



Re-imagining an African ethical value-based social contract: in the context of using “Ubuntu” as an African framework

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Abstract

South Africa is a democratic country. However, some missiology scholars, citizens, and leaders see it as one of the countries that are very violent by comparison to others. On one hand, others see it as a country that does not abide by its laws. On the other hand, others see it as a morally depraved country. What causes this negative situation? One of the answers could be political freedom and political transformation, which basically came after a long period of struggle against the unfair conditions of the past apartheid era. As a result, issues around social imbalance are exacerbated by an influx of refugees and a resultant increase in population. Creating a more tangible rationale for social contracts that South African citizens and other neighboring countries would be attracted to commit to, is indeed a huge task. A missiological examination uncovers, however, that despite of all the cultural differences and frictions prevalent in societies, some people are genuinely able to share a set of basic values that arguably could form the core of the sought-for moral direction needed in South Africa. Thus, combining the missiological trends (Mangayi & Baron, 2020) and the ideas of Ubuntu (Bangura, 2005) could be functional in bringing home to the next generation the notion of henceforth living by the precepts of such a moral direction and social contract. It is therefore this article's intention to use missiological, philosophical, theological, and African knowledge systems anchored on Ubuntu (Bangura, 2005) to illuminate social contract theories for decent social change. Writing from a southern African context, I propose Ubuntu, because its deep commitment to community, character and hospitality, has much to contribute to interculturality in the important missiological mandate.

Keywords: ethical values, social contract, ubuntu, social connectedness, social reconstruction, social change.

Introduction

Much has been stated recently regarding a range of cruel and violent acts perpetrated on individuals and communities in South Africa because of the social circumstances that have developed since the advent of democracy in 1994. Although a tendency seems to have emerged recently for countries to be more protective of their national borders (South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Eswatini, and Lesotho), Dill (2012: 541) argues that “most national borders have become permeable”. This situation refers to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho in particular. Meaning that these border posts are accessible to cross even when one does not have legal documents (passports). As a result, this situation has become a stumbling block for South Africa as it has to accommodate an uncontrollable amount of migrants from her sister countries because they are afflicted by unemployment, economic inequalities, political infights, poverty, violence, and other harmful

social conditions (Ludlum, 2002). I will dwell on this issue in more depth and discuss how it disturbs the missional calling of the church.

Background

Some government officials claim that South Africa is not coping to accommodate vast numbers of migrants especially those from other African countries (Van der Walt, 2019:1). The report by the International Commission on Financing Global Education (2016:4) states that in a global world, all forms of risks will cross national borders and become global problems requiring carefully crafted global solutions. Some people argue that the problem in South Africa is associated with the presence of increasing numbers of foreigners coming into the country on top of an already existing conflict, tension, and violence because of the social and political changes that took place in 1994 with the advent of full democracy, and some of these phenomena are after-effects of the country's apartheid past (van der Walt, 2019). Swamy, Paluri, and Koshy (2017:3) attest that "...radical change often impacts on the lives of citizens in terms of their individuality, rights, livelihood, community formation, human relations, and interactions, observed". As a result, this current situation has brought about a plethora of ethical values problems for other countries such as South Africa. While it is agreed that the social contract theory has been influenced by Hobbes and Locke, one must admit that much effort has not been made in terms of infusing its key missiological ideas from African philosophical views such as Ubuntu. Let us now take a little reflection on basic ideas provided by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and John Rawls on a range of social contract theories.

Thomas Hobbes', John Locke's, and John Rawls' Social Contract Theory

I find some striking connections about the issues that Thomas Hobbes and John Locke deal with, especially in their treatment of the ideas of the state of nature, human nature, and the need for civil government (Chembhur, 2017). Chembhur (2017:2) asserts clearly that "...these ideas are what make it possible to juxtapose the social contract tradition in the Western tradition with the African social contract theory". My focused aim is to show that African Ubuntu philosophy posits a social contract theory similar to Hobbes' and Locke's social contracts, despite some differences. Based on the outcomes of their research, Hobbes and Locke agreed together that the social contract tradition is premised on the need for social order among human beings living within a defined political space because it is a social and political theory. Since it is a social and political theory that is based on the assumption that, without certain constraints on some fundamental human liberties and natural equality among human beings, therefore, the natural state or natural condition of human beings is a very strong incentive for social anarchy. Hobbes provides the following views:

...hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time is to be considered like war, as it is like weather (Hobbes, 1651:78).

