul Shorey (1992) elucidates further that “hope”89 is understood from the Christian
tradition as an invisible blessing - a “grace” (Shorey 1992:779). This “grace” is
invested in the knowledge of self-worth in relation to the source of the highest good,
with an anticipation to share in that good. That good is in God and has been revealed
to us through Jesus Christ of the gospel. Shorey describes it thus:

The gospel is the religion of the “better hope”, because it is the religion
“through which men (sic) for the first time enter into intimate fellowship
with God”. Thus, the hope of the Christians is a “good hope” a “blessed
hope” a “hope of glory”, a “hope of righteousness”, “salvation”, of “eternal
life”. It is an expectation of spiritual blessings already realized and
potentially conveyed to man in Christ (Shorey 1992:779).

Therefore to hope is “to look forward expectantly for God’s future activity” based on
his (God’s) “past activities in Jesus Christ” who confirms God’s promise for his
creation (cf Travis 1988:321). Though the believer, a moral agent who has
surrendered to God, lives by faith in anticipation of a better future, he/she is confident
and he/she participates positively among believers and non-believers in the

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89 Four perceptions define “hope” among the Greeks of the post-Hassidic literature. That is (a) hope
was “an illusion and an evil”, (b) “the better hope of the initiated or the good”, (c) the anticipation of
such modern ideas as “the duty of hopefulness” and (d) the personification of hope (Shorey
community character and hope. This participation is in the present and is imbued with the moral standards that point to the anticipated “good” in the future.

The confidence obtained expresses a sense of “liberation from fear” caused by past experience, and overcomes present suffering, and by inference, the gloomy future. Hope becomes the (source of) wisdom and power to face the present and ultimately the future with courage and not despair. Hope ceases to be “a private matter” because it is challenged to come out and promote God’s universal kingdom. The kingdom of God is characterised by value standards for the society. Travis argues, “For if those values are God’s ultimate will for human society, they must also be his will for society now” (Travis 1988:321). To withhold participation which is the external expression of charity, faith, and hope is to deny God his honour and our fellow human beings their well-being (cf McDermott 1989:334). Hope is a divine gift of grace that aids charity and faith in a tapestry of strength to face a new day and negotiate the transactions of life without giving up.

For Aquinas, hope is a “principle for moral action, acting directly upon the will” (in Shorey 1992:780). Hope provides inspiration toward endurance and self-control that create a stable and firm character. By so doing, hope achieves an intelligible balance between the mean of empty optimism and unfounded pessimism. “It fortifies the will and nerves it for the task of self-conquest, and for that “patience which … is itself a form of moral energy, demanding the output of strength” (Shorey 1992:780). To this end, hope is a virtue, which a Christian is called upon to fulfil as a duty. And one can do so by speaking hope into situations that are without it and by doing acts that reduce misery and point to the fullness of good anticipated in our speech. This good is fortified by the fellowship of a community of hope, and the moral agent is able to refrain from actions that diminish hope in one’s individual life or that of his/her community.

90 This is “the broader socio-political dimension of hope” that influenced one of the modern theologies – Liberation theology. This perception of hope has given power to many people caught up in oppression, and they eventually fight their way out of such a situation. “The future kingdom of God, characterised by justice, peace, community and love provide the guidelines and motivation for Christian social action” (Travis 1988:321).
Aquinas summarises all the three theological virtues, Love, Faith, and Hope, as those virtues which bring humanity into a right relationship with God. These virtues are divinely communicated through the gospel to humanity. This is the revelation of God that brings a new inspiration that develops a new attitude toward God, and consequently, a new disposition or character. The virtues set before humanity a new end or aim of action in union with God.

Love responds to the goodness of God and embraces union with God, the Divine aim of creation - an end which is wider than any merely personal good and includes the well-being of others. Faith appropriates the revealed facts - the goodwill and Fatherly love of God, the Divine victory over sin, the possibility of blessedness. Finally, hope that relies on the revealed character of God looks forward with confidence to the fulfilment of the divine purpose. Such hope waits for the “coming” of the Kingdom and for the perfect nature of humanity. The community of hope becomes a blessing in itself and its neighbourhood, even as it anticipates the complete manifestation of God (cf Shorey 1992:779-780; Rom. 5:2).

Virtues in the classic form were the expectation of any moral agent in a community with defined roles. Through the centuries, moral virtues have depended on reason. As Aquinas warns us, reason can easily believe in falsehood, especially in the face of modern challenges and human egoism. Aquinas’ warning has been fulfilled in the current moral dilemma. This is ground for the necessity of the theological virtues, because they are the power and contain wisdom to restore the highest standard of moral good. Moreover, they embrace God, the individual and the community. We now turn to “modern versions of virtues” in order to analyse their motivation and contribution to moral renewal.

3.2 Analysis of modern lists of virtues and their deficiency in moral renewal

Apart from the virtues discussed above, the very idea of “Virtue Ethics” which suggests “codes of conduct” or “expressions of intent” has become very popular in recent times. As the public acknowledges moral depravity in the public and private sector, more emphasis is placed on establishing virtue lists in order to create common
standards of moral expectation. As a result, various versions of virtue lists have been made. I make a random choice of recent moral renewal initiatives in South Africa. Let us start with the formidable list offered by Edmund L. Pincoffs.

### 3.2.1 Edmund Pincoffs’ list of virtues

This is an outstanding list of virtues worth reiterating in this study. It is outstanding because he has also categorised virtues in some key areas of human living. In his submission, Pincoffs considers virtues to be an essential component of personality traits. He ably divides virtues into two categories and several clusters. I shall reproduce his table on the next page.

The first category is called “non-instrumental”. These are further divided into three clusters. The first cluster he has called “aesthetic” and it comprises two groups. The first group he calls “noble” virtues which include dignity, virility, magnanimity, serenity and nobility. The second group he calls “charming” virtues and these include gracefulness, wittiness, vivaciousness, imaginativeness, whimsicality and liveliness.

The second cluster is called, “meliorating” virtues. Three groups have been elected here. The first one is called “mediating” virtues which include tolerance, reasonableness and tactfulness; the second under “temperamental” includes gentleness, humorousness, amiability, cheerfulness, warmth, appreciativeness, openness, even-temperedness, non-complainingness and non-vindictiveness. The third group in this cluster he calls “formal” virtues and these include civility, politeness, decency, modesty, hospitableness and unpretentiousness.

The third cluster is called “moral” virtues. They are divided into two groups. The first one he has called “mandatory” and these include honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, loyalty, consistency, reliability, dependability, trustworthiness, non-recklessness, non-negligence, non-vengefulness, non-belligerence and non-fanaticism. The second group in this cluster he calls “non-mandatory” and they include benevolence, altruism, selflessness, sensitivity, forgiveness, helpfulness, understandingness, super honesty, super conscientiousness and super reliability.
### Pincoffs’ Table of Virtues

#### Personality Traits

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#### NON-INSTRUMENTAL

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#### INSTRUMENTAL

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(Pincoffs 1986:85).

The second category is called “instrumental” virtues. They are further placed into two clusters, namely the agent-instrumental and group-instrumental. In the first cluster (agent-instrumental), he has listed persistence, courage, alertness, carefulness,
resourcefulness, prudence, energy, strength, cool-headedness and determination. The second cluster (group-instrumental) lists cooperativeness, practical wisdom, the virtues of leaders and virtues of followers.

Whereas the contribution of Pincoffs is insightful, it is of course not Christian. Pincoffs’ second group, in the third cluster of the “non-instrumental” virtues includes some vital virtues for Christian-living. Yet for him this is non-mandatory. Two examples will serve to reveal this shortcoming from a Christian point of view. Pincoffs lists forgiveness under “non-mandatory” virtues. For Christians forgiveness is mandatory and is part of the Lord’s Prayer as the only request that has a self-imposed condition attached to it. Consider Archbishop Tutu’s book *No future without forgiveness* (1999). If the virtue of forgiveness is popularised as non-mandatory, then South Africa has no future, or Christian-living becomes impossible.

Altruism is another virtue downplayed by Pincoffs. Although it requires responsible interpretation, it is still one virtue upon which the ministry of Jesus Christ is qualified. African leaders may be required to offer a sacrificial service that might be altruistic in some aspects, but not necessarily dying for their people. For those who are Christians, Christ has already become the ultimate sacrifice. However, in our service to God, including worship and ministering to the needs of others, we are called upon to offer ourselves as “a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him” (Rom. 12:1c).

Nevertheless, Pincoffs’ submission offers a perceptive reference in the overall scheme of the rise of Virtue Ethics perhaps from a humanistic point of view. These can be reclaimed by African Christians’ conception of Virtue Ethics. They could then be re-interpreted from a Christian perspective.

### 3.2.2 James Ian Harris’ lists of virtues

James Ian Harris in his recent article, *The King as a Public Servant: Towards an Ethic of Public leadership based on virtues suggested in the Wisdom Literature of the Older Testament* (2002), makes two references to virtues being developed in a pluralistic society. Harris prefaces these lists of virtues with Esterhuyse’s observation that
through the years “… moral norms and values have crystallised” into the moulds of a utilitarian and deontological moral mindset. The first, Harris maintains, is a list of virtues, perhaps formulated by modern society. These include “humaneness, honesty, justice, reasonableness, freedom, truth, decency, integrity and order”. Harris observes that “These virtues are neither uniquely Western nor specifically Christian” (Harris 2002:63). They are simply suitable expressions of the common good. However, there is no external authority to honour in keeping them and no obligation to keep them. So people depend on themselves, though essentially selfish and weak, in the face of objects of desire and pressures of survival. In such a situation, Harris’ list of virtues is bound to achieve little or nothing in solving the current moral dilemma.

The second list of virtues discussed by Harris is one that was issued during a discussion on teaching in Moslem schools in England. Of course, these virtues arose from a multicultural context where faiths and races met as potentially dissentious in current political conflicts on the global scene. The list includes “compassion, self-reliance, integrity, respect, love, justice, freedom, courage, cleanliness, honesty, diligence, cooperation, moderation, gratitude, rationality and public spiritedness” (Harris 2002:63). This list was given to school pupils, implying that moral standards should be practised by these pupils. They were a mixture of what one could do and be as they were borrowed from everywhere in order to build a virtues list that would work for them - a survival kit for Moslems in diaspora. The hope for this Moslem community is the homogeneous faith and perhaps religious tradition that will support this moral scheme. The recent reports of an increase in Moslem population and conversions to Islam in England may suggest that such a virtues list is probably gaining moral ground. Of course, we may note with interest how this survival list of virtues compares with the Islamic Sharia law: altruistic commitment to the Prophet Mohammad, spotless honesty, noble virtues, absolute sincerity, and absolute trustworthiness in every sphere of life (cf Ramakrishna 1988:11). One is left wondering how the two virtue lists work together to achieve the general moral good in the community in England. One has to be very careful not to assign the current suicide bombers in the Middle East crises (Israel and Iraq) to aspects of Sharia law. Genuine interpretation of the Sharia might yield a virtuous and docile religious character if placed in situations of political and economic stability. The case of the list of virtues from Moslems in England is evidence of this possibility.
3.2.3 Code of conduct from the South African Moral Summit of 1997

The code of conduct for moral leadership was produced for consideration by the South African Moral Summit who met in 1997 under the chairmanship of then President Nelson Mandela (chairman from 1994 to 1999). From the outset, the “list of virtues” from this moral summit shows a different starting-point. There is an acknowledgment of moral leadership deficiency. Richardson observes that the signatories committed “themselves to the following ten high-sounding principles: integrity, incorruptibility, good faith, impartiality, openness, accountability, justice, respect, generosity, and leadership” (Richardson 2003:7).

These virtues seemed to arise from a context of reviving a moral leadership. The participants were, however, not being moved to inculcate a moral system. It is, in some way, assumed that everyone knows these virtues and can “be” or “do” (or not be or do) what those moral codes mean and imply. The participants were advanced leaders and whether they knew it or not, they were and are role models for moral development for successive generations. Perhaps this is why they focused on their moral regeneration. Richardson argues that this was a top-to-bottom approach to morality, and hoped that subsequent forums might introduce moral regeneration in a “bottom–up” process.

These virtue lists and codes of conduct are a typical example of MacIntyre’s observation, following his analogy of the catastrophe of moral sources. In all good intentions, people continue to use key moral expressions that have largely lost connection with the tradition that gave them their conceptual meaning. They can neither be sustained nor be passed on without the tradition from which they were developed. Virtues are not keys that one may receive once one enters public office. Rather they are internal tools learnt slowly from childhood through different stages as one finally reaches that important stage of signing a social contract as a public leader. Then drawing from experience and the support of a “wise” community, the leader remains on the “straight and narrow” of moral virtue disposition.

Modern lists of virtues depict a culture with fragments of moral discourse and virtues without the tradition to support them. The assumption is that, from a deontological
point of view, any individual is rational enough to adhere to these virtues, while the utilitarian is convinced that such virtues will most convincingly lead to the happiness of the greatest number. But it might be difficult to inculcate these virtues in a pluralistic society with competing authorities, with fragmented individuals, without a tradition or community support. MacIntyre has remarked:

> Within particular modern subcultures, of course, versions of the traditional scheme of the virtues survive; but the conditions of contemporary public debate are such that when the representative voices of those subcultures try to participate in it, they are all too easily interpreted and misinterpreted in terms of the pluralism which threatens to submerge us all. This misinterpretation is the outcome of long history from the later middle ages until the present during which the dominant lists of virtue itself has become other than what it was (MacIntyre 1981:210).

Perhaps, virtues lists that will be effective are those which carry an element of “good” capable of sustaining the society. MacIntyre has observed that we need to assess all lists of virtues, such as those given above, to make sure that such lists include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good (MacIntyre 1981:204).

Virtues, as fundamental aspects for moral living, need to be those that will help us to recover our divine connection and restore the individual and the community.

This is why we need wisdom to understand virtues, interpret them, and appropriate them in our lives as moral beings. This has to be aided by divine wisdom that is unique because of its power to transform humankind. Below I shall offer my reason for the choice and prominence of wisdom in the whole Virtue Ethics scheme of agent-centred morality.

3.3 **Wisdom as a prism of all virtue toward the creation of the community of the wise**

I argued that we all need the virtue of wisdom in order to understand, appreciate and apply virtues in our practical living. For example, justice is wisdom concerned with regulation of freedoms, distribution of rights and deserts (receiving what one deserves...
with regard to reward or punishment). Wisdom is the ability to control oneself against passions (Gk sophrosyne) as the application of the virtue of temperance. Courage or fortitude is that wisdom which overcomes the emotion of fear. Everyone needs wisdom as a means of attaining moral virtue and a realisation that one needs the wisdom of God (cf Sandbach 1975:41; Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:100-101; Wall 1997:51). Moreover, I subscribe to what George E. Ladd has called “wisdom Ethics” as “ethics of God’s present rule” (Ladd 1974:126), in the development of Virtue Ethics in Africa and elsewhere.

As such, wisdom is linked with all the other virtues as practical wisdom/phronesis. This prudential or instrumental reasoning of the moral agent is a necessary resource in the transition of virtues theories to their practical manifestation. This is the usage of wisdom as a general intellectual ability or good sense, which deals with matters of ordinary human interests. Wisdom in general and God’s wisdom in particular enable a respondent individual (subject to God in the community of the good, just and wise) to interact virtuously with the self within, with other people, and with all creation around him/her.

In making his point, MacIntyre recalls how Aristotle praised the virtue of “justice as the first virtue of political life” (MacIntyre 1981:227). Justice, as a matter of necessity, must be the first practical agreement for any community in order to be politically organised. MacIntyre’s observation that the lack of justice threatens “our own society today” referred to the American society. It is not hard to locate evidence that Africa is several times worse in some places with regard to deteriorating justice. However, for anyone to contemplate justice, he/she needs wisdom. Here justice is the felt need. Wisdom is the real need. For wisdom dispels ignorance and unlocks the dangers of an unjust society. Wisdom recognises and practises justice for its benefit to human flourishing. NEPAD and all its anticipated programmes could be an example of a new breed of wise African leaders whose virtuous state leadership will lead the continent with wisdom.

Scholars like Ricoeur (1987), Westermann (1995), and Van der Ven (1998) consider wisdom as being a critical resource in moral development. Through wisdom we can comprehend the necessity for moral standards, values, and virtues, articulate them,
and in so doing transmit them orally and textually. Claus Westermann in the introduction to his book *Roots of Wisdom* (1995) affirms the importance of wisdom in moral transmission:

Wisdom is a capacity that is inherent in human beings as persons. It is a human trait, an element of our createdness. Although people are not wise by virtue of being created, they are created with the potential of thinking, speaking, and acting wisely (Westermann 1995:1).

A number of aspects which qualify wisdom as the medium of moral transformation are advanced below. They are obtained from Westermann’s observation above, and from the discussion of Ricoeur in Van der Ven’s book, *Formation of the Moral Self* (1998).

Of all the virtues Westermann observes, especially the cardinal virtues, wisdom is the only one that has the quality that unites people, rather than divides them. Where matters of religious faith, popular or equity justice, liberalism or moderation, and the extremity of courage have failed, wisdom has asserted its inherent value as a common human factor. Wisdom is a uniting constituent found in every culture (cf Westermann 1998:1-2). This factor contributes to the claim of our creation by God who has given us the means to reflect on our relationship with Him and with one another in our changing contexts.

Ricoeur argues that there is always some “good” in a community. This “good” is constituted by the tradition by which such a community has been sustained. The community’s ethos shapes its members’ experience where justice is at home and held together in a creative tension. It is therefore the combination of the “good” and the “just” that Ricoeur includes in what Van der Ven calls the third criterion: “the wise”. I shall be using this “formula” to refer to the community of believers as the “Community of the wise” following Wall’s book *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (1997). The new community is here living out the God-given goodness (freedom-space) interacting with each other in a “tapestry” of moral virtues. Ricoeur argues for the apex of wisdom in a threefold manner.

Firstly, the “good” is the substance of the community found in the tradition and the *Sitz im Leben* (context) of the community. This environment affects and constructs
the moral outlook of the community members. Secondly, however, Ricoeur maintains:

The values and the norms that embody the good must be scrutinised, evaluated, and if necessary, purified by putting them before the judge of justice and passing them through the ‘sieve’ of the right (see Van der Ven 1998:9).

Thirdly, the “good” having been scrutinised and purified by the “right”, “must be applied in the concrete situation, including its singularity, fragility, and tragedy” (see Van der Ven 1998:9). This is the work of Ricoeur’s third criterion, “the wise”, and that is “practical-moral wisdom, moral wisdom in situation” (see Van der Ven 1998:9). Practical wisdom becomes the essential mode of moral education and facilitating the transmission of all virtues.

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”91. 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 situation92. 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

91 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.

