D.I. Manomi

Dr. D.I. Manomi, Research Center for Ethics in Antiquity and Christianity, Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, Germany/Department of Linguistics and (Bible) Translation, Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Bukuru, Jos, Nigeria.
E-mail: manomitrust@gmail.com
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2092-4596

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TOWARDS AN AFRICAN BIBLICAL VIRTUE ETHICS? REFLECTIONS ON THE LETTER TO TITUS[1] THROUGH A PROGRESSIVE-NEGOTIATED-ETHICS

ABSTRACT

African conceptions of virtue, in comparison with the virtue-ethical perspectives of the letter to Titus, have foundational and narrative tensions, yet they are in tandem in some important respects.

1 It is helpful to clarify that I am aware of the old but extant debate on the historical situation and authorship of the letter to Titus and the Pastoral Epistles generally. Taking a position in favour of either Paul's authorship or a pseudonymous Paul would require an elaborate expansion or defence of one's view. On this basis, I prefer to shift the authorship question to the background, in order to keep the focus on the text rather than on the authorship debate. Hence, I would refer to "the author", the historical writer of the letter, where necessary. However, if it would be of help in understanding some of my interpretive decisions, it would be fair to say that I do not find the arguments against Paul's authorship sufficiently convincing yet, especially after my virtue-ethical reflections on the letter. Therefore, I give Paul the benefit of the doubt, and regard the text as historical rather than fictitious.

Consequently, appropriating a virtue ethic that is relevant to African contexts and simultaneously accountable to the virtue-ethical perspectives of Titus requires the application of a synthetic methodology. Hence, this article newly develops and describes such a methodology as "progressive-negotiated-ethics". In applying this methodology, the article negotiates, imagines and emerges a virtue-ethical horizon that is simultaneously African and biblical, described as "African biblical virtue ethics". Such a third virtue-ethical space, negotiated from the two distinct virtue concepts of African ethics and biblical ethics, takes both the intricacies of biblical ethics and the complexities of African ethics seriously.

1. INTRODUCTION

African biblical hermeneutics has been rightly described as an interpretive "home-making" (Ngwa 2017:3).[2] One of the areas that is still largely "diasporic"[3] and needs such home-making is biblical ethics, especially virtue ethics.[4] This article initiates a discussion towards articulating a biblical virtue ethics that is simultaneously at home to Africans and accountable to biblical exegesis. The letter to Titus is chosen for the purpose of the current study because of another research I conducted on virtue ethics in the letter to Titus,[5] with a conclusion that the letter to Titus could be described as a

2 Thanks is due to Dr Ehase Sunday Agyeno, for proofreading this paper and making valuable observations, and to Prof. Dr. Ruben Zimmermann, for his useful guide on my ongoing doctoral dissertation, from which this article emanates, and for his encouragement to publish it. I also thank those who attended and responded to my presentation of the content of this article at the 2018 Society of Biblical Literature in Denver, United States of America (programme unit: African biblical hermeneutics). Their comments during and after the presentation of the paper and their encouragement to me to publish this nascent idea, from which others can pick up and continue the discussion, has been helpful. It is also noteworthy that most of the content of this article is drawn from the hermeneutical aspects of my ongoing doctoral (exegetical) dissertation, from which I have extracted these few points, in order to initiate a discussion towards an African biblical virtue ethics. After my doctoral research, I hope to develop this thought into a full research, leading to a comprehensive book on the subject.

3 Ngwa's (2017:1) term.

4 Metz (2014:276) laments that, while scholarly discussions on virtue ethics is fairly robust in the Western world, hardly any attention is paid to African virtue ethics.

5 As mentioned in footnote 2 above, the content of this article is mostly from my ongoing doctoral dissertation on virtue ethics in the letter to Titus (at the University of Mainz, Germany), which undertakes an extensive exegetical

"virtue-ethical text". Hence, it is helpful to initiate the discussion on African biblical virtue ethics with a biblical text whose virtue-ethical feature I have identified and elaborately discussed elsewhere.