Following the argumentation asserted by Hobbes, Locke points out that:

...but though this is a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license; though the man in that state has uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it (Locke, 1823:107).

This once again points out that the social contract theories are conceptions of the nature of human beings in their natural condition. There are fundamental and striking similarities between Hobbes's and Locke's social contract theories which make it possible to "...bracket them together and juxtapose their social contract ideals with an African ideal social contract that I see in communitarian living" (Chembur, 2017:3).

Hobbes' view has a negative view of human nature. Undoubtedly, Locke recommends some benefits of the doubts to the human person because for him, they possess the faculty of rationality and their common goal is a well-structured society. Their relational view of agreement lies in their quest for a well-structured society that is not reminiscent of the state of nature. These ideas were also reiterated further by other social contract theorists such as John Rawls (1971) and Robert Nozick (1974). In line with our latter social contacts theorists, Rawls (1971:397) substantiated their argumentation that 'a well-ordered society is one designed to advance the good of its members and effectively regulated by a public conception of justice' in which (1) 'everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and (2) the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles' (Rawls, 1999:4). Thus, in line with the title, the exploration of Hobbes', Locke's and Rawls' ideas are necessary for that they provide the conceptual lens through which one reflects on the notion of the social contract in general. Mashau and Kgatle (2019) propose an African theology of Ubuntu as an alternative to the prosperity gospel because it is a practical theology of life, care, solidarity, economic justice, hope, and accompaniment. In the same manner, their proposition paved a way for me to explore the conception of Ubuntu-gogy around the issues that affect the mission of the church in Africa. This is necessary for clarifying the conception of Ubuntu-gogy in an "African liberal democracy that is also marked by the pervasiveness of chieftaincy and communal interdependence" (Letseka, 2014:4).

The Normative Aspect of Ubuntu-gogy as an Indigenous Lifelong Social Change

Ubuntu-gogy, a derivative of Ubuntu, "...is an indigenous art and science of educating people through a lifelong process of apprenticeship, teaching and implementing the lessons learned from others in the community" (Sefotho, 2019:8). When viewed as 'an ideal concept' (Venter, 2004:149) and with 'a set of desired goals' (Sogolo, 1993:119), Ubuntu-gogy comes across as "...a normative account, which prescribes obligations and certain norms of actions as well as attempt to justify them" (Oyowe & Etieyibo, 2018:343). The imperative need for conceptual clarity regarding Ubuntu-gogy cannot be overstated. Therefore, Kamwangamalu (1999) argues, especially for a philosophy that is believed to exist in many African countries. This same thinking would have inspired van der Walt who desired "Ubuntu-gogy being a more suitable approach for sub-Saharan Africa than typical Western-style colonial education" (van der Walt, 2010:250). Bangura (2005) is credited for flourishing in coining the term Ubuntu-gogy, which is perceived as an African educational paradigm. Like Ubuntu, Ubuntu-gogy is an African educational paradigm that teaches one to establish humane relations with others, both by supporting them in what they do as well as seeing oneself in their projects or simply identifying with and taking their projects as one's projects (Nicolaidis, 2015; 2022; Etieyibo, 2017).

Sefotho (2019:8) proposes that Ubuntu-gogy inductively from the quintessentially African worldview enshrined in the maxim, represents 'a person is a person through other persons'. Just like the methodology of Ubuntu, Ubuntu-gogy as a leadership approach can be adopted as an integral part of legislation dealing with immigration, refugee affairs, and citizenship for sub-Saharan regions. Thus, based on the principles of integration, the issues around immigration, refugee affairs, and legal citizenship can (Ayittey, 2010) be resolved by a return to the African value system to support African leaders' applied ethical decision-making. Ubuntu-gogy fosters a sense of responsibility and support towards others. These senses

intensify the call for a new approach to morality as a prerequisite for bringing about a new *modus vivendi* (van der Walt, 2019:3).