92 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).
African Renaissance. This is why wisdom is important as a virtue in the transmission of all the other virtues for moral transformation and development.

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 satiations 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.

Let us now turn the four major wisdom traditions to see how they may enhance our understanding of wisdom as pre-eminent virtue.

3.3.1 Wisdom from four major traditions

In this section, I shall analyse the development of Wisdom in the Hellenistic, Jewish, and African cultures with regards to ethical reflection. In each case, I shall try to locate the cultural-theological developments as these three cultures explore their
available wisdom resources provided by human rationality, the relationships of this endeavour, and their theological reflections on ethical matters. I shall end with the Christian understanding of wisdom, which is God’s wisdom and power expressed in Jesus Christ. I shall start with wisdom in the Hellenistic tradition.

3.3.1.1 Wisdom in the Hellenistic tradition

The Hellenistic tradition covered a period of about four centuries from the 4th to the 1st century BC, during which specific aspects of Greek literary art and learning flourished. It was called “Hellenistic” from the Greek word *Hellenizein* which means “to speak Hellenic/Greek” or “to act like a Greek” (Ehrenberg 1964:332). These concepts were meant for non-Greeks. They would have to be Hellenised in order to be part of the Hellenistic culture. Hellenism marked an age, a specific period of pride in Greek history (cf Lacy 1976:4).

Artists produced single lines and verses of comments and seasoned reflections on life experiences. Some of these appeared in maxims, poems, and drama/plays.

The review of the Hellenistic Wisdom literature was to become the basis for moral reflection, not necessarily to change life, but rather to show life as it was. Consider these two poems translated by William Morris:

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He hurts himself who aims
For wicked plotting maims
Or Shame can hurt men mightily
But shame that goes with poverty
Is all to rue (see Higham and Bowra 1938:332).
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Poems such as these were later to become sources of moral reflection. These reflections originated from the heroic sagas. MacIntyre, in his description of the moral content of these heroic poems, maintained that they represented a form of society about whose moral structure two central claims are made.

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The first is that structure embodies a conceptual scheme which has three central interrelated elements: a conception of what is required by the social roles which each individual inhabits; a conception of excellences or virtues as those qualities which enable an individual to do what his or her role requires; and a conception of the human condition as fragile and vulnerable
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to destiny and death, [such] that to be virtuous is not to avoid vulnerability and death, but rather to accord them their due (MacIntyre 1981:121).

Drawing heavily from Heroic sources attributed to Homer as the author, Wisdom literature was made available in poems and drama. Its plots, *dramatis personae*, and moral injunctions provided the “texts” (almost like the Christian Scripture) later to be adapted by moral philosophers. In turn, the philosophers developed these moral reflections further, through generations of historical and academic advancement. Some examples of such Homeric texts include the myth of the origin of gods, creation of the universe and human beings. The gods were very close to human beings and subscribed to the same moral laws. A Greek poet, Pindar, spoke thus of gods and human beings in a famous anthology, *The Odes of Pindar* (6th Century) (translated by C. M. Bowra).

Single is the race, single
Of men and gods;
From a single mother we both draw breath.
But a difference of power in everything
Keeps us apart;
For one is as nothing, but the brazen sky
Stays affixed habituation forever.
Yet we can in greatness of mind
Or of body be like the immortals (see Armstrong 1999:16-17).

Some of the noted moral philosophers include the Sophists, and later on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Two movements, namely Epicureanism and Stoicism, made an important contribution to moral thought during the Hellenistic age, especially with regard to their influence on Christian moral thought.

3.3.1.1 Sophists

Sophists (Greek *sophistēs* “expert, master craftsman, man of wisdom”) were the earliest noted custodians of Wisdom in the Hellenistic tradition. They were the

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931 The Homeric poems were said to be in three forms. The epic was a long narrative poem, usually majestic both in the theme and style. They were often recited. Lyric poetry was another form of poetry comprised of fewer verses, often expressions of personal emotion, and they were often sung. Mock epics were a type of epic poetry which satirised contemporary ideals or conditions in form or style (cf Higham and Bowra 1938:xvii).
learned who offered tutorials to royalty for a fee. Operating as a group of individuals, rather than a school, the Sophists shared common philosophical views as forerunners of early Greek Wisdom tradition.

Consideration of their manner of thinking with regard to Wisdom reveals that, for example, most of them concluded that truth and morality were essentially matters of opinion. Thus, in their own teaching, they tended to emphasise forms of persuasive expression, such as the art of rhetoric, which provided pupils with skills useful for achieving success in life, particularly public life.

One Sophist mentioned earlier (Chapter two) in this study, was Protagoras (480-411 BC). He was a Greek philosopher who won great fame as a teacher and a philosopher. Protagoras called himself a Sophist and taught for money, receiving large sums from his pupils. We are told that Protagoras gave instruction in grammar, rhetoric, and the interpretation of poetry. His chief works, of which only a few fragments have survived, were entitled *Truth* and *On the Gods*. The basis of his speculation was the doctrine that nothing is absolutely good or bad, true or false, and that each individual is therefore his or her own final authority; this belief is summed up in his saying: “Man is the measure of all things” (Protagoras in Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003; Lee 1978:2).

Sophists’ perceptions such as these have had a profound influence on the development of Western moral philosophical thought. They were the forerunners of the autonomous individual and the role of reason in moral discourse. I have indicated earlier that Protagoras’ statement “Man is the measure of all things” was at the centre of the Italian and indeed European Renaissance. Protagoras doubted that humanity would ever be able to reach objective truth through reason, and taught that material success rather than truth should be the purpose of life (cf Laing 1950:3347; also Lee 1978:2). Whereas his statement is indeed true regarding human possibility of reaching objective truth, it is his conclusion that is problematic. Because as it stands, objective moral truth, that is, the effectiveness of transformative moral wisdom is only possible with God’s power. Since Protagoras rejected the influence of Hellenistic gods in human moral responsibility, his path toward divine intervention in moral human affairs was unlikely and therefore absent in his moral contribution.
Today there are trends of moral thought by those who do not believe in God, which seem to find succour in the age-old moral discourse traced from the Sophists and Protagoras in particular. These are the humanistic moral conceptions (radical and liberal) that have endured and matured into the current individualistic and materialistic dominating moral modes. Most of these are espoused and expressed in the postmodernist moral negligence. It is perhaps important to note that Sophists were not popular, largely because of their moral views that were considered with scepticism and attracted vehement scrutiny by their contemporaries. Among them were critics such as Socrates, Plato, and later Aristotle. I shall give brief reviews of their criticisms against the Sophists’ moral emptiness.

3.3.1.1.2 Socrates

Socrates is counted among Hellenistic sages who contributed to the development of moral thought. Socrates always proceeded by asking questions. Among other questions that Socrates raised in his philosophical memoirs were often those of an ethical nature. At the centre of the ethical inquiry was Socrates’ basic question: “What is the good life, and why should we live it?” In asking these questions, Socrates was trying to build towards a positive view of life against the negativism of the Sophists of his time (cf Laing 1950:3347).

His avowed purpose was “to fulfil the philosopher’s mission of searching into myself and other men” (cf Laing 1950:3347), the conception of good life and the purpose of living. Socrates’ method was dialectic: After stating a proposition, the philosopher asked a series of questions designed to test and refine the proposition, by examining its consequences and discovering whether it was consistent with the known facts. Socrates described the soul not in terms of mysticism but as “that in virtue of which we are called wise or foolish, good or bad”. In other words, Socrates considered the soul to be a combination of an individual’s intelligence and character (cf Laing 1950:3337).

Socrates tended toward the inculcation of ethics of being. The emphasis on the “good person we should be” was indeed at the centre of his moral search. I wish to follow
this trend and find out whether it included the external intervention of the divine power in its quest for moral development in Plato’s thinking.

### 3.3.1.1.3 Plato

Plato developed the above view with regard to “the good person we should be” through a debate between Socrates and Callicles. Callicles made his submission from that moral standpoint by which one is glorified who uses his intellect to dominate, and in turn uses his domination to satisfy one’s desires without limit. In response, Socrates could only raise questions with this moral position to challenge it, but he could not reject it (cf MacIntyre 1981:140).

This raises the question of reason and the role it plays in building a virtuous character. Reason is based on human nature (Gk. *physis*). It is this position that influenced Plato’s contribution that “Wherever they live, however different their life-styles are, people all share the same human nature, with the same needs and powers” (Shutte 2001:38). Suitable laws would have to be found that fitted in well with human nature that would allow it to flourish and find fulfilment (cf Shutte 2001:38).

Plato’s *Republic* developed the concept of a wise person as someone possessing knowledge of truth – above all, ethical truth or truth about what is the right way for human beings to behave, based on the doctrine of the Platonic forms constituting ultimate reality, which transcend the derived and inferior truth of the world of phenomenal experience (Kerferd 1990:320).

This transcendent “truth” from Plato’s submission points to the needed knowledge of God the divine lawgiver. If such truth resided in the soul of an individual it would guide such a soul in moral living.

There is a sense in which Plato placed all leaders in public service (government, business, and public security) on a pedestal. The basic elements or characteristics of the human soul – the appetitive, the spirited, and the philosophical, were the aspects that Plato considered in the construction of a republic. It is considered that Plato’s ideal republic
consisted of three distinct groups: a commercial class formed by those dominated by their appetites; a spirited class, administrators and soldiers, responsible for the execution of the laws; and the guardians or philosopher-kings, who would be the law-makers (Republic in Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003).

According to Plato, leaders were also guardians who were carefully selected with the responsibility for maintaining a harmonious polis. Their task was that of working toward achieving the wellbeing of the members of the polis, because it was assumed, in choosing them, that they had “a special insight into what constitutes the common good” (Republic: Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003). This meant that leaders had two moral obligations: to respect the polis’ selection of them as their leaders, and to achieve the goal or the purpose for which they were elected. The wisdom of what was morally good was the internal quality of such leaders, identified by the electorate in the choosing such leaders.

Plato, like Socrates, was not far from interiorising the moral good of the community and expressing it in good actions for the benefit of the polis. Such a moral conception identified with the “ethics of being” because it was agent-centred and was embedded in the traditionally established good, generally known by everyone in the generations of the polis. Plato passed on this concept of the good internal to the moral agent to Aristotle.

3.3.1.4 Aristotle

Aristotle was Plato’s student. Following Plato, Aristotle’s starting-point was that the highest good is to be found in the pursuit of happiness. This happiness is linked to the requirement of acting in accordance with reason. Naturally, it would follow that an individual acting in accordance with reason, would necessarily demonstrate virtuous qualities as various forms of action in accordance with that reason. Such a person would naturally display the disposition of right actions, and in so doing fulfill the requirement of moral virtue completely, expressed in the maxim “live righteously” (cf Hostler 1975:64; also Norman 1998:35). Aristotle’s emphasis on virtue is centred

94 However, this does not mean that he followed Plato’s ethical thinking. He is located in the broader Platonic stream with his own ethical thought developments. For Aristotle the internal substance was the individual’s happiness aided by reason, that led to what was morally good.

He proceeded from a purpose-driven or goal-driven position, which is referred to as *telos*. *Telos* was used “to refer to the end toward which a thing moves”. In addition, the “good” is that thing to which all things aim. For an individual, this state of “good” is called by Aristotle *eudaimonia* or wellbeing, which was referred to above as “human flourishing” or “happiness” (cf Beauchamp 1991:215). This is “the state of being well and doing well of a man’s (sic) being well favoured, himself and in relation to the divine” (MacIntyre 1999:148). To move toward this goal we need particular moral qualities called virtues. The virtues, Aristotle argues, are those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve “happiness” (*eudaimonia*) on one side of the coin. On the other side, the individual is frustrated by the lack of these qualities in his/her movement towards the anticipated "goal" (*telos*). According to Aristotle, “Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good; for by ‘the good’ or ‘a good’ we mean that at which beings characteristically aim” (MacIntyre 1981:148). Virtues are the qualities of character and not the “means”, the possession of which will enable an individual to attain this “good”. To possess the virtues and to apply them in human disposition is a test of human “good” (MacIntyre 1981:148).

### 3.3.1.1.5 The Hellenistic wisdom tradition and God

Were the Hellenistic philosophers aware of God as the source of moral thought and practice? It is often taken for granted that Greek philosophers’ passion mainly resided in logic and reason and that their preoccupation was the problems of epistemology and the nature of wisdom. Yet it is clear that the world around them was keenly aware of matters of morality, as demonstrated in the execution of Socrates (399 BCE), “on the charges of impiety and the corruption of youth” (Armstrong 1999:45).

So deep had been the influences of Protagoras, who knew and taught that the human soul was polluted and could only be purified by “ritual purification” (Armstrong 1999:45). As for Plato he “believed in the existence of the divine, unchanging reality beyond the world of the senses, that the soul was a fallen divinity, out of its element,
imprisoned in the body but capable of regaining its divine status by the purification of the reasoning powers of the mind” (see Armstrong 1999:45). The fallen person was in the dark and obscurity and could only perceive “shadows of the eternal realities flickering” but he/she could be “drawn out and achieve enlightenment and liberation by accustoming his mind to the divine light” (see Armstrong 1999:45).

Plato did not indulge so much in discussions on the nature of God. Rather he concentrated on the divine world of forms. From Armstrong’s observation, Plato categorised realities such as “beauty”, “love” and “justice” or “the good” as representations of the Supreme Being. As such, the world of forms represented the reality of the invisible world. When we think, unlike the modern understanding, we are not performing an activity – something is happening to us. Plato argued that “the objects of thoughts are realities that are active in the intellect of the person who contemplates them” (see Armstrong 1999:47). Following this argument, therefore, thoughts are simply a recollection of what a person has always known but has forgotten. Since the human being had fallen from divinities, “the forms of the divine world were within them and could be ‘touched’ by reason, which was not simply a rational or cerebral activity but an intuitive grasp of the eternal reality within us” (see Armstrong 1999:47).

Aristotle took these thoughts a step further. He did not believe that the forms had “a prior, independent existence”, although he had “an acute understanding of the nature and importance of religion and mythology” (Armstrong 1999:47). Aristotle’s perception of God was described as the “Unmoved mover”, “pure being”, “eternal, immobile, and spiritual” (Armstrong 1999:48). A person is in a privileged position in relation to God and other creatures. This privilege is invested in the human as a “divine gift of intellect, which makes him (sic) kin to God and a partaker in divine nature” (see Armstrong 1999:48-49). Humanity also shares in the divine attribute of reasoning, and by purifying this reasoning, which is the person’s duty; he/she can become immortal and divine. Here the virtue of wisdom was the highest of all. It was obtainable through contemplation of truth located in “imitating the activity of God himself” (see Armstrong 1999:49). Like Plato, Aristotle on the one hand, knew that the contemplation of the activity of God (theoria) could not be achieved by logic alone. It required “a disciplined intuition resulting in an ecstatic self-transcendence”
and was reserved for very few people capable of this wisdom. On the other hand, he knew and taught that “most people can achieve only *phronesis*, the exercise of foresight and intelligence in daily life” (see Armstrong 1999:49).

Aristotle’s God seemed to have no relevance in cosmic challenges. This was largely because the cosmos had degenerative characteristics that could not be part of an unchanging God. After all, this God was generally “indifferent to the existence of the universe” as a confirmation of the fact that “he cannot contemplate anything inferior to himself” (see Armstrong 1999:49). Effectively, for Aristotle this God could not guide or direct people’s affairs, so he should be relegated to the periphery of society and human beings left alone in their contemplation of moral matters.

We can conclude that both Plato’s world of forms and Aristotle’s remote consideration of God were similar, that is, their god did not have a moral influence on people. Nevertheless, these perceptions contained threads of philosophical thought upon which the Christians would later build in the development of Christian theology. Such links could be detected among the moral thoughts of the Epicureans and developed toward the Christian moral theology by the Stoics.

### 3.3.1.1.6 Epicureanism

Epicurus developed a philosophical teaching, later named Epicureanism, which essentially maintained that

> Pleasure is the supreme good and main goal of life. Intellectual pleasures are preferred to sensual ones, which tend to disturb peace of mind. True happiness, Epicurus taught, is the serenity resulting from the conquest of fear, that is, of the gods, of death, and of the afterlife. The ultimate aim of all Epicurean speculation about nature is to rid people of such fears (Epicurus in Encarta Encyclopedia 2003; also Ehrenberg 1964:332).

His personal hedonism (pertaining to pleasure) taught that only through self-restraint (continence) and detachment (moderation) could one achieve the kind of tranquillity that is true happiness. Despite his materialism, Epicurus believed in the freedom of the will. Although he had many followers, some abused the equivocal rule, and others (in following it) turned into ascetics (cf Ehrenberg 1964:332). There is no doubt that
Epicureanism was an offshoot of the Sophists’ moral thought, finding its place two centuries later.

Epicurus did not deny the existence of gods, but he emphatically maintained that as “happy and imperishable beings” of supernatural power, they could have nothing to do with human affairs, although they might take pleasure in contemplating the lives of good mortals. True religion lies in a similar contemplation by humans of the ideal lives of the high, invisible gods. This view was similar to that of Aristotle, even in its connotations of intellect being reserved for a higher class of human beings. They acknowledged God in their daily lives. However, they relegated Him to the periphery of their moral reflection and discourse.

The Epicureans observed the following:

So firmly fixed and venerated were Epicurus’ teachings that the doctrines of Epicureanism, unlike those of its great philosophical rival Stoicism, remained remarkably intact throughout its history as a living tradition. Since then, Epicureanism attracted eminent followers in all ages and was regarded as one of the most influential schools of moral philosophy of all time (Epicureanism in Encarta Encyclopedia 2003).

As counter-critics of Epicureanism moral discourse, the Stoics claimed that their contribution was “the philosophy of the Hellenistic age” (Ehrenberg 1964:332). The Stoics regarded the Epicureans as being “anti-theology” and went further to describe them “as individualistic, hedonistic and irresponsible” (Bray 1993:36). The Stoics’ views originated from one Zeno of Citium.

3.3.1.1.7 Stoicism

Zeno (a Hellenised Phoenician) was the founder of Stoicism as a philosophical system. This philosophical system made a significant contribution to the Hellenistic wisdom tradition. Stoicism emerged in the 3rd century BC, and had an intellectual and social influence on Christian writers. “Since the Renaissance, its teaching has affected both philosophers and thoughtful men (sic) in search of a guide to life” (Sandbach 1975:9). Stoics were known for their contribution to ethical thought. They agreed with Aristotle that the study of ethics should not only help the thinkers to know what
goodness is, but rather to concentrate on how to become good. Knowing and applying such knowledge of how to live and behave was regarded as the highest value of wisdom.