A major methodological criticism against biblical ethicists is that

> their ethical claims either have no direct and sustained reference to or are not built upon any major ethical theories (Chan 2013:29).[6]

This research, therefore, employs virtue ethics theory as the hermeneutical framework on which its ethical claims are built. Virtue ethics (also known as areteology,[7] character ethics, or the ethics of "being") is an ethic of character, attending to inner dispositions, motives, moral development, and the morality of persons more than the morality of actions. The following three questions summarise the core concepts of virtue ethics: Who am I? Who ought I to become? How do I get there? (Harrington & Keenan 2010:3).[8] Noting how most of the definitions of virtue ethics omit some aspects that are relevant to African ethics such as the symbols of character, this research defines virtue ethics more comprehensively as a critical reflection on the sources, symbols, senses, and services of character in moral formation and function.

Virtue ethics, as construed in this article, has the following characteristics: a sense of a moral *telos*; more emphasis on the character, habits, and inner dispositions of moral persons more than moral actions, and a concern for human flourishing or human good. Other characteristics include moral perfectionism in the sense of a call for continuous moral growth and concern with every aspect of life as morally relevant; a sense of particularity of the moral agents; the concept of moral exemplar; a commitment to moral development through training or education, and the moral significance of community.

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analysis of the letter to Titus, with a small section reflecting on appropriating it into an African context.

6 While Chan (2013:29) directs this criticism especially to some of the leading biblical ethicists such as Richard B. Hays, Frank J. Matera, Sandra M. Schneiders, and Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, this criticism applies to many more scholars.

7 From ἀρετή, the Greek word for "virtue" or "excellence". See Lovin (2011:187).

8 Even though Harrington and Keenan put these questions in plural form, their "we" does not explicate the concept of community that is suitable to the African context.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article develops a new methodology described as "progressive-negotiated-ethics". It is progressive in the sense that it brings two ethical perspectives (biblical ethics and African ethics), broadly stated, into a dialogue towards imagining and emerging a third ethical horizon. It is also negotiated in the sense that concessions are made where tension exists between the two ethical perspectives, and appropriations are made where tandems exist, or where tensions are negotiated. In the current study, this methodology progressively negotiates two virtue-ethical perspectives, namely that of the letter to Titus and that of African ethics, respectively, towards imagining and emerging an African biblical virtue ethics. It proceeds, first, by identifying or describing the tandems between the two virtue-ethical perspectives, followed by the tensions, and then the actual progressive negotiations.

3. APPLICATION OF THE PROGRESSIVE-NEGOTIATED-ETHICS METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description of the tandems and tensions

3.1.1 Tandems

An aspect in which the two ethical perspectives are in tandem concerns virtue acquisition and character development. In many African cultures, "creation of moral persons" (Jackson 1982:24) is not left to chance, but achieved through initiation rites, which mark decisive points in one's life. By means of these initiation rites, one graduates from childhood to adulthood, acquires the virtues needed for personal and social ordering, obtains new perspectives on life, and becomes a "new person" (Jackson 1982:24). In the selected biblical text, Titus 2:12 makes reference to the Greek word παιδεύουσα "teaching", a present active participle verb form of παιδεύω, meaning "to teach, instruct, train, educate, chastise, discipline, correct, give guidance". It suggests a continuing process of moral training,[9] thereby

9 Smith (2012:318-319, 321-322) notes that "the continuing aspect of the instruction suggests the nuances of training, encouragement, persuasion, practice, and discipline. See also Lock (1924:144) who has "training, discipline", the educative power of God's grace. Lock notes that the thought conveyed in this instance is similar to the Greek idea of "redemption from ignorance". He opines that this agrees with Pauline thought, and the focus, in this instance, is primarily on "redemption from moral evil". Hanson (date?:183-184), on the other hand, argues that the author uses παιδεύουσα to mean "chastise",

presenting a virtue-ethical concept, namely that living a godly life comes through continuous training, equipping, or teaching.[10] This corresponds to the Greek-philosophical concept of παιδεία as a means of civilising people in the virtues.[11] In addition, the author moralises the early Christian concept "the grace of God" that has been revealed, presenting it as the moral effect of the Christ-event on the believer.[12]