In South Africa, large sections of the country are still rural, communal and very traditional (Letseka, 2014). As Metz (2012:23) observes, dialogue and consensus building mirror the kind of respect for others that is inherent to Ubuntu and is expressed through the "...communal nature of traditional African society". Central to the African way of life is respect and it is highly valued by Africans. However, in today's globalised world, such important values are eroded by copying mannerisms and behaviours which do not display respect (Sefotho, 2019). For instance, in traditional Africa, it was customary for people to welcome a person in a 'foreign world' (particularly in their homes) as a sign of recognition of the other and peace that had to exist among nations. Suffice to mention it though, today, people no longer feel obliged to welcome a 'foreigner' (this refers to our African people) brother/sister; most often, people avoid welcoming them in their homes. These are habits foreign to the African way of being (Sefotho, 2019). In a way, therefore, "...this encapsulates a new ecumenical discernment to seek vision, concepts and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in changing landscapes" (Mangayi & Baron, 2020:3).

Moreover, van der Walt's idea emphasises that Ubuntu-gogy has to be adapted in at least two respects (van der Walt, 2010). In addition, Ubuntu-gogy has to be based on precepts of Ubuntu that can withstand the test of relevance in modern, globalized, and industrialised societies. In the second place, van der Walt (2010:258) proffers that "for Africa to keep up with scientific and technological developments in the Western world, the most favorable aspects of Western-type education should be retained as warp and woof of the proposed 'new' or 'updated version' of Ubuntu-gogy". In the context of missiology, this implies that, as alluded by Mangayi and Baron, (2020:7) "...the emphasis is on social involvement, salvation with social justice, and "radical transformation" (not general empowerment but radical salvation in Jesus). In other words, it is not necessary to throw away the Western approaches to life completely. However, the synergy between the African and the Western approaches has abilities to strengthen our social contract application and that of the common good, in particular. Thus, Ubuntu-gogy can enhance lifelong learning by using indigenous epistemologies in the education of our citizens. Thus, the education of our sons and daughters of the soil 'need to develop a mindset that is receptive to change, transformation and development' (Makhanya & Oliver, 2017:9). There is no human being who wishes to live without education, no matter what the circumstances are. Thus, as much as other issues are important, the looming issue of racism, for example, should be squarely placed as a central issue that missiology must address in the South African context. Education, then, is a vehicle for and a by-product of the making of the missional task. Duncan (2006:16) confirms that 'the formation of 'character' became a central feature in mission education from its inception'.

The African words for Ethical Values

I would like to begin with an inquiry into African moral language, in search specifically of the word for ethics in a Southern Sotho language. I believe that this specific inquiry will give some relevant application to the basic pedagogy and understanding of African ethical values. It should be highlighted that right from the outset a several numbers of Sub-Saharan languages do not have words that can be said to be direct equivalents of the word ethics or morality (Kwame, 2010). In Southern Sotho, a language spoken widely in the country of Lesotho and in the Free State province in South Africa, there are no words that are directly equivalent to ethics or morality. References to the moral or ethical life or behaviour are made using words that mean behaviour or character. Thus, moral statements such as he/she has no morals or his/her action is unethical will be expressed by words such as *boitshwaro*, which means character or behaviour. In this character, thus, *boitshwaro bo bobé* means

he/she has a bad character, and his/her behaviour (action) is unethical. When someone behaves (or acts) in morally right manners, they would say he/she has a good character, using the words *boitswaro* *bo* *bottle*, both of which mean good character or good behaviour.