A Stoic was one who was not easily excited, one who repressed his emotions, was indifferent to pain, and was not dependent on happiness from worldly pleasures. Their doctrine presupposed belief in the freedom of the individual’s volition. This philosophical system believed “that no external thing alone can affect us for good or evil until we have woven it with the texture of our mental life” (Laing 1950:3427). As such, nothing could influence an individual unless he/she willed it to influence and determine his/her thoughts or actions. The Stoics’ emphasis was upon the “reaction” to external circumstances, compared to the internal circumstances in themselves. Their teaching inculcated virtues such as courage, self-control, temperance, and justice.

The Stoics’ moral virtue could be linked to their understanding and usage of a term honestas, vaguely translated as “live righteously”. Cicero, though a leading anti-Stoic philosopher, linked this term with the exercise of reason. He observed, “Whatever is fitting or right becomes apparent only when honestas is present” (in Hostler1975:64). This may be compared with Aristotle’s metaphysical “eye” which gives the moral agent a “vision” of right and wrong. Ultimately, virtue led to “happiness” (eudaimonia) (cf Sandbach 1975:29).

For the Stoics, arete, translated as “virtue” or “excellence” of morality, included knowledge or understanding. The possessor of virtue always did what was right, consistent with the assumption that the said virtuous person always knew what was right. As such, to be wise was to be virtuous, and to be virtuous was to be wise. Virtue was to be desired and sought after. However, there was dispute as to whether, once an individual has acquired virtue, he/she could, for some reason, lose it. Although this was considered to be generally unthinkable for a virtuous person, it was possible, owing to some “intoxication or madness (which) might cause the loss” (Sandbach 1975:28). A virtuous person was not expected to oscillate between virtue and vice as a pattern of his/her character disposition.
A virtue was not necessarily a guarantee for material success, pleasure, or happiness. The Stoics maintained that

a man’s (sic) excellence or virtue … does not depend on his success in obtaining anything in the external world, it depends entirely on his having the right mental attitude towards those things. The external world should not be a matter of indifference to him, and he is bound to recognise the differences of value in it, but they are not value that contributes to his excellence and his happiness, of which he is the sole arbiter (Sandbach 1975:29-30).

Stoics believed that virtue had to be in conformity with the cosmic order and expressed in one’s internal disposition and external acts. Virtue, they maintained, consisted in the pursuit of moral values and avoiding their contraries. Knowledge was knowledge if it was knowledge of what was to be preferred. “The morally good was ‘to be won’ (haireton), the morally bad ‘to be fled from’ (pheukton); the indifferent was either ‘to be taken’ (lepton) or ‘picked’ (eklekteon) or ‘not to be taken’ (alepton) (Sandbach 1975:30). It follows, therefore, that a morally good life was ‘beneficial’ (ophelimon) or ‘useful’ (chresimon), and a morally bad life ‘harmful’ (blaberon) (cf Sandbach 1975:30).

Stoics summed up “virtue” as being always consistent. This view was the same for the Stoics as it was for Plato and Aristotle. Virtue was also a matter of knowledge or wisdom. It was intellectually assumed that a person who knew what was right would also be expected to do it. They argued that

knowledge could not be a firm possession without the strength of mind, and that strength of mind was to be secured by practice and training: by holding to the truth under temptation a man (sic) made himself more capable of holding to it again (Sandbach 1975:41).

The Stoics recognised habituation and emphasised that “the road to virtue was that of training the reason to think correctly” (Sandbach 1975:42). Zeno went on to define three cardinal virtues in terms of the fourth, namely, wisdom:

Justice was wisdom concerned with assignment (or distribution), sophrosyne (self-control, temperance) was wisdom concerned with acquisition, bravery wisdom concerned with endurance. Wisdom… called knowledge of what should and should not be done or knowledge of what is good or bad or neither (Sandbach 1975:42).
The Stoics believed in God. They “argued that the maker of the heavenly bodies must be superior to man, who could not make them, and therefore be a God” (Sandbach 1975:71). God was also understood as *logos* related to the noun *cognate* with the verb *legein* which means, “to say”. This could refer to “speech” or “expression”. *Logos* therefore implied “the explanation of a thing which may be the account or *formula* of its constitution and the statement of its purpose” (Sandbach 1975:72). God was the origin of the material universe, and the same God was responsible for its qualities and the source of reason for humankind’s intelligence (cf Sandbach 1975:101-108).

Relevant in Stoic moral thought was the development of the term *logos*, a term used in Christian theology to refer to Jesus Christ. According to stoicism, “*logos* was re-established as Providence or nature ruling the universe according to eternal laws” (Ehrenberg 1964:332). Some of the characteristics of the *logos* included: a material all-pervading Spirit (*pneuma*), a dynamic force which provided an ultimate explanation of the physical phenomena as the basis for the Stoics’ rational psychology and ethics. By this spirit, Stoics advanced the equality of all people and strongly believed that “it was in every human being’s power to gain complete virtue” (Ehrenberg 1964:332).

Stoicism might have been the forerunner of some Christian thought later. Christian teachers, such as Clement, though not agreeing completely with the philosophical system of the Stoics, built on their thinking, largely by modifying their language. Where the Stoics had developed the necessary principle of God, the Christians made Him transcendent. Where the Stoics resigned themselves to fate, the Christians offered hope. Where they attributed happiness to the intelligent who were at home with reason, Christians offered salvation for all, through faith as the way to happiness. People would cross over from a life of wickedness into a life of righteousness through mere repentance and believing in the power of God to transform them. Another wisdom tradition, perhaps as old and parallel to the Hellenistic one, was Jewish. Let us look at some important aspects of this Jewish wisdom tradition.

### 3.3.1.2 Jewish wisdom tradition

Jewish Wisdom tradition as found in the Scriptures usually refers to three main texts, namely Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. In addition, the Psalms and Song of Songs are
also part of the Wisdom literature collection. The development of the Wisdom tradition in Judaism shows a further collection outside the canonical books, in the Apocrypha. These include Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon, both books commonly known by the name of their authors – Ben-Sira (c. 180 BC) and the Qohelet (cf Toy 1899: xxiii; Kidner 1964:14; Thompson 1974:35; Whybray 1994:7).95

Gerhard von Rad in his detailed work *Wisdom in Israel* (translated by James D. Martin, 1972) also attributes most wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, to Solomon. However, this is because most proverbs have been given a royal origin to the extent that the “Solomonic authorship is hardly ever doubted” (Von Rad 1972:15). If Wisdom literature seems to portray royal characteristics, then it is proper to conclude that the royal court was “a place where wisdom was traditionally nurtured” (Von Rad 1972:15). Clements, in his discussion of Proverbs, offers some examples of courtly Wisdom:

Oracular decisions are on the lips of the king;  
his mouth makes no mistake when passing sentence (Prov. 16:10).

Such wisdom affirmed the king in his execution of justice, while the subsequent verses appealed to his righteousness:

It is an abomination for the kings to do evil,  
for the throne is established by right action.  
Truthful lips are the delight of the king,  
And he loves one who speaks what is true (Prov. 16:12-13).

Love of truthfulness and justice was to be expected of the king in his ruling, for he ruled on behalf of God (cf Clements 1992:98-99). The royal court was not, of course, the only place where wisdom flourished. As other sources and genres will show, there was wisdom concerning behaviour of the ruled toward the king, presented as a message of wisdom from a father to his son:

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95 Thompson alludes to usage of proverbs as wisdom from other regions in the Ancient Near East. These include Egypt, Canaan, and Babylon (Thompson 1974:35-57). Wisdom literature is not, by any means, limited to the four sources indicated above. Proverbial phrases and statements are to be found elsewhere in the Bible in the priestly and prophetic traditions (Thompson 1974:60; also Westermann 1995:99-107).
My son, fear the Lord and the king
and do not be disobedient to either of them;
for disaster from them will spring up suddenly,
and who knows when their lives will be cut off? (Prov. 24:21-22).

The perception here is that God and the king were in the same category. To be disobedient to the king was tantamount to disobedience to God (cf Clements 1992:99).

Proverbs formed the main component of the texts regarded as Wisdom literature in the Jewish tradition. The text in 1 Kings 3 and 4 serves to situate the later Jewish claim of originality and superiority of Israel’s wisdom above the wisdom of other nations96. However, evidence of wise people and Wisdom literature indicate sources which date even earlier than the Hebrew text. Noting that proverbs, as a form of wisdom, were transmitted orally, most scholars argue that they (proverbs) date earlier than the invention of writing in the fourth millennium BC as evidence of their oral genre (cf Thompson 1974:36).

Clements identifies three stages in the development of the Jewish wisdom tradition. The first stage was that of “the earliest traditions of folk wisdom” (Clements 1992:23). It emerged from small communities and clans as indicated in its characteristics:

It incorporated several aspects of family life, being pragmatic and strongly respectful of the authority of the family headed by the father. It also encouraged artistic elaboration in the form of riddles, allegories, fables and other forms of poetic speech. The fact that the proverb (Heb. Mashal - ‘likeness’) remained one of the most popular and basic of all forms of wisdom utterance suggests that skilful use of metaphors and simile were favoured features of wisdom teaching (Clements 1992:23).

The second stage was that of the development of wisdom in the royal courts. As noted earlier, this phase was fundamental as it provided a nurturing environment to wisdom. Wisdom did not necessarily become a prerogative of the courtiers alone. Rather

96 Solomon prayed for wisdom from God. And it is affirmed in 1 Kings 4:30-31 “Solomon’s wisdom surpassed all the wisdom of the people of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darba, the sons of Mahol” (Thompson1974:35).
wisdom “underwent very formative changes in this context,” taking on “the character of the ‘royal wisdom’ in which the king was accorded very high respect as an exponent of wisdom” (Clements 1992:23). The “contents of these sapiential instructions came to incorporate a strong national and political dimension” (Clements 1992:23). Clements also suggests that it was during this royal phase that wisdom attained its transformation from oral to a literary collection with an artistic sophistication. The connection of wisdom and the royal court brought in an inevitable dimension of foreign influence. Perhaps through King Solomon’s relaxation of foreign policy, in what Clements calls “the period of greatest Israelite openness to the other sapient traditions of Ancient Near East” (Clements 1992:24), a further literary development brought in Wisdom literature from places like Egypt.97

The third stage was that of the creation of long and didactic forms of wisdom. Examples of these include the book of Job, with its deep reflection on the suffering of the righteous or morally right. The poems found in Proverbs 1 to 9 also serve as evidence of this literary development perhaps in the 3rd century BC. It is generally accepted that the 3rd century could be the time when the Book of Proverbs was compiled. Other collections included the Book of Ecclesiastes, whose fundamental message reveals deep and provocative reflection upon Judaism’s inherent tradition of wisdom. It contains strong impulses of Hellenistic teaching with influence on Jewish life. It also poses a strong counter-attraction to the increasing conservatism and rigidity of a more traditionally pious community of the Jews (cf Clements 1992:24). This third phase in the development of wisdom in Israel is important because it puts wisdom in a fixed literary embodiment of the available primary theological characteristics of the Old Testament (cf Clements 1992:25). While the entire source located in the pre-exilic period remains respected, it is better to understand that the development of wisdom included reshaping and additions. It is during the post-exilic period that wisdom was given a more coherent and consistent form, finally determining its canonical shape (cf Clements 1992:25).

97 Noted is the appearance in Proverbs 22:17- 24:22 of material drawn from the Egyptian teaching of Amenemope. This source is confirmed by both Adegbola and Clements. The latter observes that this particular section originating from Egypt was identified in Yoruba Wisdom literature (Adegbola 1983:61-62; Clements 1992:24).
The post-exilic period produced yet another important influence on wisdom, as the Jewish people began to see themselves not as an exclusive nation, but rather as a people scattered in diaspora among many nations. While retaining their moral dimension in the torah, their hope for a new national identity and complete reign of God was postponed. The pre-exilic experience had given them a glimpse of the fulfilment of divine promises. The hope of the future which was to recapture the lost glory was never difficult to anticipate. Here wisdom played a significant role in helping the Jews to understand the new world in which they found themselves among nations whose traditions of wisdom were not different.

Considering that the Jewish claims of divine visitation on Mount Sinai and the account of their origin in the Genesis story were not different from the myth of origin among the Greeks, they found that their moral laws were perhaps not different from those of other people. The authoritative wisdom traditions which the Jews sought to display in the diaspora, framed within their national ideology, found their counterparts which had a validity of their own. To this extent, Jewish wisdom is “universal”, as were the “wisdoms” of other nations. Its authority was drawn from the fact that Jewish wisdom owed its origin not to mere myth and made-up stories, but to a “unique revelation vouchsafed to Israel as a nation at a decisive moment of its origin” (Clements 1992:26). This revelation, further substantiated in the interpretation of Jesus Christ “a human being” as the embodiment of God’s wisdom in whom both the orally proclaimed, morally lived-out and textually recorded (the gospels) wisdom, found its full expression.

The Jewish Wisdom literature has, among others, three important moral themes, namely, the fear of the Lord as a source of wisdom; the personification of wisdom, and the secular element in wisdom. These themes emerge out of a tapestry of a multiplicity of human and divine experiences. This natural synthesis evolved around certain key perceptions, which occurred at crucial points in Jewish life experience, giving a creative tension to the wisdom tradition. These three themes are fundamental in building up a moral virtue foundation. They also have a divine uniqueness in the coming of Jesus Christ, which causes them to transcend all other wisdom traditions.
3.3.1.2.1 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.98

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,
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.

98 “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).
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).

While wisdom in proverbs may be a divine gift that enlightens the human mind, in many instances it is also an acquired quality. This means, on the one hand, that even those people considered to be highly intelligent have to subject themselves to learning and constant reflection in order to acquire the mastery and the concomitant practical living influenced by this wisdom. On the other hand, all proverbs offer a particular
unique mode of communication in their oral nature, which is open both to the scholarly and to those who are not (cf Van Heerden 2002:466-467).

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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)\textsuperscript{99}

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.

\textsuperscript{99} 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.
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. 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).

But in other Proverbs, the origin of wisdom is neither considered nor denied as originating from God. Nevertheless, the acquisition of it is a human responsibility, and anyone who wants wisdom should stay in the company of wise people. (Prov.13:20). There is a noted shift in the source of wisdom as being from God to a source of wisdom and knowledge from “the vast field of daily, and sometimes for that very reason trivial experiences, a field in which man (sic) never ceases to learn” (Von Rad 1972:61). We should not read into such regard of the sources of wisdom, Von Rad warns, a modern trend of secularisation. For Israel, the sacred and the secular were undifferentiated (cf Rader 1964:3). Nonetheless, we may not rule out the possibility of a departure from pre-exilic Yahwism and its conception of a reality centred in God, to the post-exilic one that had to compete with the wisdom sources from other cultures. It is here that Israel’s experience of Yahweh and the world in which they found themselves offer a significant difference. For Israel this was a dilemma unless Yahweh and the world became identical, that is, the anticipation of Yahweh encountering Israel in the world context. This paradigm shift might be the reason behind the genre of the personification of wisdom (cf Von Rad 1972:64).
3.3.1.2.2 The personification of wisdom

The personification of wisdom as a phenomenon common to the Israelite Wisdom tradition reveals two aspects. It is firstly, a poetic articulation adding emphasis and vividness to the wisdom subject. Secondly, this stylistic device expresses certain abstract qualities inherent in wisdom. In both instances wisdom is vividly displayed on the streets, as preaching and crying out with a loud voice in the market place:

Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech (Prov 1:20-21)

Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud: “To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind” (Prov. 8:1-4).

This personification brings to wisdom an empathic component of human feeling. It finds people at places like the streets perhaps where they are most vulnerable and away from the family, church, and community support. In some case personified wisdom is also at the family table or in serene places such as the temple or church pulpit. Cox suggests that here in the public place is the venue where wisdom is most needed. So personified wisdom parades at the “gateways”, “along the way where paths meet”, beside the gates leading into the city and at the “entrance” where everyone will have opportunity to interact with her while on their journey of life.

Wisdom personified can be sought and found because it is readily available. It can also be approached on a personal level like a father to a son. The resultant intimacy facilitates learning and education and is the ultimate means to moral character development. The qualities of personification are usually attributes of a teacher, a parent, a bride, a woman, or an “ungenderised” being (cf Cox 1982:72).

Wisdom as a bride evokes a natural human desire, which puts the invitation of the respondent into a unique relationship – one with the divine. Human beings need not struggle to find wisdom for she is already out there looking for them. The personification of wisdom is not limited to the feminine gender, but also to Yahweh who is wise himself. In this process:
Wisdom becomes a force in which God makes himself present and in which he wishes to be sought … Wisdom is a channel by which God can reach out to humanity, and draw humanity to himself, led by the voice of creation and inherent mystery of creation (Cox 1982:74).

It is through this stylistic and vivid presentation of wisdom that someone greater than Solomon developed. This wise king would remain consistent from beginning to end, the very embodiment of wisdom. The personification of wisdom reaches its highest theological interpretation when it is used to enhance the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, a theme to be pursued later.

The verses which bring out this theological link between the personification element in Proverbs and the Jesus Christ in the New Testament are Prov. 8:22-36 and John 1:1-14; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30, Col.1: 15-17, 2:3; Rev.3:14. However, the fact that these texts are separated in time, cultural dominance, and theological stance, means that an explanation is required to update the view on this debate before assuming the link under Christian wisdom, to be dealt with later.

Proverbs 8 presents personified wisdom which existed from the beginning as the eternal wisdom of God present as a “craftsman” on God’s side during creation. Von Rad refers to Proverbs 8 as a “great poem”. According to him, the great poem is divided into three parts. Part one comprises verses 1-21. This is the opening summons that expounds on the nature of wisdom and its indispensable value for people’s benefits. The second part, verses 22-31, is the main part that carries the essence of the text. This text has been extensively debated because of its profound importance. The key word and phrases at the centre of the debate are those which regard wisdom as the “craftsman” and “speak of her mysterious origins which reach back to the time when the world was created” (Von Rad 1972:151). The third section, verses 32-36, is a return to the paraenetic theme of the summons of part one, which prompts us to appropriate the benefits of wisdom, upon which depend life or death (Von Rad 1972:151; Gammie 1990:480).

This term “craftsman”, which has been at the centre of the controversy, is so important because it determines the eternal and divine connection of wisdom and
God. Unfortunately, it is one of those terms that has been overly debated, and even then without much success. The Hebrew word from which “craftsman” has been translated is *amon*. Some scholars such as Goldingay and Kidner suggest that the word *amon* should be translated as “little child” or “one brought up with”. It would seem that those Bible versions that translate *amon* as “craftsman” got the interpretation from the exegetical work by R. Stecher used here by Von Rad. It is noted that the word *amon* in verse 30 has been translated from the variant of the Septuagint *harmozousa*, which might have influenced the translation in the Vulgate rendering of the same word recorded as *componens*. The two renderings assumed that the word *amon* might have been *amman*, which means “work-master” in Hebrew. This was because it is related to *ummanu*, which means “craftsman”, a rendering borrowed from the Akkadian (cf Von Rad 1972:152). This interpretation is supported by an apocryphal source (Wisdom 7:21; 8:6), where wisdom is described as *technitis*, translated as “artist” or “worker” (Von Rad 1972:152). However, the other closest rendering to *amon* could have come from the Hebrew word *ament*, which means “pet” or “darling”. This is closer to the translation adopted by Goldingay and Kidner mentioned earlier.