The moral effect of the Christ-event and the concept of παιδεία "teaching" (Titus 2:11-14), as described above, correlate with initiation rites in African cultures. In Titus 3:5-6, the author recalls baptism as

> the very point in life at which God's merciful acts changed not only a person's status before God, but also the person's thinking and doing under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Herzer 2007:131).[13]

Moreover, he uses the verb ζήσωμεν, a subjunctive, aorist active, first person plural of the verb ζάω, which means "to live". Using ζήσωμεν "to live" with an ingressive nuance (Mounce 2000:424)[14] shows that the Christ-event imparts virtue through a radical moral transformation, expressing the virtue concept of moral progress towards a moral *telos*. Just as the

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not "educate". He further argues that, in contemporary pagan philosophical vocabulary, παιδεία (training) was an "autonomous activity, a form of self-improvement", but the author, in this instance, appropriates it in the Christian context of God's dealing with people. Moreover, Hultgren (1984:164) notes that the grace has an "educative effect, not in a speculative way, but in the sense of moral training". Sparks (1985:83) states that the manifestation of God's grace in Christ is "instructive for believers; it teaches them 'how' to live in this world".

10 Knight (1992:319) understands παιδεύουσα and other related verbs in Titus 2:12 as having an ongoing present significance, because it is the controlling verb in the present tense. Kent (1982:227) has "to educate, train, chastise", and in Titus 2:12, it is for believers in this present age, before Christ's return.

11 Towner (2006:747). See Young, *PE,* 79–84 For more discussion on teaching and learning in the ancient world, see Young (1994:79-84) who notes that "the education of mind and body through παιδεία was the classical Greek ideal" which is reflected in the Pastorals (1994:79).

12 See Towner (1989:151); Smith (2012:318-319).

13 Herzer (2007:131) rightly argues that the pneumatological dimension in this text is significant to understanding the ethical argumentation, because it reveals the "motivating force behind Christians' behavior towards all humans", which Herzer thinks is not un-Pauline.

14 In the Pastoral Epistles, Mounce (2000:424) states that God's grace is the instructor, not Hellenistic philosophy. Towner (2006:720) also notes that the norm σώφρον and its cognates, especially in Titus 2:12, are "explicitly identified with the new life made possible by the Christ-event". The Christ-event is the mystical source of this life.

Christ-event imparts the right virtues such as self-control, justice, and godliness for Christian living (Titus 2:11-12), initiation rites in African cultures impart appropriate virtues for responsible living. Similarly, just as παιδεία "teaching" (Titus 2:12) is a continuous process[15] of character development throughout a person's lifetime, so also are the different rites of passage for continuing character development. Nevertheless, I will discuss an inherent tension in this regard below.

3.1.2 Tensions

I now turn to the tensions between the virtue-ethical perspectives of Titus and African ethics. Metz (2014:276-284) identifies two foundational values for virtue in sub-Saharan Africa as community and vitality.[16] The tension between the two virtue-ethical perspectives lies in their foundational, existential, and narrative structures. The virtue-ethical perspective of Titus is predicated on the early Christian narrative and tradition centred on the Christ-event, whereas African ethics has its own narrative in its orally transmitted tradition, religion, and culture.

The second significant tension concerns altruism and narcissism, or individuality and community. The altruistic nature and heavily social concerns of African virtues place it in tension with the Western account of virtue ethics, which has been accused of being narcissistic and self-centred.[17] In this sense, one of the contributions an African construal

15 παιδεύουσα is a present continuous verb "is teaching".

16 Metz (2014:276-284) relates the concept of *ubuntu* with virtue and sees a similarity between the sub-Saharan African ethics and Greek-philosophical ethics in their concept of moral perfectionism. He further notes that *ubuntu* is grounded in the notion that human beings share some natures, but also have others that are distinctively human and of higher quality than the animals. Therefore, one's basic aim in life should be to develop the valuable features of human nature, or to exhibit *ubuntu*, humanness. When one is said to have *ubuntu*, it means that one is "generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate". In criticising someone for inappropriate behaviour, one could say that "he is not a person" or even "he is an animal"; in other words, he does not have *ubuntu*.