Kwame (2010) indicates that the inquiries into the moral language of several African peoples or cultures indicate that in these languages the word or expression that means character is used to refer to what others call ethics or morality. The greatest ethical values discourses about morality turn out to be pedagogies essentially about character. It is essential to note that the Greek word *ethike*, from which the English word ethics derives, means character. *Ethos*- what is called ethics, Aristotle calls the study (or, science) of character, *he ethike* (Hardie, 1968). For the Greeks, as for the Africans, the character of the individual matters most in our moral life and thought (Kwame, 2010; Nicolaides, 2022). Kwame (2010) illustrates further that African value ethics are weighted on duty, not on rights and would, in principle, not consider the moral duty of any kind as extraordinary, optional, or supererogatory. Thus, within the practice of Ubuntu, African humanitarian ethics and missiological calling all people are made objects of moral concern, implying that our moral sensitivities should be extended to all people, despite their culture or nationality (Kwame, 2010).

Ubuntu considers human rights as moral principles or norms that designate certain standards of human behaviour that are required in dealing with other human beings. One's rights and duties in society are grounded in a multifaceted philosophy because of the moral aspects which are a mixture of heritage and tradition. Ubuntu avows that society, and not any transcendent being, provides human beings with their basic humanity. An authentic individual human being is part of a complex and important relational, communal, societal, environmental and even mystical world. (Nicolaides, 2022:1)

However, Baartjies (2005:3) makes a sensitive statement that 'neoliberalism, as the most dangerous ideology and most brutal form of market capitalism of our times, reorganises society according to the politics of markets and corporations and rejects equity, redress, social justice, and civic responsibility which underpin the values of an inclusive democracy'. This statement is a wakeup call for African missiologist (the church) to look at.

Relationally-Driven African values of Ubuntu

Harmonious life is central to human existence and this includes our relationships. At some point, people can perceive life as being constructive, and sometimes it can be perceived as being destructive. Sefotho (2019) argues that relationally-driven Ubuntu philosophies strive to assist human beings to mend relations among themselves so that human existence can be harmonious. Thus, it suggests "...a prizing of these beings and a desire to protect and nourish them" (Letseka, 2014:547). Taking this issue further, Hollis (1998:1) cites John Locke as he regards trust as: "The bond of society, a necessary element in 'our dealings with friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers ... whether in homes, streets, markets, seats of government or other arenas of civil society'".

According to Banda (2020:6), "...a sense is generated that there is 'basic trust' which is innate. This is portrayed as 'normative' and forms part of our 'natural' self". Banda (2020) continues to substantiate this argument that a sense is generated that there is 'basic trust' which is innate. As a theological concept, Küng (2010) affirms that trust begins in a person's fetal state and is a learned experience. In addition, Küng argues that trust builds from infancy as 'basic trust' and through experience finally achieves the state of 'fundamental trust'. Following Erikson's conviction, Küng (2010:13) that there are three groups of people, namely, those who trust in life based on religious faith, those who are believers but have no

trust in life, human beings nor in themselves, and those who trust in life without having a religious faith (Küng 2010:13).

Following Banda (2020), I also use this quote lavishly to underscore the complexity of trust. To what other authors might call 'natural', 'basic' or 'primal' trust, Küng (2010) introduces us to the mystery of trust as rooted in God. It is this sort of desire that Metz (2014) and Sefotho (2019) relate to each other, that the philosophy of Ubuntu/Ubuntu emerges as a framework for relationally-driven philosophies in Africa emphasising the principle of relational ethics. This principle of relational African ethics promotes harmonious relationships and Metz (2014:149) phrases it as "...a relationship of solidarity which is concerned for other beings' welfare". Premised on the fact that harmonious relationships are sacrosanct in African ethical values, Ubuntu/Ubuntu therefore can be regarded as one of the strong African pedagogies that unites people and the rest of creation. In an African context, a person who does not cultivate harmonious relationships with the rest of creation is regarded as an outcast (Nicolaidis, 2015; 2022). Sometimes even families and communities despise such a person. According to Mashau (2020:48), this situation manifests itself through dominant systems (hegemony) which have always had the ability to use legislations and policy frameworks within a political system to perpetuate structural and systemic dominance of Africans by the respect and trust of the West. Vellem (2015:3) alluded that: "...the contemporaneity of uncertainty in South African context constitutes a continuum giving way to globalisation, but more deeply so, a continuum between modernist theories of politics, theology, and ethics right into the ponderings of the current world order".