Goldingay and Kidner are aware that their translation arrived at by linguistic criticism, diminishes the importance of wisdom, simply because it tallies well with verse 8:30b, where wisdom is the daily delight of God.

Those versions which maintain their translation as “craftsman” or “architect” pave the way for the link between Proverb 8: 22-36 and the Jesus Christ of the Christian wisdom tradition in the New Testament. Rather than make hasty conclusions in terms of this link, it is safe to state that the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 might be a literary coincidence. We can cautiously accept that it, nonetheless, achieves a prophetic connotation because it carries possible references from the Jewish wisdom tradition that almost correlate with the wisdom-theology of the New Testament. This tentative conclusion leads to the argument that the Old Testament reference to wisdom (Prov. 8) is in some way a prophetic anticipation of Christ, the wisdom of God in the New Testament. I shall assume this stance in the rest of this study, that is, regarding Prov. 8 as an important source of wisdom that points to Christ as the wisdom and power of God in moral transformation and development.
The foregone arguments serve as evidence of God’s activities, which themselves qualify Him as the foundation and source of wisdom. But how did this evidence of divine wisdom score in Israel’s secular world? (Sitz im Leben). And what help would the findings in this argument be to us in building a Christian moral contribution from the wisdom tradition? Can we find answers for questions raised by modern secular culture with its moral dilemmas?

3.3.1.2.3 ‘Secular’ wisdom within the Jewish wisdom tradition

The third theme is that of the secular aspect of wisdom in the Jewish tradition. It is argued by Cox that Israel’s awareness of God as a creator is “a relatively late development” (Cox 1982:76). We, however, have narratives of God as the creator in Genesis (1-2), which might be dated to about the 10th century BC. And Isaiah 17:7, dated about the 8th century BC, talks of God as a “maker”, the creator of the world and humankind.

However, other scholars such as Armstrong suggest that Israel’s knowledge of God dates as far back as the story of Abraham in the 20th and 19th century B.C. (cf Armstrong 1999:18). This narrative runs through important leaders such as Moses, Joshua, Eli, and Samuel. The wisdom of this period was essentially theodic law (torah). The ethical injunctions came from Mount Sinai. The God who revealed Himself offered the laws to guard and regulate his relationship with his chosen people. He would reward the obedient with blessings, and punish the disobedient. There is another social political development from Saul, through David to Solomon, during which the social structures evolved from small, sometimes independent, or loosely connected communities, to a state-like monopoly of power. Israel reaches this political apex in the reign of Solomon. The period is also marked by the intrusion of secular wisdom into the Jewish nation.

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100 John G. Gammie has ably discussed the different sources or schools of wisdom in Israel. In his discussion, family is the first source of a type of wisdom; the king or political establishment and the national and international categories form the other two. Gammie shows how the family developed its forms of wisdom related to the life-situation that surrounds a family experience. This included “honour of parents, joy in one’s spouse, warning against adultery, and preferential treatment for the family line through the elder brother” (Gammie 1990:484). He also shows how transformation took place through the years from external impact. Then he shifts the focus of wisdom to kings. In this
The most important of the leaders who is of interest to this study is King Solomon, regarded as the “patron of wisdom” (cf Brueggemann 1990:117). In the Solomonic tradition, three distinct episodes are distinguished by Brueggemann:

The first is Solomon’s inaugural prayer (I Kings 3:3-14). In a ritual-packed event, Solomon is visited by God in a “dream and prayer in which he prays for wisdom to govern” (Brueggemann 1990:117). Rather than raise suspicions of failure, Gibeon, “the most important high place”, was chosen for worship, Bimson explains, because the temple had not been built. Nonetheless, this retreat at Gibeon had to be followed by a ritual of thanksgiving near the Ark in Jerusalem. Solomon shows all the intentions of following in the footsteps of his father, King David. King David had praised Solomon as in fact a wise person. The question here is whether this wisdom was merely intellectual, and if he would “need more than mere shrewdness and cunning” “… for the just leadership of God’s people” (cf Bimson 1994:342). The prayer event includes Solomon's acknowledgement of God as the source of wisdom, and Israel (Solomon's subjects), as God's people. The king is God’s servant who in this event demonstrates his obedience to God through elaborate rituals and retreats. Such undertakings were also meant to legitimate the monarchy as divinely instituted (cf Gammie 1990:486). Solomon needs God’s justice and righteousness in the order of his father, David. King Solomon’s sense of priority is commended by God and for this reason wealth and long life are given to Solomon as a bonus.

Secondly and almost immediately, (Kings 3:16-28), Solomon uses his divinely given wisdom to “execute royal justice”. In the famous dispute between two prostitutes over one child, Solomon offers a simple but very wise solution to the emotive problem of deciding who the real mother was. At the end the child is spared, justice is done, and Solomon’s reputation as a wise king is made (cf Bimson 1994:342).

category, he indicates how the sages were often “aware of the weaknesses, vagaries, and imperfections of human kings” (Gammie 1990:486). He also discusses the awareness of the power of the king, who derived his authority from God. The monarchy used the authority from God to legitimise the royalty. There were times when monarchy almost completely assumed the authority of God over the people (cf Gammie 1990:486-487).
Thirdly, “Solomon is credited with the production of the encyclopaedic proverbs” (cf 1 Kings 4:29-34). However, Brueggemann argues that this wisdom goes beyond mere proverbs. It includes the natural order as God’s creation, to which disciplined investigation is not a contradiction of its divine origin (cf Brueggemann 1990:126). The fact that it was possible to create political, economic and intellectual environments in which such scholarly work was possible is attributed to wisdom. The investigation of nature and the wonder generated by such a wise leadership, suggests Brueggemann, is not outside the sacramental conception of the Jewish people. Instead, it enhances their commitment to the God of creation.

Most scholars of the Jewish wisdom tradition raise a question regarding the enduring nature of the wisdom of Solomon - the wise king. Although Solomon starts with God as the source of wisdom, he strays away. His failure prompts God to announce the future disintegration of the kingdom of Israel. A question arises, however, “How can we salvage the importance of divinely given wisdom as authentic for moral leadership, following Solomon’s ‘fall’?”

Dr. Griphus Gakuru, who has recently completed his doctoral thesis at Cambridge on The Davidic Covenant (1998) advises thus: “A solution to the serious tension between Solomon the wise leader and Solomon the rogue king is to take a ‘historical’ view of his life and chart his life as the scriptures say” (Gakuru Internet Discussion, May 24 2004 ). The historical view, he argues, is that Solomon starts very well. He is patriotic and selfless, with a high commitment to justice. As his fame and authority increase, and in the bid to consolidate his power and protect the kingdom from foreign invasions, he violates God’s ordinances\(^\text{101}\). Solomon’s long reign of forty years of justice and economic and political progress ends up in moral disgrace and partial divine discipline.

Solomon abandoned his own pledge of following in the footsteps of his father, David. The benefit of divine wisdom to his long rule persists as testimony to God’s

\(^{101}\) He married seven hundred wives of royal descent from among the nations forbidden by the Lord. This was because these wives would lead Solomon’s heart away from his God to their gods. Unfortunately, this is what happened as detailed in 1 Kings 11:1-13.
faithfulness, to him and to King David, Solomon’s father, even when Solomon betrays God. Solomon’s shift toward the concerns of protecting his political leverages and diplomacy displaces his allegiance to God (1 Kings 11:1-13). Ironically, this was a betrayal of wisdom by power politics of self-aggrandisement. The scheme was to backfire in the political cessation of the allegiance of the Northern tribes to the central power in Jerusalem. The monarch suffered loss of political mass. However, it received a divine concession on account of David, and that of God’s chosen city, Jerusalem.

Gakuru concludes that the persona of Solomon is a good example to follow, and a bad one to avoid. We do not have to take a simple praiseworthy stance and patch up Solomon’s misdemeanours. We do not lose sight of the fact that Solomon is the Jewish wisdom authors’ hortatory tool showing how a person, and in the case of Solomon, a king, who is a devotee of Yahweh, can prosper (2 Chronicles 1-9).

This input by Dr Gakuru helps in salvaging the valuable texts in which the Jewish wisdom tradition interacts with the secular world, and how best we can in fact benefit from them. Rather than lose them because of Solomon’s disgraceful end, they give a realistic view, which is nonetheless a warning to leaders not to depart from their well-intentioned initial pledges and commitment to virtuous leadership.

Was this wisdom exclusively Jewish? Brueggemann and other scholars such as Clements and Westermann assert that such wisdom can be identified in other places, and most especially in Egypt (cf Brueggemann 1990:125).102

The concept of God becomes more explicit in the priestly and Deutero-Isaiah texts marked by the theology of the creative word of Yahweh (6th Century BC). From here onwards the Books of Wisdom (Proverbs and Job) begin to mention God in a vivid perspective. This new perception about God brought about a distinct way of looking at both God and people. The distinction was the new regard of a person as prime in the created world order, an idea that elevated the human being as one that had been

102 Proverbs 1-9 is one such example suggested by Brueggemann and other(s) with its origin located in Egypt.
created “free and responsible” (Gen. 1; Cox 1982:77; Goldingay 1994:50-51). This perception was a descent from the contemporary theological one which focused on God’s redemptive activities from the Yahwistic tradition (10th Century BC (Gen 2:28-30; Cox 1982:77; Goldingay 1994:50-51). It is this shift that led to an emphasis of the secular and one which was welcomed by the sages as a sign of maturity, “a call to live in the world rather than against it. Life was presented, to a great degree, as a human enterprise” (Cox 1982:77).

Wisdom books present this secular dimension to some extent, as the sages established a socio-cultural society with its human-based governance (Prov. 16:10-15). The social scene is dominated by human-made values, and the wise ruler is expressed in human terms with acknowledgement of his share in the divine domain. This secular period can be traced from the reign of Saul until the exilic period (11th - 6th Century BC) progressively expressing the new pluralistic world of which Israel was part.

In Saul’s time, there would have been recourse to ritual and inquiry from the divine. But in the world conceived by the sages (6th century BC), a ruler, a teacher, or a government official had to be able to act on his own, as did the scribes of an earlier age in Egypt; he would not wait for a new revelation or a new divine intervention. There “grew an awareness that God tended to leave much of the day-to-day affairs to responsible agents” as Cox elaborates that God the maker had given humanity the mind for thinking and filled them with knowledge and understanding, even the ability to distinguish good from evil. With these endowments it was a human’s vocation to go and exercise dominion. Cox observes that Wisdom literature reveals a changed perspective with a new insight, which offered to the individual a theological freedom described by Cox thus:

> Wisdom saw the human being as one who is emancipated; one who would have to make his own decisions and was free to do so – and of course this human being,- was one who would have to live with the consequences. The literature that found something of its inspiration in this idea clearly recognised human power, and also human limitations. But over and above all there grew up a trust in the man’s capacity to cope – and of his own ability, not just by occasional grace (Cox 1982:78).

The human vocation was to go out with these endowments and master the world. However, wisdom asks the practical question, “How does humanity master the
world?” The answer given then is that humanity can master the world by “counsel” (Prov. 11:14; 15:22). “Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war” (Prov.20:18). The torah directs us to the wise counsel, and counsellor was traditionally the designation of the sage. Counsel would be drawn from human reason and practical experience regarding what is good, expedient, and seen to work. From the secular point of view, law commands us to go out and establish the things of God, while wisdom instructs us to establish the things of the world. Wisdom helps us to analyse the perceptible data of our experience, controlled by reason, and adapting the data by judgement (Prov 20:1-11). By wisdom, we are taught how to make observations of particular kinds of actions that could affect human situations. Then we can establish, hopefully, viability and value of human life and achieve “goodness”. By “experience, one grows to realise that certain things ‘just do not work’” (cf Cox 1982:79).

The secular view perceived in the Wisdom literature thus does not present a dream world of the ideals. The presentation is that of an anthropological life experience with less specific reference to the divine sphere. Humanity is in charge; people can raise questions concerning God, as opposed to insistence on faith by the rest of the biblical literature. Wisdom literature reckons, often toward the end, that since human beings are in charge, they will have to give an account of their performance. Humanity will reap what it propagates. To this end Wisdom literature is not isolated from the overall theme of the biblical theology in which God remains at the centre even of secular perceptions of the world. Thus Cox concludes:

> The faith of the Old Testament is centred on historical acts of encounter, God’s gift of self-revelation, which is continued in history. This is the first thing that marks out the wisdom tradition as distinctive, for it is essentially free of this historical, revelatory dimension. However, it would be wrong to think of Wisdom as purely secular discipline; it exists always in the ambient of faith. This is seldom explicit, and is not emphasised, but it does exert a certain influence. Mankind (sic) still has a religious commitment but perimeters have changed (Cox 1982:79; bold my emphasis).

Ronald E. Clements, in his book *Wisdom in Theology* (1992), referred to earlier, develops a very important observation worth recapitulating here. First he affirms that wisdom emerged in Israel most probably in the pre-exilic period. And in an effort to accord wisdom a firm and credible source, its emergence was associated with
Solomon as a “powerful and ambitious monarch with a strong central administration” (Clements 1992:18). In this plausible environment, wisdom, thus purported, was nurtured and consequently flourished.

However, post-exilic wisdom seems to have had great recognition and influence through its interaction with the wider world. Clements argues that Jewish wisdom remained anchored in the torah to the extent that wisdom nearly lost its distinct prominence apart from the law/torah (cf Clements 1992:19). Brueggemann considers this noticeable shift to be a socio-political economic strategy in which the Deuteronomist, while remaining aware of the torah recognises that human influence has a great stake in the present and planning for the future.

Brueggemann presents Israel’s new order under Solomonic rule, during which Israel consolidated its political and economic monopoly. He identifies the sages’ “hidden, but discernible orderliness of God’s creation” (Brueggemann 1990:129). As it has been suggested by Crusemann, the texts (Proverbs 1-9) reflect and serve certain interests which value social stability (see Brueggemann 1990:129). Cox, who sees such development as a necessary “secular outlook” dominated by human value and life experiences (Cox 1982:77), confirms this view.

Brueggemann remains critical of secular political power with its interwoven, just and selfish interests. He argues that there is often a particular experience that accompanies power. Leaders try to balance responsibility and freedom in the face of ethical realities. Often they end up misusing their power, raising the question of legitimacy. The wisdom teacher would have to reflect on the “deeds and consequences” with regard to justice, righteousness, and equity. A secular power would have to reach a balance as to what is “politically permissible” and “tolerable” and “non negotiable” to created order. (cf Brueggemann 1990:129-130). We note sadly that the divine element would have been lost all together. Could this be the reason for divine intervention?

The principles behind Jewish wisdom are: a specific knowledge and relationship with God; regard for the individual at all levels of community; the employment of the power of language in the personification of wisdom; and the accommodation of secular wisdom as realities of political and competitive environments were faced. All
point to moral reflective import that has influenced the world through the New Testament. However, the new community that they had become had developed a deep sense of exclusivity in Judaism that marginalised anyone outside their nation. We noted a similar sense of exclusivity in the Hellenistic culture. Much as they absorbed aspects of other cultures good or bad, they maintained a closed community, guarding the “good” that they had accumulated in their wisdom.

They needed the radical approach epitomised in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, to unlock the Jewish wisdom tradition for moral transformation. The moral influence of Jesus Christ will be discussed under the contribution of the Christian heritage to the virtue of wisdom, popularly referred to as the Judeo-Christian tradition. Before that, I shall now turn to the African wisdom tradition, a fundamental source for theology wisdom in the scheme of moral transformation.

3.3.1.3 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. We shall also analyse the richness of the genres in which it was communicated. 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. 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.

3.3.1.3.1 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.

3.3.1.3.2 The genre of African wisdom in proverbs
Wisdom phrases and statements were constructed and communicated in a particular style intended to captured people’s imagination and wonder. The heightened speech effect called for deep reflection that often lingered in the hearers’ minds long after the conversation or speech had ended. Responsibility calls for constant attention to details by one to whom duty is given. To be reminded that your duty calls you, the following proverb is used:

*Otomize tahw’ekaranga* (Rukiga-Runyankole -Uganda)

**Translation:** The one whose grains are not dry never stops roasting.

**Interpretation:** One whose task is not over keeps on at it as long as it requires

**Interpretive note:** The heightened effect is often achieved through the imagination of the real act of roasting grain. Even when the statement of advice is orally given, the picture in the imagination stays. Its vividness makes reflection on advice possible long after the conversation in which the advice was given.

The study of proverbs reveals “semantic ambiguity” as a feature intended to awaken the mind to the seriousness of the issue under discussion. Mieder alludes to the style that has tested the minds of linguists and folklorists in their repeated attempt to explain this “semantic ambiguity” of proverbs (cf Mieder 1997:18). Among other
functions, this feature enables those proverbs that have it, to be used in various contexts with different effects. Mieder has warned in his submission:

In trying to understand the meaning of proverbs in certain contexts, we must keep in mind that they are usually employed to disambiguate complex situations and events. Yet they are paradoxically inherently ambiguous, because their meaning depends on analogy (Mieder 1997:18).

To this extent, proverbs used in moral leadership transformation could also be used elsewhere in a different context and for any category of people. In fact, this ambiguity is a possible subject of “further study by paremiologists as they map out the strategies used in the appropriate employment of seemingly simple and yet so complex proverbial utterances” (Mieder 1997:19).

One of the ways in which such ambiguities might be resolved could be a study in the world-view of a given people. The Africans, for example, have a holistic world-view. To this extent human life experiences were and still are, to some African minds, considered in a holistic sense. After all, it was in this holistic view of life that proverbs were captured in conversations as wisdom\(^{103}\). Often such wisdom would be narrated through stories, “real” but often fictitious. Proverbs developed as moral teachings forming the conclusions to such stories. In many cases, such stories have been completely lost, but proverbially valuable relics of those original stories still exist (cf Mushanga (1969).

Van Heerden has added his caution to this matter of concern, especially when African proverbs are correlated with the biblical Book. Any user of proverbs should always be aware that some “proverbs are particular to their contexts” (cf Van Heerden 2002:470) and as such they will be helpful only if used responsibly.

Further description of African proverbs taken from the etymology of the Rukiga-Runyakole term “orufumu” yields a deep function residing in the use of proverbs.