17 For a discussion of the objections to virtue ethics in secular circles and their appropriate responses, especially as it relates to applied ethics, see Louden (2012:503-509). For similar discussions of the criticisms against virtue ethics in philosophical circles and their appropriate responses, see Oakley & Cocking (2001:31-38). For a discussion on the nature of virtue ethics, see Oakley & Cocking (2001:7ff.). For a general discussion on the suitability of virtue approach to professional roles and ethics, see Oakley & Cocking (2001), in general. For the response to objections against the Christian appropriation of virtue ethics as being self-regarding, see Kotva (1996:143-147), who argues

of virtue would make to the global discussion on virtue ethics is that it indicates how the self-regarding or self-centred nature of virtue theory could be considerably *de-selfed,* illustrating how individual and communal virtues could be dynamically integrated, leading to individual and community flourishing.[18] The narrative tensions and the altruism versus narcissism tensions underlay (and are, therefore, evident in) most of the other tensions between African ethics and the ethics of Titus.

Another tension concerns the three most important questions in virtue ethics mentioned earlier. Virtue ethics, as advanced by MacIntyre and Hauerwas, is a narrative ethics. It views one's moral situation as not disconnected from the story of the community or tradition to which one belongs. MacIntyre (1981:191) argues that the unity of the virtues is intelligible only to the extent that one's life is conceived and evaluated as a unitary life. In this instance, the concept of selfhood finds its unity in the "unity of a narrative which links birth to death as narrative beginning to middle to end".[19] It is in the context of a narrative that the three most important questions in virtue ethics theory emerge and find their essence. However, owing to its communal structure, an African account of virtue ethics appropriates the narrative questions from "Who am I?" to "Who are *we*?"; from "Who ought I to become?" to "Who ought *we* to become?", and from "How do I get there?" to "How do *we* get there?". Moreover, African

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that there is an implicit self-regarding in every other ethical theory, and virtue ethics has only explicated that implicit motif. Nevertheless, he concludes that virtue ethics is too other-regarding to be objected as self-centred. For example, some, if not all of the virtues themselves are acquired and expressed in the context of relationships and community such as, for example, hospitality, courage, "distributive" justice, and so on. Human excellence or *telos* is not defined or achieved exploitatively at the expense of others, but in company, and for the common good of all.

18 The tension between the two ethical perspectives could further be described. In the African account of virtue, one sees oneself from the point of view of the community, while in the Western account, one views the community from the point of view of oneself. In the African context, one is to first define "who we are" before one finds "who I am". One finds oneself, one's bearing and one's place in and through finding the community, tradition or narrative to which one belongs and its *telos*. One's *telos* in life is the community's *telos*, and flourishing is in terms of the flourishing of the community rather than the individual. In the Western account of virtue ethics, one first finds oneself and one's *telos* before one tries to figure out how one fits into and could contribute to the society.

19 See also Hauerwas (1997; 1975). Kunhiyop (2008:66) notes that, in their understanding of human beings as created beings, Africans have mostly taken a holistic view of man, seeing him as a single entity, contrary to a dualistic view that separates body and soul.

biblical virtue ethics would not only ask "Who are we?", but would expand the understanding of "we" from one's immediate community to a wider sense of the human community.[20] In this way, an African account of virtue ethics gives due relevance and emphasis to its communal structure and simultaneously explicates the social relevance of the virtues.