Relationships among human beings and creation are important in the Church's missional mandate as people have to be competent in becoming co-creatures of God's Kingdom. Mashau and Kgatle (2020:51) note that the Church in Africa remains silent when atrocities such as racism, gender-based violence, marginalisation of women and children, and all other forms of injustices against humanity occur. This is an indication to South Africans that the social participation between human beings and creation is fundamental in enriching the Ubuntu/Ubuntu philosophies and the missional development of the church. Kumi-Kyereme, Awusabo-Asare, Tanle and Biddlecom (2007:135) describe social connectedness as "...the nature of relationships that provides the individual with support, security, and direction".

The principle of social reconstructionism is taken here as a key provider of a platform for security, direction, and support within communities. It is, therefore, that the relationally-driven principles are also anchored in social-reconstructionist ethical principles. It is hoped that the principle of Ubuntu/Ubuntu anchored in social-reconstructionist values would bring that transformative social change in Africa which is the mandate of the church. Kgatle (2018:6) calls this transformation of social change "a socio-cultural calling". Kgatle (2018) argues that the church has a definite formative socio-cultural calling in the world in line with its prophetic, priestly and kingly tasks; it thus needs to make its influence felt in the world about other societal institutions and the community in general through its own and its individual members' Christian testimonies in the world. The missiological lesson that one can draw is that Christianity in South Africa must, therefore, assume an Ubuntu/Ubuntu concept so that it may be a formative and transformative power in South African society and South African the state, communities, etc (Jansen, Pretorius & Van Niekerk, 2009:80).

Social-Reconstructionist Principles

In general, the principle of reconstructionism focuses on social issues. In particular, social reconstructionism is concerned with learning the dynamics of life (Sefotho, 2019). Mwanzi and Mwanzi (2016) note that social issues that affect different communities inform the programmes that are developed from the perspective of social reconstructionism. These programmes include African ethical value-based social contracts and governing Constitutions (Woolman, 2011). Thus, the reflective practice of Ubuntu/Ubuntu can be used as

a basic foundation that “represents the African subcontinent’s philosophy of shared beliefs and values” (Keevy, 2009:67). It seems to me that social reconstruction can be applied emphatically by borrowing some principles from Ubuntu philosophy, however, from its more pedagogically inclined Ubuntu-gogy in a multicultural society.

Social Teaching of the Catholic Church

The real importance of positing a state of nature is to set the stage for natural rights. Meaning that if the human person was created before the state existed, therefore, the state is the rational creation of the human person. In other words, the state exists to provide human beings with something, rather than human beings existing to provide something for the state. Thus, both Locke and Pope Leo XIII (Church) hold that not only individual human being, but their families and even households, exist before any political community (RN, #12-13). Pope Leo XIII put his argument, especially concerning the right to human dignity and basic needs, based on the same assumptions about natural law, natural rights, and Christian obligation. In *Rerum Novarum* (#51), Pope Leo XIII also approves his argument that “...it is by the doctrine of natural rights that men/women preserve both their dignity and security in society, for not only do these rights exist independently of the state, never to be abrogated by it, but the very reason the state exists is to defend them”. The Holy Father (Pope) insisted on the value and dignity of a human being endowed with rights and responsibilities to protect life and the world. That encyclical provided moral, and even spiritual, guidance for many of the great social reforms of the last century, including advances in public health, public education, unemployment, and similar programs. It shows that this encyclical defends the Ubuntu-gogy notion against the assault of social and ethical responsibilities.