\(^{103}\) This holistic world-view could not be sustained with the advent of Euro-Western competing worldviews. The dilemma was and still is whether it is possible to hold human life experiences of socio-politico-economic and ecological forms under the Africans’ world-view. These witty observations in repeatable life experiences, which had been shared among elders and elders to the young, for moral reinforcement, were discontinued by colonial suppression.
This term resembles a term used to refer to a “medicine man” – “omufumu.” From this comparison a proverb may be comprehended as “a soothing sentence or a medicine phrase” (Cisternino 1987:7-8). Cisternino goes on to elucidate that proverbs are “standardised, short, witty, humorous statements meant to comment on a situation or to summarise it” (Cisternino 1987:8). Mr Barlow, a Muganda (from Uganda) informant, explained that in Luganda language a proverb is olungero. It comes from okungera, which means to “tell”. This means that that which is told carries a message independent and complete for a specific purpose (Barlow 2002). Nyembezi, a Zulu author of Zulu Proverbs (1963), writes that a “proverb represents, in its essential form, some homely truth expressed in a concise and terse manner so as to recommend itself to a more or less extended circle” (Nyembezi 1963:xi). He explains that Zulu “proverbs are, in fact, ordinary everyday words… They cease, however, to be ordinary when people begin to accept them as clever expressions of some “truth” and because of that, give them a place apart” (Nyembezi 1963:xi). This brings us to the social context in which African proverbs are constructed.

### 3.3.1.3.3 A nostalgic social context of African wisdom tradition?

Most wisdom utterances were seasoned by the minds of elders who had observed life situations in real life experiences over a period of time. This is how proverbs as one of the main sources of wisdom in Africa were constructed and later recorded. We have already noted that African wisdom is not, by any means, limited to proverbs alone. It is also communicated and preserved in poems and songs, folktales, myths, and riddles.

Has the social context that made possible the reflection that produced wisdom ceased? To some extent, and particularly in Africa, reflections on life experiences by elders are no longer the sources of wisdom. The age groups, which were associated with the rites of passage and which kept groups of old men together, are less and less oriented to wisdom in proverbs. Moreover, these cultural rituals have been displaced by Euro-Western rituals. In some cases, what is called Christian is in fact a reflection of Euro-Western culture. In some societies, such rites of passage have been completely lost.
The education system has almost replaced the “fireplace school”; the counsel of the elders at the chief’s courts has been replaced by political formations operating on preset policies; the gathering of the elders at beer parties where wisdom would be spontaneously generated and transmitted are no longer common. Colonial education focused on the most intelligent, and politics on the most outspoken, who may not necessarily be morally wise according to community needs. After all, the strategy was that of accumulating a Euro-Western concept of life. Therefore the only wisdom literature researched constitutes relics of wisdom whose human experience is embedded in folktales that have long since been lost. Perhaps the experience of the Hausas people of Nigeria sums up the effect of the modern way of life on proverbs:

Traditionally, interactions with younger generations helped the elders to pass on proverbs to them. However, it has been found out in Hausas… that youth are no longer able to give correct interpretations of proverbs. The young people seem no longer interested in cultivating the tradition, having more important issues to attend to rather than listen to and interpret proverbs. Proverbs are much more reduced to being used by chance rather than by deliberate use to explain situations and phenomena (Pachocinski 1996:3).

Forces of modernisation seem to pulling away most Africans. The demands of survival leave no spare time for acquiring and accumulating moral wisdom from proverbs. With globalisation, the Euro-Western ethos will be entrenched even deeper. None of these aspects has been or will be friendly to the preservation of African wisdom in proverbs.

Africans need to make a deliberate effort, as in the past, to revive the use of African wisdom as part of the acclaimed African Renaissance. We can still learn from the skills of the past African elders for moral renewal. Elders were always able to formulate well-known truths in crisp sentences and indirect statements. After all, the experiences presented in the proverbs transcended immediate situations to become guiding principles for all time. In every African group is a considerable number of proverbs relating to almost every situation in life (cf Calana 2002:5). This wisdom was offered as challenges, counsel, affirmation, praise, or statements of encouragement. Included in wisdom sources in the African tradition were proverbs (amaqhalo), sayings (izaci), folktales (iibali), poems/praise songs and (imbongo). Does the African wisdom tradition have reflections of God? Are there any African
proverbs that demonstrate this reflection? To these questions, we shall turn in the next section.

3.3.1.3.4 African wisdom tradition and God

Elsewhere I have already alluded to Africans’ religiosity, expressed in African wisdom in relation to the awareness of the Supreme Being – God. John Mbiti, one of the astute African theologians and scholars, collected information from over 300 communities in Africa concerning the nature of God. He observes, “In all these societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being” (cf Mbiti 1969:29). The knowledge of this Supreme Being, Mbiti observes, is oral, and some proverbs expressing the knowledge of God are most recently contained in a body of literary works. He (Mbiti) maintains:

African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and to pass on to other people, since there are no sacred writings in traditional societies” (Mbiti 1969:29).

Current paremiographers have since turned the oral wisdom of Africa into literary works. John Mbiti has, in recent years, made significant contributions, not only to paremiography but also to the ongoing task of trying to recover the stories behind proverbs in order to enhance their meaning and usage.

In one of Mbiti’s groundbreaking works in African Religion and Philosophy, he presents some attributes of God. Moreover, these attributes were proverbial. God is known as both the creator and sustainer. Being older than time, God is the origin and sustains all things. The perception is that He is personally involved in his creation.

Patrick A. Kalilombe offers a visual model to illustrate Africans’ perspective of God:

Kalilombe elaborates “God, or the Supreme Deity, is all-encompassing as creator and sustainer, up above heaven as down below the earth” (Kalilombe 1994:120). God is the “omnipresent Reality” never mentioned explicitly and rarely offered sacrifices or
reverend in worship. He is approached through lesser spiritual beings, and only addressed by his attributes.¹⁰⁴

Creating GOD

Heaven

Visible

HUMANS

Earth

Invisible

Sustaining GOD

(cf Kalilombe 1994:120)

As such, attributes express God as being actively in the community. These attributes are descriptively used to refer to Him instead of his name (cf Mbiti 1969:30). He is:

“Nyamuhanga” (Rukiga-Runyankole).

Translation: Creator.

Interpretation: The creator is the one who brings people and other creatures into being.

Interpretive note: This is often said when one is in a tough situation. He/she evokes the name of God. This is a name attributed to and for God alone. No other creature or superstitious object is referred to by this name. Only He has the final say in any conceivable situation deemed to be beyond one’s capacity to surmount.

¹⁰⁴ Kalilombe explains that some who have made observations regarding this concept are often intrigued by what they have called the “remoteness” of God in African religiosity. Lack of explicit worship and the engagement with spiritual intermediaries manifest this remoteness. This has created a “gross misunderstanding, although we have to admit that taking God’s presence for granted in this way does create the danger of doing as if God does not count very much (Kalilombe 1994:121).
Mbiti has skilfully offered a list of ethical concepts of God expressed in proverbs in his contribution in *the African proverb series: Embracing the Baobab Tree, The African Proverbs in the 21st Century* (1997). From every group of people in Africa there are proverbs that suggest the virtuosity of God. The virtues of God identified in the proverbs include perfection/holiness, compassion/kindness, generosity/faitfulness and love. Below are some proverbs to illustrate the cultural theology of African wisdom morally expressed in proverbs by concentrating on five virtues of God, namely: holiness, goodness, trustworthiness, justice, and wisdom.

(i) God is above criticism because he is holy and perfect. God is like a donkey rolling (in the dust). The Africans perceive that “God does as he wishes; he makes one rich and one poor” (Mbiti 1997:141,156,160).

A variant from Walser in Luganda:

*Eyali afudde, bw’olemala: nti Katonda yankolera* (Luganda –Uganda)

**Translation:** One who nearly died in an accident but escaped with a lame leg complains: God has tried me hard!

**Interpretation:** One should always be thankful whatever God gives one, because if the situation were worse one would still have to accept it (Walser 1982:165).

**Interpretive note:** Even if it is a death situation, there is no complaining because those attending to the sick have tried everything, they have asked for health, but God has granted death. The Africans accept all situation, especial those beyond their control, as from God, whatever such situations may be.

The Gikuyu express this inevitability of death in a proverb:

*Thuutha wa maundu mothe ni Mwathani* (Gikuyu – Kenya)

**Translation:** In the final analysis God is in charge.

Or Uhoro *mutue ni Ngai nduri ucuuke* (Gikuyu – Kenya)
Translation: What God has ordained cannot be questioned (Wanjohi 1997:177,182-183).

Interpretation: You do not question what God has decreed.

Interpretative note: Some situations are regarded as being beyond human understanding. Such situations are attributed to God especially if human being cannot do anything to change such situations.

*Go bitsa go motho go bitso Modimo* (Setswana – Southern Africa)

Translation: Instead of calling man, call God.

Interpretation: God can help where people have failed.

Interpretive note: The Gikuyu, the Tswana and indeed almost all Africans believe that God has the final say in every life situation. This is often the case if all human efforts have failed. God must be evoked. Moreover He has the final say as the creator.

Proverbs which express similar meanings from other parts of Africa:

*Otekire enyungu niwe amanya emihurire yaayo* (Rukiga-Runankole – Uganda)

Translation: Only the cook knows how best to dish out/serve the food he has cooked.

Interpretation: Only God the creator knows how big or small his blessings and punishments should be to people, according to what they have done.

*Ekinyamuhanga akozire tikimulema ishoborora* (Rukinga-Runankole – Uganda)

Translation: What the creator has done only He can re-order.

Interpretation: The maker of something … a master is he who knows how to govern and to judge.

Interpretative note: God is the creator, therefore, He knows how to sort out the difficulties which His creation meets in life.

(ii) God is good

The following proverb expresses the goodness of God:
Guoko kwa Ngai gutieraga (Gikuyu – Kenya)

Translation: The hand of God does not waver.

Interpretation: This means that God’s works are perfect (Wanjohi 1997:102).

Interpretive note: This conceptualisation of God for most Africans includes the understanding that God does only good to them, so they have no reason to complain (Mbiti 1969:36-37). Even if what has occurred seems bad or sad, it is believed that for God there is overall good, which we human beings may not see or perceive.

These are proverbs that in some way qualify God as the reference point for moral goodness. The common perception is that “pure goodness is the nature of God” (Mbiti 1997:141-142). From Mbiti’s collection, the Akan people state: “God does not like evil”. On the one hand, fraud, robbery, murder, and meanness are behavioural categories suggesting that there is one who takes away from others that which God has given them. This is contrary to what God is. He gives freely to whomsoever he chooses. On the other hand, all good things that promote life, such as respecting and protecting other people’s property, and sharing food and other things for the good of others. It follows therefore, that people are kind following God’s kindness.

Examples include: “God never listens to a robber” (Mbiti 1997:156). Other examples have been cited from G.J. Wanjohi concerning the perfection of God as a basis for his referential moral consideration. The perfection of God is often discussed in contrast to human imperfection.

(iii) God is patient and trustworthy

The following proverbs attempts to convey these qualities attributed to God:

Ngai ndagiogwo (Gikuyu – Kenya)

Translation: God is not to be pestered.

Mwana uteri muciare ndatumagiruo ngoi (Gikuyu - Kenya)

Translation: One does not sew a shawl for an unborn baby
**Interpretive note:** Again, God’s virtue of patience is in contrast to the absence of the same quality in human beings. They have to look up to God to appropriate this virtue in their lives. Mbiti has given very good examples: “God does not hurry”. (What He sends to the earth does not fail to arrive; God’s actions are above time and place). “The deeds of God come slowly” (Unlike men (sic) God works slowly); “When God picks up God’s stone, God does not throw it at once” (The compassionate God does not hurriedly punish, but God’s justice will surely come (Akan)). The same proverbs suggest also that God allows people time to change their lives, and to change their society for the better welfare of all (cf Mbiti 1997:152).

(iv) God as judge

These are a few examples of proverbs related to God as judge:

*Ngai ndabaaranagia githiithi kia mundu* (Gikuyu)
**Translation:** God does not respect persons.

*Guoko kwa Ngai gutieraga* (Gikuyu -Kenya)
**Translation:** The hand of God never strays.

Utari muhe nimuigire (Gikuyu - Kenya)
**Translation:** Something is reserved to the one not already given

*Ngai ari tha* (Gikuyu -Kenya)
**Translation:** God is merciful

**Interpretive notes:** There is a strong perception that God judges and rewards people’s moral actions. For example among the Banyarwanda there is a saying: *Imaana Ihora ihoze* “God avenges quietly”. Again John Mbiti, in one of his recent contributions to paremiology, discusses different qualities of God. Among them is the perception that God is a judge. This perception is expressed in a proverb: “A man says this is good and that is bad, but he knows nothing of the two” (Mbiti 1997:150). The implication of the proverb is that God is the only one who can judge good and bad. So God has the right to mete out deserts for human actions and even to avenge.
Mbiti goes on to explain that African wisdom also provides further knowledge which affirms that God gives people discernment of what is good and bad. This is expressed in another proverb: “Any calabash that has a bottom can stand upright”. This means that God gives everyone what is required by human nature, but it depends on each person to exercise that given knowledge. Each person does so bearing in mind that he/she is responsible to God, the final arbiter. God’s justice may seem to be taking a long time, but the proverb suggests “There is nothing which can delay God’s help permanently, whether it is success or punishment” (If God has determined that you will succeed, no matter how long it takes, you will eventually attain your goal) (Mbiti 1997:151).

(v) God is wise

These proverbs may be linked to God as the one who is wise:

_Yawan shekara bashi ne wayo ba_ (Hausa – Nigeria, West Africa)
**Translation:** To be old by age is not to be wiser
**Interpretation:** Wisdom is supposed to be a gift from God

_Olorun kidajo amu eji cran_ (Yoruba – Nigeria, West Africa)
**Translation:** It is God who settles the case of a man who shares out a piece of meat between two people with his teeth
**Interpretation:** When people feel that mystery surrounds an incident or that true justice was not done in a case – what they cannot see or understand is, however, known to God.

**Interpretive note:** The wisdom qualities of God are implied in the above four proverbial examples. Mbiti elucidates: “Wisdom is highly valued in African tradition. It is to be expected that God would be considered wise and omniscient” (Mbiti 1997:153). This is recognised in the proverbs that attribute to God creation, sustenance, being above criticism and being the final arbiter as a “declaration of his infinite wisdom” (Mbiti 1997:153). The Ghanaians believe that God is a discerning God, whose judgment between good and evil is above criticism as expressed here: “I bear my creator no grudge, but my
lazy parents who turned me into a beggar and expected me to feed them” (Mbiti 1997:153,155). Among the Banyarwanda, God is referred to as all-knowing: “Imaana niy’ibizi” “God is the one who knows”. In addition to these, it is perceived that God solves every problem. “An issue for which there is no answer, God did not create” This suggests that God helps people to resolve all problems (Mbiti 1997:153,155). The Akan perceives that God’s wisdom heals and saves, expressed as: “If God gives you sickness, God gives you its cure” (Mbiti 1997:153,156).

The cultural-theology of African wisdom presents God as an ethical Being. His ethical attributes results in a closer level of human and divine interaction. These ethical attributes of God are in fact human daily life experiences to which Mbiti has observed:

[T]hese ethical attributes are related to human life and observations. They are in a sense more applied attributes of God, and less speculative in nature. In his ethical being, he (God) is actively in the midst of people in their daily [life] (lives), in encounter with one another and with nature, in their experiences and hopes. Nobody questions or denies his existence. Belief in him is communal: it is one of the values by which people live (Mbiti 1997:155).

God offers an ethical standard which is naturally his very being. Although people are judged by this higher divine ethical position, they are nonetheless given opportunity to model their characters after it. To this end, African wisdom offers a theological resource which contributes toward moral transformation. This theological-ethical resource is often compounded in the African moral philosophy of ubuntu, to be discussed later in the next chapter of this study. Augustine Shutte astutely presents the ethic vision or ideal invested in this philosophy. However, I would like to argue that this ideal might be the deposit of God in the normative conception of the African people and this enables them to comprehend Him. Christ the incarnate God takes up our humanity and becomes umuntu so as to show us the ideal human. To quote Shutte:

Ubuntu is the name for acquired quality of humanity that is the characteristic of a fully developed person and the community with others that result(s). It thus comprises values, attitudes, feelings, relationships and activities, the full range of expressions of the human spirit (Shutte 2001:31).
Let us now reflect on some examples of African proverbs. We shall focus on those that address and encourage moral leadership. The assumption here is that proverbs are presented within the conception of an African holistic worldview so typical of cultures attuned to wisdom theologies.

3.3.1.3.5 The reflection on everyday leadership experience as seen from proverbs

I shall offer examples from the collection of proverbs by Fr. Marius Cistermino (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. Cistermino 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 mworo (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).

### 3.3.1.4 A summary

We can conclude that all three traditional sources of wisdom, namely Hellenistic, Jewish and African, **originate from oral traditions** which were later committed to writing. They all tended to state and **deal with the concerns of everyday life.**

There is, however, a noted progressive movement from a state of knowing less about human nature to an ever-increasing complexity of the knowledge of human behaviour in the present moral philosophy and human psychology scholarship. This
The phenomenon is common in the Hellenistic strand developed over centuries of Euro-Western scholarship.

The Jewish tradition developed in a different way. It has a progressive knowledge of a moral God who supplies moral resources from within and without. God was faithful to those who interiorised his moral injunctions. He remained in fellowship with those who patterned their lives along his moral standards, values, and virtues. This forms the hallmark of the theology of the Christian-wisdom tradition (Judeo-Christian), which I shall deal with in section 4.4 below.

The African moral-wisdom tradition depicts a rather meshed tapestry of a religious drama with a complete moral order anchored in the present yet drawing its sustenance from the past. The present generations comply with what the ancestors set in the past. How important this phenomenon is, is a critical question to be taken seriously for the moral revival of the continent. Could this state of affairs be attributed to forces that interrupted and suppressed Africa’s progressive element in almost all spheres of life? This historical problematic moral situation is discussed by John Mbiti under the concept of time and space in the usage of terms Sasa (present) and Zamani (past) (cf Mbiti 1969:22-27). This African concept of time has difficulties in appropriating moral transformation and development. It is difficult to conclude whether Africans are now reviving the previously suppressed cultural aspects or whether they are caught up in what they know best – the Zamani.

It is my strong assumption that questions of eradicating poverty, disease and ignorance may be difficult to deal with unless African thinking adopts the Euro-Western future concept of time and history. In this case, the Judeo-Christian futuristic concepts, which most Africans have embraced, becomes an important component of this study.