There also exists a tension regarding "being" and "doing". Due to the many orally transmitted dos and don'ts that confront one in an African society from birth to death, Mbiti (1969:214) describes the essence of African morality generally as more "societary" than "spiritual", and that it is more a morality of "conduct" than "being". He further describes it as dynamic ethics rather than static ethics, "for it defines what a person *does* rather than what he *is*" (Mbiti 1969:214). In other words, one is what one is because of what one does, and not what one does because of what one is. In this light, man is viewed as neither good nor bad, his association with good or evil is solely in terms of what he does or does not, in conformity with societal values and expectations.[21] This description of African morality places it in direct tension with the neo-Aristotelian concept of virtue and the virtue-ethical perspective of Titus, which are primarily the ethics of "being" more than "doing". At the intra-textual linguistic level, the author of Titus frequently uses the verb εἶναι "to be" (for example, Titus 2:2, 4, 6, 9) to describe moral "being" than "doing". Similarly, he presents the ethical norms in adjectival and adverbial forms, in order to describe more the qualities of moral persons than moral actions.

20 See Odozor (2014:205), who contends that African Christian theology must emphasise the universalism of God and his love in the God-language. The parable of the good Samaritan illustrates this. God through Christ has made himself our neighbour, and has made us all neighbours, irrespective of our different ethnic groups, social classes, gender, and other differences. For a critique of these virtue-ethical questions, see Musschenga (1995:201), who argues that, in contemporary pluralistic society, each moral tradition is simply one among many, and has to take into account other moral traditions. In this light, he criticises Hauerwas' narrative ethics of virtue, especially its central questions. He argues that an ethics which takes the problems of plurality seriously, cannot confine itself to the question 'Who am I/who do I want to be?' (or: 'Who are we/do we want to be?'). Another ethical question must be added: Who am I/do I want to be among/together with others who think and act differently?' The willingness to relate and live with people who think differently should also become part of one's identity.

21 Mbiti (1969:214).

Nevertheless, exceptions need to be made to Mbiti's description of African morality. For example, among the Zaar[22] people of Bauchi State, Nigeria, one's character is often described more in terms of "being" than "doing", even though "doing" is the yardstick for assessing "being". It is common to hear one being described as "ci nə Zaar mbuni", in other words, "s/he *is* a good person", or "ci nə kuskə Zaar", in other words, "s/he *is* a wicked person". Such an assessment of one's character is normally made when a persistent attitude or pattern of behaviour is observed, which earns one the description of either being good or being bad. In this instance, the virtue-ethical concept of "being" rather than "doing" is employed in assessing one's character.

3.2 Progressive negotiation towards an African biblical virtue ethics

This section negotiates a new horizon called "African biblical virtue ethics" through progressive negotiations, concessions, and appropriation of the tensions between the virtue-ethical perspectives of Titus and those of African ethics. The undergirding rationale for such negotiations and concessions is that African ethics is or should no longer be regarded as "the cradle" and "experimental space" (Ngwa 2017:1) of ethics, but a developed space, with its complete ethical resources and structures, that has something to offer to global ethical discourse. While Westerners have articulated their virtue theory, African ethicists also need to articulate and negotiate their own concept of virtue "with eyes wide opened", rather than importing ethics. In this way, African ethics not only enriches, but also benefits from other ethical perspectives. This also applies to biblical ethics.

The first and most significant concession the Western-oriented virtue theory would make to an African virtue theory is its narcissistic or individualistic nature, in favour of the communal nature of African ethics. The altruism or communal relevance of the virtues in Titus is not sufficiently explicit for an African biblical virtue ethics. Hence, an African interpretation of the virtue-ethical perspectives of Titus would explicate, articulate, and lay more emphasis on the communal relevance of the virtues than their individual relevance, or at least lay the same level of emphasis.