The encyclical document also centers Ubuntu-gogy as the conceptual heart of the article to provide readers with specific ways in which African scholars have spoken of it as the philosophical basis for a unique African socio-political and economic democratic order (Letseka, 2011:47). Ubuntu-gogy is particularly important to re-imagining an African ethical value-based social contract and South Africa’s democracy. In the same manner, Pope Benedict XVI confronts these challenging issues in the encyclical called *Caritas in Veritate* (charity in truth). For over 100 years, the Church’s social teaching encyclicals or documents have given the Church several directives based on the Gospels and the lived experience of the Church. These directives are valued as an integral development of Church teaching that has built on Pope Leo’s encyclical with both continuity and new developments. Embracing Pope Leo’s encyclical, in *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict added another theological insight reflected in this document. The first principle “*res novae*” addressed by Pope Benedict is love. In this document Pope Benedict XVI echoes the following teaching:

Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelled out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with a neighbour; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members, or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic, and political ones). For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, “God is love” (*Deus Caritas Est*): *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it*. Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, #2).

Furthermore, Pope Benedict XVI uses the centrality of *caritas* as one of the basic criteria to address the challenges of facing the world. He exclaims that: “Through this close link with truth, charity can be recognized as an authentic expression of humanity and as an element

of fundamental importance in human relations, including those of a public nature... In truth, charity reflects the personal yet public dimension of faith in the God of the Bible, who is both *Agápe* and *Lógos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word” (Caritas in Veritate, 2009, #3).

Pope Benedict XIV highlights the astonishing experience of gift (Caritas in Veritate, 2009, #34). Here lies the difference between justice and giftedness (gratuitousness). Justice practices equity, an ethical virtue, though importantly it touches the dimension of obligation, the logic of justice is the logic of equivalence (Chua, 2011). But giftedness is not an ethical virtue nor is it a duty. It has a supra-ethical virtue whose logic is in solidarity-communion. It is a symbol of the human condition. Thus, to see the practice of giving motivated by solidarity - communion is the pre-requisite of human development in love and truth (Chua, 2011).

In this section I expounded on the specific ways in which the Catholic teaching can serve as the theological basis for a unique tool for re-imagining an African ethical value-based social contract and African socio-political and economic democratic order. I started out with some of the values implicit in the encyclical documents and some of the values implicit in Ubuntu and discussed the Popes’ teaching upshot. I, therefore, contend that both the Catholic teaching and Ubuntu have the potential to serve as both a moral theory to re-image the African ethical value-based social contract. That is, they both have normative implications that can guide African ethical value-based social contracts. Placing the human person at the center of Ubuntu values advances the cause of justice. For the human person without Ubuntu/Ubuntu this is the major problem issue. But social contracts are not individual “things” whose worth can be measured by numbers alone. Social contracts are initiatives creating dignity that offer human beings new opportunities in response to new challenges posed in life. Our social contracts, in tandem with others, should place human beings at the center of Ubuntu principles.

The Church’s Missional Mandate

The church’s participation in the missional mandate in the world continues to experience dramatic changes, and challenges related both to massive demographic shifts in the distribution of Christian adherents and to new realities in missionary endeavours. Moving from general principles of Catholic social teaching to application in everyday life is never easy. The church needs to advise the State to assess not just individual actions, but broader trends in social and economic structures. The Church offers a path forward at a time of economic distress and uncertainty; respect for human life and dignity; subsidiarity and solidarity; respect for the sanctity of marriage and family life; Priority for the poor and vulnerable; recognition of cultural diversity; right to economic initiatives and productive work (Benedict XVI, 2009).

In my previous discussion, I commented on Hobbes’, Locke’s, and Rawls’ notions of social contract theories. I also commented on the normative aspect of Ubuntu by infusing different ideas from different African scholars: Sefotho and Letseka, and therefore, I shall not dwell on the issues here. Instead, I want to tap on semblances of ‘social contract’ theory and Ubuntu as fairness in traditional African communities. This could be in the form of an *indaba*, *lekgotla*, or the *pitso* (an assembly) as described by Mahao (2010). In light of *lekgotla*, it can be remarkable how it can effectively influence the Church’s missional role in bringing ‘the democratic accountability doctrine, the indivisible human dignity doctrine and social cohesion’ Mahao (2010:320), particularly in a multicultural society. The *indaba* (Zulu translation), *lekgotla*, or *pitso* are platforms where daunting issues (challenges) of public interest are openly debated and collective decisions made. Letseka (2014) argues that ‘it resulted from the consultation with the chief and the *indunas* (*morena le matona* or *mahlana*), the *izikhulu*, the elders, or with the general population through the *pitso* (public assembly)’ (Letseka, 2014:549).