The concept of God is present in all three wisdom traditions. How God is and acts are communicated in proverbs, applied attributes, people’s names, and myths. The whole enterprise demonstrates a deep awareness of God that had a profound influence on moral reflection and the conception of a moral life.
All three traditions **practise rituals** for purification as a means of dealing with moral inequities and issues of transformation in life. The practice of rituals demonstrates awareness of wrongdoing and the need to remedy the situation. It is an anticipation of the goodwill of the gods (Greeks) and forgiveness of sin/the wrong done (Jews) and approval of the ancestors as intermediaries between the living and God (Africans).

In the following section I shall deal with the Christian wisdom tradition as committed to writing in the New Testament. We know that historically the Christian understanding of wisdom can only be properly understood from its Jewish sources, and was expressed in Greek cultural forms. The association with Africa in its modern sense, developed only much later and is overtly discussed in the last chapter.

In Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of the purpose of wisdom is found for people of all cultures. Moreover, Christ, God’s power and wisdom which makes moral transformation possible, is equally expressed and transmitted. Included in this section is the argumentation of how Christ relates well to the conception of *Ubuntu* in the African agent-centred ethics. He imbues the individual and binds him with the community of character, the church, which is the body of Christ. This concept comes out more clearly in the consideration of the moral implications in the Christology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology discussed below.

### 3.3.1.5 The wisdom tradition in the New Testament

Before launching into the wisdom of the Christian era, a simple question needs to be posed and replied to: Do we actually find “wisdom literature” in the New Testament? After pointing to elements of wisdom in the New Testament corpus, I proceed to show how wisdom is intrinsic to an understanding of Christ, the Spirit and the church respectively.

#### 3.3.1.5.1 The genre of wisdom tradition in the New Testament

Generally considered, the whole Bible constitutes Christian wisdom insofar as Christ’s divinity is eternal. However, in terms of proper reference, that is, to isolate the Jewish tradition of wisdom from that of the Christian era, the study will focus on New Testament literature as the source of Christian wisdom. New Testament scholars
such as C.H. Dodd (1961), R. Bultmann (1963), S. L. Davies (1983) G. MacRae (1986), C.W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (1986) and Bernard B. Scott (1990) agree that the New Testament does not have what may be regarded as a collection of wisdom literature (cf Scott 1990:399). However, there are wisdom inferences in the New Testament. What is available is neither the “archetypal genre” nor “a dominant category of scholarly analysis” (Scott 1990:399).

Therefore, the wisdom material in the New Testament is “embedded within other genres”. Examples of such observation include the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-6), which functions as a “single unit within the narrative genre of the gospel” (Scott 1990:399). Numerous proverbs used in many other places, often embedded within dialogues, form another category. However, these two examples do not provide a full picture of the presence of wisdom in the New Testament. Harnack has suggested that whatever wisdom is available here may be an “acute … hellenisation of Christianity” (see Scott 1990:399). These considerations tend to push wisdom in the New Testament into the background.

Claus Westermann in his book, *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and other Peoples* (1995) refers to the critical analysis of three prominent New Testament scholars whose work has been in the forefront of the debate concerning wisdom proverbs as words of Jesus in the synoptic gospels. I shall review aspects of their presentation one by one below.

R. Bultmann in his book *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (1921, 1970 [4th ed.]) has made critical observations concerning wisdom at the “root of the synoptic tradition”. Examples listed here are “proverbs, beatitudes, and parables” often attributed to “Jesus the teacher of Wisdom” (see Scott 1990:399-400). While the term “Jesus the teacher of wisdom” may be misleading and perhaps limiting, it is correct to argue that Jesus made a significant contribution to aspects of Wisdom found in the synoptic gospels. Hermeneutically speaking, Bultmann maintains that Jesus’ wisdom teaching resembles that of the Jewish tradition in form and content (see Westermann 1995:112). This deduction is, of course, consistent with his upbringing rather than an adaptation of a writing style, as Bultmann observes:
It was unnecessary for Jesus to adapt himself to these sayings, since he was familiar with them from early on, inasmuch as he grew up with them. They were a living reality as popular proverbs in circles of common people with whom Jesus associated. Before his public appearance, they were his possession intellectually and remained so throughout the period of his ministry. Much of this entered into his preaching – some of it stemming from references to God as framed by proverbial wisdom (see Westermann 1995:112).

Is the Wisdom literature in the gospels authentically that of Jesus? Or has it been attributed to him? Both of these questions have been rejected by Bultmann. He argues that Jesus belongs to an oral phase which leaves no material with which to investigate this matter. What we have is Israel’s written wisdom literature and later the synoptic literature. There is no doubt concerning the relationship of the two sources. While contending that wisdom sayings attributed to Jesus might have undergone a particular development, this development might not be more than a literary one (see Westermann 1995:113).

Max Kuchler in his book, *Fruhjudische Weisheistraditionen*, OBO (1979), takes Bultmann’s argument further. He positions his definition of wisdom portrayed in the genre of New Testament proverbs as truth of an individual experience which allows “the object of inquiry to acquire … generality and develop an almost didactic tendency” (see Westermann 1995:113). Some of his examples taken from the beatitudes include what Westermann rejects as exhortations. Exhortations are often specific to a group of people and lack the universal distinction of proverbs. Kuchler has, however, offered a sketch of a grouping of proverbs in the gospels. My interest focuses on those that have an ethical leadership:

The eye is the light of the body (Matt. 6:22);
Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt.12:34)
Can the blind lead the blind? (Matt.15:14).
What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36);
Every good tree brings forth good fruit (Matt. 7:17);
Whoever draws the sword dies by the sword (Matt.26:52).
Kuchler presents Jesus as an “early Christian wisdom teacher” and goes further to suggest that Jesus is “the ultimate expression of wisdom” (see Westermann 1995:113), an assertion which I will come to shortly.

The third scholar whom Westermann has chosen is W. A. Beardslee in his work, *Use of the Proverbs in the Synoptic Gospels: Interpretation 24* (1970). His major contribution is that he “distinguishes between practical and speculative wisdom” in the synoptic gospels (in Westermann 1995:115). This categorisation is similar to Westermann’s distinction that differentiates synoptic wisdom between the functional and abstract. In this critical analysis, their findings show that the synoptic gospels have wisdom of a functional or practical nature and that the speculative or abstract wisdom is almost or entirely absent (cf Westermann 1995:115). Both Beardslee and Bultmann agree that the proverbs as a form of wisdom in the gospels “do not express general truth; rather, they concern actual, specific situations in people’s daily life” (see Westermann 1995:115). In the case of parables, the same analysis affirms the focus of wisdom here as stories of things that happen in real human life experience. The commonality of human experiences implied in the synoptic wisdom serves as evidence presupposing a link between the Old and New Testament Wisdom, as they point to themes that are indeed common to all people (cf Westermann 1995:115). Such a conclusion would cover both the Hellenistic and the African Wisdom traditions.

Having established the availability and genre of wisdom literature in the New Testament, I shall now consider an interpretation of Christ, the Spirit and the church from a wisdom perspective, highlighting the transformative potential in the Christian wisdom discourse.

### 3.3.1.5.2 Christology

Christology is the doctrine of the second person of the Trinity. Although strictly speaking, this doctrine should cover Christ’s person and nature, scholars in this field often include the work of Jesus Christ, namely soteriology - that covering “atonement” and “salvation”. We shall tend to lean toward the whole meaning of
Christology as it relates to his “work”, in which the power and wisdom of God are demonstrated for moral transformation.\textsuperscript{105}

In his critical analysis of the New Testament, Kuchler defines Jesus Christ as “the ultimate expression of wisdom”. His presentation mentions that the nature of wisdom discourse in the synoptic gospels bears evidence of their link with Old Testament Wisdom. This evidence is the connection between 1 Corinthians 1: 18, 20-24 and Proverbs. 8:22-31, texts in which wisdom is personified. In my previous argument, I maintained that we could not draw any conclusions at that stage that the section of Proverbs 8 referred to Jesus. It nevertheless bore aspects that relate to Christological material in the New Testament.

Let us analyse further some of Paul’s argumentation of Christ as the wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 20-24. These texts allude to theological connection that encourages us to read the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8 as supportive to Christological developments. Christian theology in the New Testament wisdom asserts the conclusion that Jesus is the wisdom and power of God. Ultimately, scholars have singled out the texts that suggest this theological view as a resource for moral virtue development.

Let us turn to a specific and important periscope with a brief exegesis of key phrases in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25:

Paul’s statements in his epistle to the Corinthians are particularly important as introductory to God’s wisdom and power for moral transformation. In presenting divine wisdom and power invested in the “message of the cross”, Paul expresses his ideas as follows:

\begin{quote}
For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel - not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{105}George E. Ladd in his book \textit{The Theology of the New Testament} (1974) argues that “[m]uch of Jesus’ teaching was concerned with human conduct” Ladd 1974:120. Ladd elaborates on the subject of human conduct under the theme “The Ethics of the Kingdom” where he offers examples of Jesus teaching, such as the Beatitudes, the golden rule, the parable of the good Samaritan. These are only a few of Ladd’s selected texts to illustrate the ethical thrust of Jesus Christ’s work (Ladd 1974:120).
who are being saved it is the power and wisdom of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate’. Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?’. Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe… but to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength (1 Corinthians 1:17-25).

The Corinthian social and politico-economic context of AD 59 bears aspects that shed light on Paul’s humble presentation of the power and wisdom of God in his text. Bruce Winter, in his commentary *1 Corinthians* (1994) notes that at the time of Paul’s writing, the Corinthians had been under colonial rule for over a century. They were in fact a Roman colony, with some “freedmen” from Italy who settled at Achaea. This resulted in phenomenal geo-political growth that distinguished the city as a vibrant centre of culture and trade. Some Greeks moved out of Athens and came to settle in this growing city. Some of them became the leading benefactors among the civic contingent.

The population comprised three distinct groups of people, namely, the Greeks, the Jews, and the Italians. Inscriptions in the city gave “evidence of classes of wise, the well-born, and the powerful” (Winter 1994:1161). At the time of Paul’s writing, there was a group of Christians. They were, however, among worshippers of many other gods, especially Aphrodite, perhaps the most popular goddess among the gods. There were also scholarly activities marked by rhetoric presentations that took place in open places in the city. It was these aspects, namely the scholarly attitude of the Greek philosophers and to some extent the Jewish scribes, the “well-born” powerful royalty, and the wealth classes that formed the background rhetoric in Paul’s letter, specific to 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 text. I shall now exegete selected key phrases in this text.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of human wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (v17). Winter explains that “A first-century orator or public-speaker was expected to produce

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106 Emperor Julius Caesar made a decision to send a governor to Achaea in AD44 after it had been in ruins for over a century (146BC). As the seat of the Roman governor, its population soon became larger than that of Athens. Achaea, was therefore the centre of socio-political interaction but also a centre for moral degeneration (Winter 1994:1161).
carefully crafted speeches which drew attention to his skilful use of rhetorical conventions” (Winter 1994:1164). A presentation of this nature was often termed “magic” because of its power to “arrest” or “bewitch” the audience. To this end the content of the speech was less important than the speaker. The audience was the judge. If Paul, on one hand, had employed such human wisdom and skill, then the audience would have simply judged him as having no interesting message to impart. Paul, on the other hand, having adopted the secular convention, would have promoted himself as a speaker by means of his rhetorical skills. The audience who listened and “judged” the performance would have had their attention diverted away from the “message of the cross” that had come to Paul. This outcome would have robbed Paul’s hearers “of the opportunity to hear about the amazing event by which God rescues people” (Winter 1994:1164). As such Paul chose not to use the wisdom of this world.

“The message of the cross” (vs18a) became Paul’s phrase for the gospel. He called it “message” or “the oratory” (logos) of the cross” (Winter 1994:1164). The response was bound to be twofold. For some it was absurd and for others it was a powerful way of becoming God’s people. But the wisdom of the intelligentsia would be brought to nothing and the boasting of the educated and powerful would be frustrated.

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?” (vs20). These rhetorical questions seem to suggest that the admired rhetoric of the day and the effort of the theologians had failed to bring people to the knowledge of God. There were sufficient and often sophisticated discussions of natural theology by the Stoics and the Epicureans especially on the nature of gods. The Jewish Scribes taught and read the torah in the synagogue. But people did not know God (cf Morris 1985:42; also Winter 1994: 1164)107.

To the Greek philosophers, the “message of the cross” and “Christ crucified” as a means by which humankind is saved was foolishness. After all, the death and resurrection of gods were among the Greeks’ existing myths whose influence through

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107 Winter observes that the content of the speech did not matter; only the performance of the speaker did. Ultimately, an orator aimed at gaining the adulation of his audience for self-gratification and popularity (Winter 1994:1164).
cultic rituals did not bring about the desired moral transformation. Paul’s claim regarding the importance of the gospel of Jesus Christ could not gain any ground when compared to philosophical systems because it made no sense and it lacked a practical link with moral living. Only a criminal slave would be crucified, therefore “it would be ridiculous to say anything at all” let alone offer distinction to such a person, the “Christ crucified”, by calling him “the Lord and Saviour of mankind” (Kistemaker 1993:59).

The gospel of Jesus Christ was “a stumbling block to the Jews” because in the elected tradition, it seemed to hijack their favoured position. They “were the recipients of God’s covenants, the law, the promises and worship regulations” (Kistemaker 1993:58-59). They were so practical in their religious culture that nothing less than a miracle would lead them to belief. Ultimately, the Jews rejected the “message of salvation” (Kistemaker 1993:59; also Bruce 1971:34-36; Morris 1985:43-47). The main part of Paul’s message that the Jews were not prepared to accept was the reference to a mere crucified person. To accept Christ, one whom they regarded cursed by God forever, as a sacrifice for their sin was a repugnant contradiction. The gospel message made it even worse by associating the crucifixion with a religious figure – Christ the Messiah - anticipated by the Jews for their salvation (cf Kistemaker 1993:59).

But, “to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks” and “to us who are being saved” (v24), suggests that there was only partial rejection of God’s wisdom and power among the Jews and the Greeks. There were among them those who indeed embraced this gospel “the power of God and the wisdom of God in conquering the forces of evil and redeeming men from their control; the wisdom of God in solving, by means of Christ crucified, the problem which had defeated secular wisdom” (Bruce 1971:35). In their obedient response they become witnesses of the working wisdom and power of God in this relational and morally transforming wisdom and power.

“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (v24c) Here Jesus Christ redeems the Jewish cultural-theological wisdom by giving it the ultimate power without which Jewish religious tradition would remain with no conclusion; the same
applies to the Greeks. Winter concludes, “Both God’s wisdom and his power are located in Christ. While this may be designated as a foolish and weak way by men (sic), God is wiser and stronger than they are” (Winter 1994:1165). Let us link this exegesis with the argument for the personification of wisdom in the Christological perspective. Bruce joins those scholars whose analysis is recorded in “primitive” Christianity:

The identification of Christ with the wisdom of God … carries with it the ascription to him of the functions predicated of personified Wisdom in the Wisdom literature of the OT and inter-testamental period, specially as God’s agent in revelation and creation (Bruce 1971:35-36).

Morris and Bruce remind us that the personification refers to Christ’s eternal nature with God and his role in creation. In the gospel message, the wisdom and power of God, elaborated in the exegesis, refers to Christ’s agency in the redemption plan. Nevertheless, both implications are profoundly fundamental to the interpretation of wisdom in relation to triune God. Firstly, God’s wisdom is prudential, because it is timely (characteristic of the virtue of wisdom)108. Secondly this wisdom is effective in its power to indwell (Holy Spirit) the willing respondents and deal with the problem of human depravity. And thirdly, this prudential wisdom anchors the respondent in fellowship of the community of believers, where he/she finds support on the path of virtue transformation and development.

108 In my study of the Hellenistic, Jewish and African wisdom traditions and the struggle for moral virtue development, there was a common impasse in all three cultures. This impasse was such that the promotion of moral codes, rules, and laws of these cultures as a means of establishing moral virtue did not yield any enduring results. After all, both the Greek and the Jewish cultures were experiencing a serious decline (cf Rader 1964:133-135; Fernandez-Armesto 2000:433-435).

The incarnation of Christ (6-4 B.C.) provides a timely answer to the moral impasse. He is the basis for moral wisdom that is agent-centred. First, he sets the example in his virtuous relationship with God and then invites humanity into partnership with him as the very source of wisdom and power by which moral virtue is made possible. Christ as moral wisdom is inclusive and relational to all who respond to him. The propositional statements of moral codes, rules, and laws are to be viewed in the light of a moral agent’s response to God’s wisdom in Jesus Christ. A relationship with Christ, the wisdom and power of God for moral transformation, is also dynamic. One grows into it through a process of discernment, perceptivity, and obedient response. Moral virtue aided by Christ’s wisdom and power becomes a pilgrimage for anyone who desires to be morally good. This goodness is not at all invested in keeping of any set of rules but in an ongoing and growing relationship with God in Christ Jesus and other people. Ultimately, the personification of wisdom in the Old Testament wisdom literature achieves its highest effective vividness in Jesus Christ. It is no longer stylistic rhetoric advertising wisdom, but rather in Jesus Christ is the very object of wisdom and relationship, which could not hitherto be achieved. In this personal relationship with Christ - the embodiment of God’s wisdom and power - moral transformation is possible in practice as a daily experience.
The assumed connection between the wisdom and power for salvation and the texts on personification is the supposition that Christ is eternally with God as personified wisdom. Christ is presented as the eternal “word” (*logos*) in John 1:1-5, who was with God and was God. Everything that is in heaven and on earth was created through him and by him (Armstrong 1999:105-106; cf Col.1:16; also Prov.8:30-31). These texts position Christ as one with God. Since God is the origin of good and righteous wisdom (James 3:13-18), Christ is accorded the same status. God in Christ took on human nature when He became human so that we may have a perfect model of what God intended us to be as human beings (cf Phil. 2:6-11 Armstrong 1999:105). Armstrong sums up the humanity of Christ as conceptualised in Paul’s letter as follows:

Jesus had insisted that the *dunamis* (power) of God were not for him alone. Paul developed this insight by arguing that Jesus had been the first example of a new type of humanity. Not only had he done everything that old Israel had failed to achieve, but he had become the new *Adam*, the new humanity into which all human being, *goyim* included, must somehow participate (Armstrong 1999:105)

Jesus Christ demonstrates the power and wisdom of God by his ministry in relation to God - the origin of wisdom. In his power and wisdom he transforms lives from depravity to virtue under the guidance of the Spirit. God’s power and wisdom transform anyone who is morally deprived without discrimination (Gal. 3:28). Human beings - including public leaders – are called to be new virtuous beings supported and sustained by a virtuous community of the wise.