However, while in an African biblical virtue ethics the community plays a significant role, aspects of communal living that significantly hinder the flourishing (*eudaimonia*) of some individuals or groups would also

22 I come from the Zaar tribe and have lived and grown up in five different typical Zaar communities or villages until the age of 28 years. I thus possess a first-hand understanding of the Zaar language and culture.

need to be modified or conceded. The primary weakness of the sense of community in African cultures is its discriminatory aspects and the tendency to stereotype an entire family, clan, or tribe with bad character traits. Odozor (2014:244) considers this discriminatory tendency in African communitarianism as a "critical weakness in African traditional moral reasoning". This weakness, he observes, partly explains the participation of Africans in slave-trade history. Moreover, it is a contributing factor in the persistent incessant inter-ethnic violence in Africa nowadays (Odozor 2014:212-214).[23] A virtue-ethical African community would, therefore, take the equality and full humanity of everyone seriously, irrespective of the stereotypes associated with one's clan, family history, age, gender, social status, or health status.[24]

An African biblical virtue ethics would redefine community from the known other to the human other, conceding and developing, in the words of Ngwa (2017:1), an "activist mode"[25] against the discriminatory tendencies and cultural stereotypes. It would emphasise that, even if it were true that the individuals in stereotyped clans and tribes shared in some acquired bad characters, the moral transformative power of the Christ-event effects a new identity, character, and entire life of persons, thereby rendering such stereotypes invalid and obsolete. This is congruent to the "we were" but "now we are" rhetoric in Titus 3:3-7.[26] An African virtue ethics would contend that character or virtue is basically an individual and not communal phenomenon, which is formed and finds (or should find) expression in the community, for human flourishing.

Herzer (2007:127-134) applies Titus 3:8 to the issue of reconciliation, especially with the former members of the Eastern German Communist secret service known as the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, after the political reunification of Germany in 1989. In light of the incessant ethno-religious conflicts ravaging many African communities, African biblical virtue ethicists could appropriate Herzer's message towards forgiveness

23 See also Paris (1995:61). In view of this, Odozor (2014:213) suggests that the notion of social relatedness, which has been widely characterised as central to the definition of the human person and ethics in Africa, "needs a boost to take it beyond mere blood ties to universal vision". Writing as a Christian theologian, Odozor (2014:213) opines that "this boost can be given through close attention to some key ideas of the human person which are found in Christian scriptures and tradition".

24 For a discussion on the ethical issues in the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, see Dube (2008:171-185).

25 Ngwa (2017:1).

26 See also Titus 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 5:17.

and reconciliation among the warring African ethno-religious groups. Forgiveness and reconciliation are possible in light of the new character, new identity, and new life occasioned in, and through the effect of the Christ-event on the life of individuals and communities. This cross-border[27] sense of community fellow-feeling would lead to a peaceful and egalitarian co-existence with neighbouring communities and people of different faiths in Africa. In a virtue-ethical Africa, forgiveness, reconciliation, and all other virtues that promote human flourishing become desirable virtues to acquire rather than mere moral duties to fulfil. If love, forgiveness, and reconciliation become character, human flourishing becomes the norm.

Beyond articulating a virtue-ethical African community, African biblical virtue ethics would explicate and articulate the social relevance of the individual-oriented biblical virtues. In this instance, two examples from the letter to Titus suffice: self-control and justice.

3.2.1 Self-control

Jackson's (1982:24-25) description of the concept of self-control among the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone neatly illustrates how self-control is understood in many African cultures. He mentions that initiation rites teach one the virtue of self-control. One learns to control one's feelings, thoughts, and actions, which promote "steadiness of mind and body" (Jackson 1982:24-25).[28] Unlike in the Western culture, where self-control is an individual achievement and excellence, self-control in African cultures is "always regarded as an aspect of social order, not as a means of self-aggrandizement" (Jackson 1982:24-25). In this instance, self-control is closely associated with upholding communal values and laws (Jackson 1982:24-25).

The virtue-ethical reading of σωφρόνως "self-control" shows how the letter to Titus has provided a model of negotiation, concession, and appropriation of the "self" aspect of self-control. The author concedes the Graeco-Roman concept of self-control by *de-selfing* the "self" aspect, giving room for both divine and human cooperation in moral agency (Titus 2:12). African ethics does not have a sense of divine moral agency or co-agency, even though divine or spiritual entities are always in view. Divine entities such as gods and the "living-dead" (Mbiti 1969:46)[29]

27 A word inspired by the title of an article by Theobald (2017:305).

28 Jackson's (1982:24-25) discussions particularly refer to the Kuranko people of Sierra Leone, but it is similar in many African cultures.