Applying Solidarity and Common Good

The ethical and missional essence of the Reformation theology of Martin Luther is related to society. Thus, it focuses beyond the individual, the family, or the small community. Martin Luther, who emphasised grace and mutual passion about God, *coram Deo*, insisted on a dialectic about a shared responsibility for the world, *coram mundo*. Applying this concern for the ethical value-based social contract is often not highlighted in some discourses, but 'it is particularly crucial today, in an age where the extremely wealthy leave the majority behind' (Gerle, 2021:168).

The mission mandate of the Church changes over time and has become an important part of human life whereby it changes the way people live, work, and interact with one another. Re-imagining an African ethical value-based social contract is declared, as complex and its impact on political life is uncertain. Therefore, for African Churches, preparing for a complexity and uncertainty it can be challenging, as it is expected to generate various opportunities and is often anxious at the changes to be made in other people's lives. This is why it is so important to encourage the Church leaders to continuously use *lekgotla* or *pitso* platforms so that they can effectively influence the Church's missional role in bringing 'the democratic accountability doctrine, the indivisible human dignity doctrine and social cohesion' Mahao (2010:320), particularly in a multicultural society. Despite all the debates, it is clear that there are different camps on the perceptions of the social contract: some church leaders are supporting African ethical value-based social contract principles, especially those one that are anchored in Ubuntu; while others are skeptical of its impact on the political sphere. My view is that some people need to stop producing inapplicable and irrelevant problems such as hating of fellow Africans, while some African portfolios are being mismanaged and misgoverned. Charity begins at home, and Africa is our home. Africa has bodies such as the African Union (AU) and what is its function? The African Union bodies meet every year, and nothing has been resolved regarding mismanagement and misgovernment matters that take away the dignity of our African image which is represented by the *imago Dei/Image of God*.

Conclusion

Social Contract Theory is almost as old as human society. It implies an implicit agreement among people that results in a societal structure in which the individual surrenders liberty in return for protection. A more holistic perspective sees the value that the missional mandate of God can play in supporting people to be good neighbours who serve others and share wisdom. We do not act as if nothing is happening around us and are conscious of our environment. The Church needs to unite and act toward the socio-economic illnesses plaguing society. Africa needs a solid social order and the Church must have a comprehensive approach toward the goal of its mission. It is, therefore, recommended that the golden rule of Ubuntu be anchored in the missiological mandate of the Church and Africa at large. We need to rediscover a new Image of God (*Imago Dei*). Therefore, Ubuntu and African Christianity (missional mandate of the Church) can be 'cooked in the same pot'. In other words, they can each act in solidarity and unison. But the question is: how can the Church in Africa engage in dialogue with the African leaders to solve this manifesting social contracts issues? In many cases, the Church tends to issue statements whenever there are manifesting social contract problems. But I suggest that this action is simply not adequate enough as it stands.

In this article, I have argued that lifting the Ubuntu principles in re-imagining an African ethical value-based social contract may be crucial to the renewal of an effectual demos, both South Africa and the entire continent. A shared vulnerability as emphasised by both pope Leo XIII and pope Benedict XVI is related to the social and shared responsibility for the world. As the title of this article indicates, this has to do with re-imaging or restoration of



human dignity and the entire creation. As pope Benedict followed pope Leo and focused on becoming human again, I argue that Africa needs a new focus on the social dimension that is today being undermined by democratic political leaders including some fellow African brothers and sisters. Becoming a dignified society again is an expression of the need to search for a new identity that takes its point of departure from our interdependency, thus, focusing on health issues, care for humans, the earth, and similar programmes. I, therefore, posit that perhaps a rediscovered sense of interdependency amongst African countries may help us focus on Ubuntu principles and philosophies.

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