Paul puts it this way: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor.5:17). Into this way of life, the believer, now a new creation (any respondent) knows by the Spirit and by experience that the power and wisdom of God is a daily experience. This understanding is implied in Paul’s statement with regard to those who are being saved (cf 1 Cor. 1:18b). They realise their inability to survive morally in a sinful world and continually seek God’s power and wisdom to sustain them, through the enabling of the Spirit.
“Being saved”, which is a daily experience, does not exclude one from moral failure. This happens, for being the community of the wise does not take away vulnerability caused by human weakness. Nevertheless, the difference is that when someone fails and the community of the wise reproaches him/her, he/she accepts the mind and judgement of the community, repents, and asks for forgiveness. This provision is available in Christ and a Christ-centred community. The law of the land may take its course according to the intensity of the wrong committed. Nonetheless, the individual has an obligation to mend his/her life with Christ and with the offended community.

We have argued that God’s power and wisdom are found in Jesus Christ. Jesus has the power and wisdom to transform the foolish and self-conceited community into a wise one. This is made possible through the gospel of good news. We have noted that reality of transformation by this power and wisdom of Christ is being appropriated into the lives of respondents. The fundamental result of God’s power and wisdom is that it is capable of transforming a “foolish” community into a wise one. God in Christ can transform a morally deprived individual into a virtuous one. This phenomenon is made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and sustains the new community. To this Holy Spirit we shall now turn.

3.3.1.5.3 Pneumatology

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who carries on the ministry in the power and wisdom of God after the physical presence of Jesus Christ. He is promised to the disciples as a counsellor, one who convicts the world of guilt regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment. He (the Holy Spirit) guides followers into truth (cf John 16:5-15).

The Old Testament describes the Holy Spirit as the ruah of Yahweh God’s power in action (Packer 1988:316). Packer analyses the nature and work of the Spirit in six areas. Firstly, like Jesus Christ, the Spirit is God himself at work shaping creation, and animating animals and people, as well as directing nature and history (Gen 1:2, 2:7; Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6, 104:29-30). Secondly, the Spirit reveals God’s message to God’s spokesmen and women (Nu. 24:2; 2 Sa 23:2,Is. 61:1-4). Thirdly, the Spirit is a teacher who instructs us about how to be faithful and fruitful (Ne. 9:20; Ps. 143:10; Is. 48:16;
Fourthly, the Spirit elicits faith, repentance, obedience, righteousness, docility, praise, and prayer (Ps 51:10-15; Is. 11:2, 44:3). Fifthly, the Spirit equips people to become strong, wise, and effective leaders (cf Packer 1988:316; Gen. 41:38; Nu. 11:16-29; 2 Kings 2:9-15; Is. 11:1-5; 42:1-4) and sixthly the Spirit gives skills and application for creative work (Ex.31:1-11; Hg.2:5; 1 Corinthians 12) (cf Packer 1988:316).

From the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit assumes a distinctive personhood of his own in the discourse of the New Testament. From here onwards, He sets forth the work of Jesus Christ as the paracletos of the Church: He is a “counsellor, helper, strengthener, supporter, adviser, advocate, and ally. Like the Father and the Son, He acts as only a person can do – he hears, speaks, convinces, testifies, shows, leads, guides, teaches, prompts speech, commands, forbids, desires, helps, intercedes with groans” (Packer 1988:316). The Holy Spirit does these things with individuals and with the church.

However, some current historical churches seem to lack the freshness of the work of the Spirit. This lack of appropriating the promptings of the Holy Spirit is often attributed to the institutionalisation of the church. Vitality of the church has shifted, so that its driving force is no longer the communities of believers but rather the administrative authority at the top. The legal aspect and claims to allegiance through rituals predetermine the relationships in the church structure. Such establishment often limits and sometimes blocks the wise function of the Holy Spirit. Secularism quickly infiltrates the working of the church when it starts to adjust to outside pressures.

The result has always been that the church leadership seeks identity with the social and politico-economic status quo rather than maintaining the identity of the church with Christ with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. It may be correct to suggest that the church (as in the establishment), runs the danger of being caught up in the expression of the current moral dilemma. This may account for the fact that the church has not performed as the venue for moral transformation. When this happens then the church

109 This description of the work of the Spirit leaves no doubt that it has some influence on wisdom literature whose function is similar to what the Holy Spirit does as the originator.
loses its dynamic and renewing force. It simply becomes part of secular institutions and their struggle to survive in a competitive environment (cf Stott 1984:10-14). As such the institutionalised church is now part of the moral dilemma rather than epitomising the solution to moral depravity.

Small Christian communities or church cells seem to exhibit the presence and work of the Spirit with regard to moral virtue transformation and development. Here emphasis is on individuals with a view to creating good, virtuous people for the community. The emphasis is on people, while rules/codes of conduct and law are reserved in the background but not thrown away.

The phenomenon of cell groups as communities for moral transformation and development needs to be investigated further, since the re-introduction of cell churches is relatively recent. It is the structure of cell churches that I will now turn to, as cell groups are distinct from the larger church institution. Their pattern is similar but not the same as the Greek polis; no different from the Jewish communities in diaspora; and African homesteads as centres of moral transformation and development. Cell groups are characterised by closeness where the individuals are morally accountable one to another in the community. It is this moral community that I would like to advance within the broader concept of ecclesiology. Christ is the head of the church and his Spirit guides and guards this very Church.

3.3.1.5.4 Ecclesiology

Broadly considered by E.P Clowney (1988), the doctrine of the Church is called ecclesiology. At the centre of a worshipping community – the Church - is a moral God, holy and virtuous. As people gather around to hear his wisdom, in fellowship with each other, the moral question is not only assumed, but is enacted in imitation of Christ as the embodiment of the wise community.

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110 The cell church is very similar to house churches of the first century Christian communities. Their nature made Christianity effective and aided in its expansion. Where cell churches have been introduced, similar successes of both spiritual and numerical growth have been reported.
For one to choose to belong to a worshipping community suggests, at least in the interim, that the questions of morality are high on one’s agenda. All activities in such a church are focused on the questions of how to embody the Word of God in good practical Christian living, and on improving the quality of both character and conduct. The church is not only theoretical, but also provides guidance, support, and authority patterned on faith in God. Here moral discussions about obligation, virtue, value, or vision in the Christian life are carried out in fellowship (cf Birch and Rasmussen 1989:10).

Clowney goes on to describe the church as a “people of God” following the description of the “covenant-making” assembly ekklesia (Gk), Qahara (Heb) at Mount Sinai or whenever Israel assembled for covenant renewal (Deut. 9:10, 29:1; Jos 8:35). The assembly, known as qahara, met regularly for the purpose of receiving and appropriating common values that were theo-centric.

Right from the inception of the concept of church there was the obligation of moral responsibility whose initiative came from outside the human community. The coming of Jesus Christ marked the establishment of the “Messianic community” by whom, through whom, and in whom, is the proclamation of the rule of God. The presence of Jesus Christ in human flesh was defined in terms of building a new community based on relationship rather than the authority of the deity. He demonstrated a model of morality in obedience to God through the imitation of Christ. As such the church, the community of followers of Christ, is called into a life of holiness (Eph.1:22-23; Rom 8:9-11; 1 Pet 1:15). The body of Christ as a symbolic name for the church emphasises both the holiness and support of one another, inter alia also in moral formation. This church is in fellowship with the Holy Spirit whose duty it is to lead the community of believers to truth and liberation from sin, death, and condemnation (cf Clowney 1988:140-141).

B. C. Birch and L. L. Rasmussen in their book, Bible & Ethics in the Christian Life (1989) have underscored the importance of the Bible as the written word for Christians. Elsewhere I have referred to Kistemaker, Bruce, and Morris, who describe the “word” as the “wisdom” of God. Both “word” and “wisdom” are used synonymously to refer to Christ, the head of the church as a community of the “word”
or “wisdom” (cf Birch and Rasmussen 1989:13-34). In the execution of its obligation, the church takes on a new meaning and qualification as the “Community of the Wise”. Robert W. Wall has assigned this description to the church in his book, *Community of the Wise* (1997). Perhaps the letter of James more than any other Book of the Bible, presents, in practical ways, the struggles and challenges facing the believer in every community. The ethical implication cannot leave even the non-believer without a moral thought with regard to the poor, the sick, the ignorant and human conflict. Wall concludes:

> What every good teacher knows best about the ordinary mess and muck of human life is that ordinary believers require a “way of wisdom” that will lead them out of their daily [trails](travails) and toward Christian maturity. James well considers the struggles of our common experience and supplies us with necessary wisdom for a more robust spiritual journey (Wall 1997:2).

The presentation of James sums up the required human response to the whole challenge of God’s wisdom and power for any community. The letter of James can be used in whole or in part by anyone wishing to share its wisdom with a community. It also points to the triune God whose wisdom from above is instructive for beneficial human living and indeed for our salvation from sin. To embrace the message of the letter of James is to become a “Community of the wise” whose integral tenet is submission to God, the origin of wisdom. Then such a community becomes God’s community with a “communal form” of “the collective experience of God” uniquely expressed by Israel and then in Jesus Christ and the Spirit” in the church as “the community of the wise” (Birch and Rasmussen 1989:26, also Wall 1997).

**(i) Cell groups: a sample of a new development**

Cell church is a new concept embraced by the Christian tradition in recent times. It captured the interest of this study because of its support mechanism given to and offered by its cell members. They are beneficial to the spiritual growth of each individual, making each member a better person for the benefit of others. In the whole process the individual is given the opportunity to exercise Christian virtues in the cell group. The cell is characterised by commitment to one another without diminishing the rights and freedoms of the individual members. In this way the cell church is a miniature of the larger structure of the Church - the fellowship of believers such as
present in Acts 2: 42-47 in some respects, though not similar in all practices. There is an attempt to reconstruct a kind of a community whose intention is to grow in virtuous living resulting in practical faith.\textsuperscript{111} It has a marked effect on members attributed to the virtues of care and love inherent in the cell groups. Formerly unchurched people are attracted into the cell group. Below are some of the characteristics of the cell-group concept which have been observed and are credited for their effectiveness.

a) A cell group is a living and growing family (organism), where members are responsible to and for one another. They learn to give and receive in their extended family where the freedom to make mistakes is handled with grace as one learns to be a better person.

b) Members meet more times in the week and come on Sunday to celebrate their relationship in and with Christ. They remain in touch with one another for moral support even when they are not together physically. During meetings members are instructed in virtues, how to glorify God, become equipped for a godly lifestyle, and give practical service to others.

c) Members develop a sense of moral lifestyle in which they are salt and light in word and action to those they come into contact with. The virtue of love is the means and mode of everyone reaching out to humanity. They pledge to “be Christ” to others.

d) It engenders a give-and-take relationship where lives are transformed in community, through relationships of people to people in fellowships.

I observed that a cell group applies a holistic approach to the person and is not just concerned with theological issues and Bible study. It includes practical and emotional dimensions in which members meet, eat, play, and share other aspects of life such as birthdays, fixing a member’s roof, painting homes, and offering time during crises such as sickness or bereavements\textsuperscript{112}.

\textsuperscript{111} Cell groups are a current phenomenon in Christian church growth. It is a reversal of disillusioned churchgoers and the criticisms directed against big and seemingly an uncaring church in modern individualistic communities. The results are very enticing. Individuals are restored in fellowship, through character-building, they become active members of the community on a moral path toward becoming good, just, and wise.

\textsuperscript{112} Activities carried out at cell-group meetings include worship which Dirkie Smit calls “looking in the right direction” (Smit 1997:261), the direction of God; they edify God as the creator, redeemer,
In this Cell group Phenomenon 113 - the community of the good, just, and wise replicates itself. From the individual level, to small groups then to the whole church the larger community virtuous living becomes the dominant moral disposition. Since it attracts everyone, a cell church cannot be just a resource for an individual church’s evangelism, but rather its principles can be used in moral transformation of any community. A community in South Africa might include a plurality of faith, denomination, economic levels, and political differences. From a charismatic congregation to a Roman Catholic Church we find similarities all aimed at becoming creative in order to build the community of the wise.

(ii) A creative local church for moral virtue development

One document dealing with the issue of the church as virtue-enhancing local community in an African setting is a collection of documents edited by Patrick J. Hartin, Bernard F. Connor and Paul B. Decock. The title is *Becoming a Creative Local Church: Theological Reflections on the Pastoral plan* (1991). The document was a project commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa. The purpose of the document was to add substance to the “Pastoral Plan” which had been developed by the Catholic bishops in Southern Africa. Although it was meant for Catholic Christians, their theology of community is worth recapitulating for the benefit of all. Nearly every chapter of the document is opened with poetic verses that reveal a mind that is imbued with the Christian Scripture characteristic of the reflection of the community of the wise. The introduction to the “Pastoral Plan”, printed below, is an example taken from the document.

“God’s plan, the source of our plan”
Blessed be God the Father
Of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and sanctifier; then they share the vision of the cell group and the ultimate goal of the Christian community. They discuss areas of growth to be promoted and weaknesses to be discouraged. They reach out to friends whom they would like to invite to join the cell group in prayer and with love through a process of socialisation. Other activities include prayer as the primary method of asking God to permeate the spirits and hearts of those outside and bring them into the fold of the cell group. Children are never left out. On the contrary children are encouraged to come along to cell meetings. This approach to children’s ministry helps in growing them into the moral values and habits of this wise community ethos.

113 A cell group has a dynamic force within it by which it multiplies. As members increase to 12, it is time to multiply. “Multiplication” is a term given to describe the process of “dividing” one group into two, once they reach the target of 12 members.
Who... has let us know the mystery of his plan
That he would bring everything together
Under Christ, as head,
Everything on earth” (Eph 1:3,9,10).

We believe in God’s plan for the world.
It is a plan that we may be one
As Jesus and the Father are one (17:22).
It is a plan that we may serve one another
As Jesus served us (Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-15; Phlp 2:6-7).

But it is also a plan for a world
Filled with Christ’s love
It is a plan for a world

Another verse in the same poem develops the community concept:

“Our God is a community;
a community of Father, Son and Spirit.
We were made in God’s image (Gn 1:26)-
A community of human beings
God’s plan was that two communities,
The divine and the human
Should be one” (Gaybba 1991:18).

In this document Decock expounds on the theology of building a community according to the mind of Christ. His views concur with those of Hauerwas (1981), Maclntyre (1981) and the cell group concept insofar as the process of building a community of character starts with self-examination. This process includes the self-examination of individuals in the context of the community of believers. Decock presents the following as vital characteristics of a community according to his perception of Christ’s mind:

A common orientation towards a significant aspect of life; some agreement about values; a commitment to common goals; the opportunities for personal exchange; and finally, an agreement on expectations and tasks (see Hartin, et al 1991:52-63).

This is what Bujo referred to as “the internalisation of the community standards, values and virtues”. It is not different from an individual who submits to Christ. This is often called receiving Christ in one’s heart. The confession of our ego creates space for the Spirit of God and his wisdom and power to begin work alongside our conscience. Then we become wise, forming a community of the good, just, and wise.
Until then, because of our “foolishness”, we could not understand the necessity of moral living.

Then, we become a good community, one in which people are welcome, free to be who they are in their uniqueness. Yet they are able to respect the boundaries that the community has set which determine its identity as an African Christian community. The community offers virtues as the means to facilitate human interaction. They (virtues) are made available through learning, in proverbs, poems, stories of individuals, and folk-song. The virtues are the ideals and therefore the expectations of the community whose intention is to be good, just, and wise. Its boundaries and the virtues are a priori to the role of the wisdom traditions, a synergy of African and Christian wisdom. Here the church, a combination of African and Judeo-Christian traditions, is able to join hands with political establishments in the vanguard of social and politico-economic transformation. Such a community is able to attend to the challenges of poverty and disease (especially the HIV/AIDS epidemic) and intervene in potential armed political conflicts on the continent.

President Thabo Mbeki expressed this view, at the South African Christian Leaders Assembly (SACLA) in July 2003 quoted by Tony Lawrence, Regional Representative of the Haggai Institute for Leadership and Evangelism in Africa:

President Thabo Mbeki said at the last SACLA (July 2003) conference a week ago that government and the church should work together to “strengthen the values and orientations on which the future of the country depends.” These values include the values of sharing, solidarity, compassion, sacrifice and service to the people, as well as a deep commitment to assisting the weak and the poor (Lawrence 2003: 1).

Christian wisdom, expressed in various places in Scripture, achieves its zenith in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is in Him that there is the demonstration of the personified power and wisdom of God in the community of believers.
3.3.1.6 Concluding reflection on wisdom as “foundational” to virtuous living

This chapter – in pursuit of providing a “content” to virtue moral theory – first outlined the seven virtues common to traditional literature in this regard. It was then argued that the virtue of wisdom may be construed as foundational virtue as it both permeates and “leads” the application of other virtues in the practicalities of everyday life, both personal and communal.

To understand how wisdom itself is perceived, four traditions were analysed. All four wisdom traditions discussed above have played and continue to play a significant role in the search for morality. The only task that now remains, is to focus on the African and Christian traditions (without exclusion of the others) to see whether a wisdom theology can be constructed that both takes the particular cultural forms of African wisdom seriously, and does not relinquish the main tenets and particularities of the Christian tradition.

Specifically as a Christian endeavour, it is presupposed that the personification of wisdom in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, will both complement and critically supersede all human wisdom as embodied in various traditions (not excluding a self-critical criterion for the Christian tradition itself!) A second presupposition is that the church is to be seen as the embodiment of Christ’s wisdom as it shapes people for virtuous living in the world. As such the church itself has the calling to be an exemplary community of the wise, acting both as inspiration for and critique of other institutional forms in society.

This wise community should transcend the cultural and exclusive establishment of the Greek polis. The power of the polis, as noted earlier, was for conquest and competitive self-aggrandisement. The intellectual capacities of the polis offered speculative philosophy. However, the practical wisdom of the Church, the body of Christ, based on the virtue of charity, is extended to the whole community for the purpose of the community’s formation, instruction, preservation, and renewal (cf Birch and Rasmussen 1989:32).
Jewish exclusivity and legalism are redressed by the coming of Jesus Christ, in order to demonstrate the all-inclusive grace of God. The Jewish accumulated wisdom tradition gathered in narratives and the proverbs are transformed and made available for use as a blessing to all nations. God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 are fulfilled, and the wisdom and power of God in Christ (through the Jewish tradition of wisdom) becomes a blessing to all nations in the Christian wisdom tradition. There is a clear move from exclusive people of Israel to the catholic, ecumenical church.

The African wisdom tradition, like any other wisdom tradition, uses human experience as its source. As such, it carries all human limitations like any other wisdom tradition elsewhere. The common barriers to faith in Christ found in the African wisdom traditions, such as superstitions, ancestral worship, and the concept of Zamani may need to be corrected and transcended by the forward-looking promises of Christ to the Church. This would put Africa on a new pedestal of moral transformation and development. The inclusive power and wisdom of God in Christ go beyond the nepotism and ethnic exclusion that tend to cripple the morally well-intentioned on their path to social and politico-economic development. After all, Africa’s wisdom seems to have paved the way of thinking that is reminiscent of the wider concept of the church, and is naturally attuned to the ideas of moral formation and education in the living of a virtuous life.