29 In African culture, "living-dead" describes dead members of the family or community who are believed to still be actively involved in the affairs of the family but at a different level, as ancestors or spirits. They are believed to have

sanction, reward or punish moral acts, but do not give special moral capacity. Hence, African biblical virtue ethics would appropriate Titus' concept of co-moral agency, showing that the Christ-event not only saves, but also continuously teaches and enables a believer to live a morally acceptable life.

3.2.2 Justice/righteousness

Among the four Greek cardinal virtues, unlike temperance and courage that are related to controlling various kinds of desires, prudence and justice are related to the habits that one develops for making the right judgements (Lovin 2011:191).[30] Justice concerns giving each person his/her due. It also concerns the equal or fair distribution of burdens and benefits among individuals and groups in a community (Lovin 2011:191). In contemporary discourse, especially in African contexts, justice is often associated with politics and political leaders. However, in virtue ethics, as inspired by its Graeco-Roman roots, justice is equally an individual virtue, expected to be expressed in one's everyday life (Lovin 2011:191). The use of justice in Titus conveys both the political and the individual nuances. For example, the political nuance is represented in naming justice as a quality required of the bishop (Titus 1:8), whereas the individual nuance is represented in naming justice among the virtues that the "grace" teaches all believers (Titus 2:12; 3:3-7). However, considering the fact that the bishop is "to be" just, implying "being" more than "doing" and character more than action, the individual nuance is more represented in Titus than the political nuance.

In appropriating the virtue-ethical concepts of justice in Titus into an African biblical virtue ethics, both the individual and the political nuances of virtue would be equally emphasised. The individual aspect of justice would emphasise how Africans, for example, would strike a fine balance between work and leisure, temperance and courage,[31] and "license and

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the power to reward good behaviour and punish bad ones. In relation to the morality of spiritual powers who are believed to be in constant interaction with people, Ellis (2016:31) explains that, in pre-colonial African ethics, spiritual powers of the invisible world were ascribed a "morally neutral character", not intrinsically good or bad. The moral nature of the spirits depends on their relationship with human beings. For one to maintain stability in one's life, one has to keep close attention and good relationship with the spirit beings, just like other social relationships, because the spirits can act good or bad, depending on how one treats them.

30 For a discussion on the Christian perspective on Aristotle's cardinal virtues, see Lovin (2011:193-196).

31 See Lovin (2011:191).

stupidity".[32] It would also seek to strike a fine balance between the place of the community and that of the individual; between genuine respect and hypocrisy; between a husband always demanding submission from his wife and being a burden to her; between age and respectability, and between power and humility.

The political aspect relates to judicial and distributive justice in forms of advocating for human rights, gender equality, equal access to education; fight against domestic violence and child abuse, and fight for freedom of expression and association. Others include an insistence on equal distribution of communal resources such as lands, infrastructure, and political appointments; fight against ethno-religious discrimination and violence, and the like.[33] Such a virtue-ethically just and balanced life at individual and communal, commonplace and political, local, national and international levels would lead to both individual and community flourishing in Africa.

4. CONCLUSION

This article not only demonstrates the need to develop an African biblical virtue ethics that takes the complexities of both biblical ethics and African ethics seriously, but also proposes and applies a synthetic and coherent methodology with which the nascent idea of developing an African biblical virtue ethics would proceed. Through the application of this methodology in hermeneutical relations between virtue ethics in the letter to Titus and virtue ethics in African contexts, this article has imagined and emerged a third virtue-ethical space that is simultaneously biblical and African. In this way, this article initiates and calls for continuing discussion towards developing and concretising "African biblical virtue ethics".

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32 Aristotle is of the opinion that, in relation to desire, σωφροσύνη refers to the mean (μεσότης) between "license and stupidity" (Luck 1971:1099).

33 These individual and political aspects of justice represent some of the aspects in African culture and ethics that need to be transformed by the Christian gospel.

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Virtue	Deug
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