The last chapter will address the basic tenets of an African virtue ethic from a Christian theological perspective.
CHAPTER 4
A Theological Analysis: Towards an African Virtue Ethics?

The introduction to this study sets out to look at the appropriate “sources” for a theology of wisdom. As wisdom by its very nature addresses the realities and practicalities of life (individually and collectively) wisdom theology must undertake a contextual analysis. This will inform such a theology of the “signs of the times” to which it can then address its focus and energies. This was attempted via an analysis of the African Renaissance debate in chapter one above – focusing on the dire need for moral rebirth as part of an encompassing renewal of the African continent.

To give a specific theoretical coherence to such a call for moral renewal, this study turned to the source of moral philosophy and aligned itself with an agent-centred theory over against rule-based or consequentialist ethical theories. It was specifically the work of MacIntyre that shaped the idea that a wisdom theology could fruitfully be a “virtue theology”.

But what are the specifics again of such virtue-based theory? The study turned to the well-known outline of the seven virtues to orientate itself toward understanding the various virtues. Two important steps were then made: First a motivation was given of why one virtue, namely wisdom, could serve as prism for all other virtues. And secondly, the actual depiction of wisdom itself was given clearer content via its presentation in four dominant traditions. In the course of this, the complementarities of the various traditions were seen, but also the critical element inherent in the Christian understanding of Christ as the wisdom of the triune God.

The task of this chapter is to relate the wisdom traditions of Africa with that of the Christian theology in such a way that complementarities and discontinuities are depicted, but still brought together in a minimal degree of coherence in the
construction of what may be termed an “African virtue ethic”. To achieve this, we proceed in five\textsuperscript{114} interrelated sections:

1. An African virtue ethics is \textit{theo-centric}, in a trinitarian sense, as it recognises God as moral being from whom all virtues proceed.

2. An African virtue ethic is \textit{pneumatological} as it recognises the Spirit (\textit{moya}) as facilitator of virtue and as a continued divine presence via the “vital force” common to all creation and human beings in particular.

3. An African virtue ethics is \textit{anthropological} as it recognises the individual (\textit{umuntu}) as unique image of the triune God and relative autonomous agent of virtue.

4. An African virtue ethic is \textit{communitarian} as it recognises the virtue of \textit{ubuntu} as guiding life - in-community. Just as God in His \textit{trinitarian fellowship} is the source and protector of virtues, so is the African community the custodian of virtues on God’s behalf.

5. An African virtue ethic is \textit{Christian} as it recognises Jesus Christ as embodiment and prototype of wise and virtuous living.

\textsuperscript{114} Charles Nyamiti, in his article, Contemporary African Christologies (1994), has suggested five themes quoted from the statement of Pope Paul VI in his message to Africa (\textit{Africae terrarium, October 1967}): (i) A spiritual view of life, including “the idea of God, as the first or ultimate cause of all things” (ii) Respect for the dignity of human beings, particularly manifested in the traditional way of education within the family, in initiation rites, and the traditional social and political life. (iii) The sense of the family, evidenced by the attachment to the family and bond with ancestors. (iv) Closely linked with the family is the patr\textit{ria potestas} of the father of the family, implying authority and demanding respect; it is sometimes accompanied with a typical priestly function. (v) The sense of community life expressed by participation in the life of the community into which the individual is introduced by various initiation rites (Nyamiti 1994:68-69). The five points of this chapter greatly overlap with this, although it is developed independently and add a specific Trinitarian flavour to bring them closer to traditional Christian theology.
In order to comprehend the presentation of the triune God it has been referred to in the three *persona* of the trinity. However, our Christian tradition - carried into Africa - has always understood the trinity as also indivisible. This tradition dictates that you cannot talk of God the Father (Mother) without at the same time implying God the Son (Child) or God the Holy Spirit.

### 4.1 Belief in the Trinitarian God from whom all virtue proceeds: the theo-centric dimension

We have established in chapter three, that all three traditions, namely Hellenistic, Judea-Christian and African, affirm the divine origin of wisdom. We demonstrated in various oral and later discourses the fundamental claim of the centrality of God in Africa’s source of wisdom. Samples of African traditional knowledge of God often communicated in attributes were appropriately discussed. They affirmed a Theo-centric moral inclination. The attributes reveal God as supreme, creator, sustainer, and judge. As noted earlier from Thomas, all things proceed from God and return to God. Moreover, when people return to God, they are answerable regarding their lives while here on earth. This claim was reiterated by Bujo, asserting that human beings were created in the image of God, and as such God’s moral attributes should be reflected in them. Therefore as God’s image – human beings possess these attributes at least potentially (cf Bujo 1998:41). The motif of being the image of God forms the very basis for an African’s moral obligation because through it, just as in Judaism, the human being is charged with responsibility (cf Gen 1:26-30).

If God is understood to be good, holy, and perfect, these moral attributes\(^{115}\) form the conceptualisation of moral standards to be imitated by his people, as “privilege of organising earthly life, and making this planet habitable by acknowledging our fellow humans” (Bujo 1998:41). This is a fact that underlines our responsibility for our moral actions (cf Bujo 1998:41).

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\(^{115}\) Though the attributes of God are varied, most Africans use the morally good ones. Hence, most African attributes of God communicate a similar perception of God to those of the Christians. Tribal gods and family cults may remain different, but the biblical God, the creator, and his attributes have been welcomed as sufficient translations of the Supreme Being – God (cf Mbiti 1969:26-51; Setiloane 1986:17-36; Masolo 1994:91-93).
In a translated analysis of Kagame’s work, *La Philosophie buntu-rwandaise de l’etre* (1956), Masolo observes that the basis for the Rwandese moral virtue is God (*Immana*). According to this philosophy, *Immana* is the creator, source of existence, and conserver. As such *Immana* is the author of the “good” as well as the moral laws that protect the well-being of all people and other creatures. Moral attributes of God are given to describe God’s virtue in relation to that of the people (cf Mbiti 1969:36-38).

In turn, people are given names that carry expressions of their response to this moral nature of God such as, for example, *Niyirema*, an attribute which carries two meanings: God is the creator and ruler; *Niyiibizi* (Only God knows or only God rules) or *Immana ihora ihoze* (God avenges quietly). These conceptions of a Theo-centric morality encompass both the metaphysical laws and those that have been “refined as a result of social experience” (Masolo 1994:92-93). The latter are also attributed to God in order to give such laws a higher status of authorship, hence soliciting a non-negotiable response (cf Mbiti 1969:36-38). Anyone who breaks the laws, including the king, receives, so it is perceived, his/her punishment from *Immana* (Mbiti 1969:155-156). 116 If the reward does not happen in the present, it is believed that it will be meted out in the next world, after physical death. The nature of the death of a king itself may be interpreted as a punishment, especially when it is premature. The life to come may also bring about divine vengeful actions, such as misfortunes that befall the descendants of the wrong-doer as a visitation of punishment from past unjust actions of the ancestors.

From the above understanding of God proceeds the African ontological understanding of virtue. God is the good and positive power, transcendent, sometimes perceived as remote and only accessible through lesser divinities that are greater than human beings. God as a creator occupies the highest position as the final point of appeal. Beneath God are the divinities and spirits, which are more powerful than human beings.

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116 This particular concept of punishment/desert can be comprehended on two levels. On one level, anything that happens, especially a misfortune such as snakebites, death in a battle, a car accident or any accidental deaths, carries a metaphysical explanation. A search of the events preceding such an incident is common, as the bereaved try to find out what might be the cause. On another level, incidents of direct revenge such as in feuds, and any otherwise medically explainable death, might be considered as forms of punishment.
beings. The next in rank are the living-dead, Emizimu (Rukiga-Runyankole), Amadlozi (Zulu). The elders, particularly those who fulfilled their rites of passage and are now dead live on watching over their families. Some of the ancestral spirits (emizimu/amdlozi/amnynge) include those of kings, chiefs, rainmakers, priests, diviners, and medicine-men/women. Even in these special cases, the influence of the living-dead on the living is intense among members of the immediate family. The family must perform specific rituals at specified times. This intensity diminishes in order, immediate children having the first order of responsibility, moving away to distant relatives, and subjects in the case of a king or a chief.

This hierarchy of power suggests that intervention is sought from the immediate power on the bottom rung of power in an ascending order. Moral imperatives come from the top. The higher category, God, advises the successive group, the spirits of the ancestors, the ancestors, the elders, and the elders advise the young, and never the reverse. As such, the living would seem to be far from God, dealing with one another and at most seeming to consult ancestral spirits in moral and indeed any other matters.

Because of the above expressions in African morality, Euro-Western critics argue that this African concept of God makes God remote from the African people. Therefore, African moral thought, they argue, is by implication anthropocentric (in the negative sense) and superstitious. However, scholars who have revived previously suppressed African religions and philosophy have a different view of the African world-view. One such view is to explore the idea of “vital force” to give expression to God’s continuous presence in the events of everyday life. God as a creator is not merely remote, but is present, and in fact intervenes in the African moral order.

How this may be construed in order to answer the critique of a “distant moral God” is addressed in the short pneumatological section that follows.

4.2 The Holy Spirit (moya) as “vital force” and facilitator of virtues: the pneumatological dimension

As we saw in the first section, the relation between God as divine moral agent and an ordinary human person (from an African perspective) could be construed as one of
distance. Between the highest and the lowest there are a hierarchy of powers embodied in the social status of the living and the “living-dead” that in a way mediates between God and ordinary persons. The notion of Christ as proto-ancestor is here quite important (see discussion later), but one could also explore the potential of a different African notion to explain an enduring relation between God and human beings, namely that of the “vital force”.

Setiloane, in his booklet, *African Theology: An Introduction* (1986), explains this “vital force” as a divine connection between human beings and God. “It is God”, Setiloane maintains, “who has force, power in himself, God gives existential power of survival and increase to other forces” (Setiloane 1986:14; cf Mbiti 1969:29-38). The force emitted from God extends to all human beings, but Setiloane asserts that it is also given out from God into animals and even plants. He believes that “the human being is like a live electric wire which is ever exuding force or energy in all directions” (Setiloane 1986:13). This exuding force - the vital force - is called Seriti – Isithunzi Seriti (Sotho) often translated as “dignity or personality”. Riti is the word-stem from which moroti is derived, which means umthunzi (shadow or shade). Concerning this umthunzi, Setiloane expounds:

> It is like an aura around the human person, an invisible shadow or cloud or mist forming something like a magnetic or radar field. It gives forth into the traffic or weltering pool of life in community the uniqueness of each person and each object (Setiloane 1986:13).

There are claims that the vital force is everywhere. Though its seat is perceived to be inside the individual, it extends beyond the physical body. Kagame of Rwanda makes a distinction between the human power/vital force and that of animals. This is a departure from Setiloane’s view. The human power which Setiloane calls *Umthunzi* (Sotho) is here called *Igicucu* (Kinyarwanda). For Kagame, these two agree insofar as they refer to the physical appearance, such as occupying space which animals share with human beings. However, Kagame uses another term – *amagara*, which refers to the “principle of intelligence”. In his convincing argument, Kagame makes it clear that *amagara* carries further qualities such as the “ability to reflect, compare and invent, which is only unique to human beings” (see Masolo 1994:88-89). Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that umtunzi may refer to umuntu, as the human physical
form that occupies space, while amagara includes power of discernment that is unique to human beings.

Kasenene affirms this understanding of “vital force” in his article, Ethics in African Theology (1994). He agrees with Setiloane and Kagame that “vital force” is “life” given by God. As such it is a gift to be jealously guarded from conception, through pregnancy, birth, naming, youth, and adulthood, by rites of passage. All these rituals are intended to “ensure that vitality is promoted, maintained and strengthened” (Kasenene 1994:140). Moral value and norms are established in order “to make life stronger, and be protected from misfortunes or from a diminution of being” (Kasenene 1994:140). He explains:

Supreme happiness is to possess the greatest vital force, and the worst misfortune is the diminution of this force through illness, suffering, depression, fatigue, injustice, oppression or any other social or physical evil (Kasenene 1994:140).

From this ethical point of view, Kasenene observes:

Any action which increases life or vital force is right, and whatever decreases it is wrong. Sin and moral evil manifest themselves in any attempt to diminish, threaten or destroy the life of another person. Sin and evil in the African world-view are measured in terms of the life of individuals who suffer injustice, oppression and destruction at the hands of their fellows (Kasenene 1994:140-141).

We can now conclude that “vital force” is significant in at least three related aspects: It is, firstly, the power of God present in all creation and without which life is impossible. It therefore carries a theological meaning. Vital force, secondly, in its presentation of amagara, carries an anthropological meaning as distinguishing feature of human beings from among all creatures (something related to imago Dei perhaps?). Because of its intrinsic link with life, growth, and personality, the vital force acquires, thirdly, a normative dimension as criterion for right and wrong, wise and foolish. Wise action increases the vital force; foolish action reduces life.

But the crucial point is that one could construe the Spirit of God, the moya, as that power of life, the vital force, through which God is present in all creation and
specifically in human beings. We know from the Jewish tradition that God created through the *ruah* and that God specifically blew life into lifeless *adama* to create the first human being (see Gen 1-2). Where human beings respond to this life-giving power, personified as the Spirit of God, wisdom, accountable living, and the exercise of virtues become possible. It is the Spirit of wisdom who guides us to increase instead of diminishing life. The Old Testament teaches us that God’s Spirit can leave irresponsible leaders and prophets, just as we learn from the New Testament that it is possible to resist and even quench the vital moral force of the Spirit (Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30).

Conversely, because the Spirit is the expression of God’s life force as a fundamentally moral force, the Spirit is uniquely placed to facilitate virtuous living. In the language of the New Testament, someone who “walks in the Spirit” (Gal 5) displays gifts and fruits that enhances virtuous living, leading individuals and communities – in African terms - to “increase life”, that is, to increase Godliness, the source of vital force.

This brings us to the point to assert that an African virtue ethics is not to be imagined without a constitutive pneumatological dimension which not only explains life and personhood, but enables virtuous life, a precondition for wise living as individual and as community. To these two inter-related aspects of individual and community we now turn.

### 4.3 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 Schreiter’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.117

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.

117 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 heteronymous 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. 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).

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118 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 otinna onwina, (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.)
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 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.

4.4 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 Xhosas 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.

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, 
wafua akakurerera abaana’

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

119 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.
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.\(^{120}\)

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 “intrinsically 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 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

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\(^{120}\) 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.
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.121 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.122

121 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).

122 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 ayia 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*:

123 “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: “umuntu ng’umuntu 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

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123 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. 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).
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?

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.  

**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.

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

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124 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).
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).\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{125} 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.
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 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 remediying 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).

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 even 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.

This study is concluded with a short discussion of the crucial importance of the Christological dimension of an African virtue ethic.

4.5 Jesus Christ as prototype and embodiment of wisdom: the Christological dimension

In the earlier analysis of Christian wisdom above, the fundamental Christological character embedded in Christ as the wisdom of God, has been expounded (see 1 Cor 1:24).126 Jesus Christ is first and foremost the image of the invisible God (Col.1:15).

126 G. Goldsworthy (1978) argues that wisdom is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is because, he maintains, wisdom always functions within the framework of God’s saving acts. Christ
We have argued that God is source all wisdom and virtue (a view affirmed by all wisdom traditions). To this extent, then, Jesus Christ communicates this divine wisdom and virtue in his humaneness (umuntu with ubuntu). He is the embodiment of virtue ethics. In him we experience the ideal of virtuous living as it proceeds from divine wisdom. Moreover this wisdom is eternal just as God is eternal. That is to say that, virtue and wisdom exemplified in Jesus embraces all people of all time, eternity, past, present (in the concrete moment) and the future.

To the African Christian, Jesus Christ, then is not simply one of the many ancestors, as Bujo has ably explained. Rather he is the “Proto-Ancestor, which does not place him in the biological lineage, but rather gives him a position on a transcendental level, where he is the one upon whose existential power and the life of the ancestors depend” (Bujo 199:104). As such we can draw from Jesus Christ all wisdom in His recorded word and imitate His virtuous living by the prompting of His Spirit. In Jesus Christ we encounter the triune God, recreating, redeeming and enabling our faulting human natures to attain the divine standards of virtuous and wise living.

Jesus Christ is also the prototype of the ideal human being (umuntu with ubuntu). It is demonstrated in John 1:14 that Jesus took human flesh and became a human being. He revealed God’s glory demonstrated grace and truth, divine qualities that customises ubuntu –Africa’s qualification for the ideal agent of virtue ethics. Therefore, in Jesus Christ we have umuntu (an individual) with ubuntu (virtue) to be imitated. But Jesus Christ does not operate in isolation. He is also the head of the church - his body (Col. 1:18). This means that he is the mind (the wisdom) of the community of believers. To embrace him is to be a community of the wise.

This Christological dimension that captures Jesus Christ as prototype and embodiment of wisdom is succinctly illustrated in the ancient hymn found in Philippians 2. To conclude this section, and our study, we turn to a close exegesis of this passage.

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was a saviour and was also a wise man, whose virtuous living is to be imitated for responsible living (cf Goldsworth 1978:170).
4.5.1 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 become 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” (phroneo). 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 disobeyed\textsuperscript{127}, Jesus Christ, the new Adam, must 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 \textit{umuntu}. Here Jesus Christ became human, an individual, \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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 “\textit{something to be grasped}”. Instead, he uses his position to promote the

\textsuperscript{127} 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 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)
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. 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 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 Gyekeye 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.

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128 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).
“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, discussed earlier under ecclesiology, 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.

“This 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.

After many other supportive evidence in African and biblical proverbs I wish to conclude with the salient points in Paul’s ancient hymn with its reference to the centrality of Jesus Christ as the model for virtues ethics. Paul uses the wisdom of this ancient hymn to communicate the dynamic character shaped by virtues as demonstrated by Jesus Christ. Three levels concerning our fundamental motifs with regard to this study are thus fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the prototype of virtue ethics in a universal sense, and for African virtue ethics in particular. Below is a summary of that dynamic movement that restores God to the centre of our virtue ethics, reclaims the individual and sets him/her on a course of constant moral renewal within the new community of the good, just, and wise.

The dynamic movement in this ancient hymn also demonstrates the motifs of the triune God, the individual and the community.

First, in Christ, the traditional belief in God is affirmed. Jesus, “who being in the very nature God” reintroduces God into African morality. He is no longer remote, but close, in the heart of the believer. He nevertheless remains transcendent as
demonstrated in the transformation of the individual and enhancement of the virtues for service. Because Christ transcends human reason, He is able to inform, correct, and transform human moral thinking. Moreover, He is the origin dispenser and judge of our use of virtues.

Secondly, 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.

Thirdly, 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. Amen.


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